



**THE PROTÉGÉ EFFECT: LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF
GRADUATES IN AN ONLINE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

A Thesis submitted by

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Abstract

Newly registered migration agents enter an emerging profession that has experienced constant change in educational requirements for practice, and that is contested due to the dual regulation faced by legal practitioners providing immigration assistance and the rise of multiple professional bodies purporting to represent them. These issues are exacerbated by the ability of migration agents to begin practice without supervision.

A lack of supervised practice has resulted repeatedly in calls from the government and stakeholders for a mandatory scheme to be implemented. This has proven difficult due to the number of sole practitioners and the high turnover of agents in the profession. These factors have raised concerns regarding the ability of migration agents to develop their professional identity without coherent guidance from the profession.

This thesis has examined the effect a Virtual Community of Practice known as Protégé, would have on the professional identity formation of Australian migration agents in sole practice. Protégé was a project that provided a Virtual Community of Practice to thirty newly registered migration agents for one year. It focused on the research question: “How and to what extent can a virtual community, designed as a supportive workplace, enhance the professional identity of migration agents in sole practice, as determined by their ‘own’ and others’ perceptions of their competence and confidence”. Two sub-questions were also considered: (1) “What process may be involved in forming an identity as a professional migration agent?”, and (2) “How have the experiences in Protégé enhanced/influenced participants’ perceptions and development of their professional identity”?

This thesis presents three findings and four theoretical concepts that underpin those findings. This study is based on the interviews and site interactions of eighteen protégés who took part in the broader research project. By adopting a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), the findings expose how migration agents adopt a professional identity, the struggles newly registered agents encounter, and the strategies they use to achieve their professional goals.

Importantly this thesis articulates the design features of Protégé that led to its success. The design included conditions identified by Eraut (2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2010) as those belonging to a supportive workplace. Their inclusion into the design of Protégé created new ways of viewing the structure and effect of Virtual Communities of Practice.

The findings and theoretical concepts presented in this thesis extend theories of professional identity formation and the role a Virtual Community of Practice can play in enhancing this process. Together they reveal how Protégé provided a means for early career migration agents to recognise and adopt the values and ethics that belong to the broader profession and to actualise their professional identity. They demonstrate that supervised practice does not have to follow traditional methods, such as working within an established business, and they highlight the role working with peers and more knowledgeable professionals can play in developing professional identity and an understanding of the broader professional landscape that an early career practitioner works within.

The recommendations from this thesis provide guidance for professional bodies representing migration agents. They are also applicable to emerging professions seeking to create virtual supportive spaces for their members to learn their practice, values and professional mores together.

Certification of Thesis

This Thesis is entirely the work of Marianne van Galen-Dickie except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Principal Supervisor: Pauline Collins

Associate Supervisor: Anthony Foley

Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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Abbreviations

AILA	American Immigration Lawyers Association
CoP	Community of Practice
IAAAS	Immigration Advice and Application Assistance Scheme
LCA	Law Council of Australia
MARS	Migration Agent Registration Scheme
MIA	Migration Institute of Australia
MPD	Myeloproliferative Disorder
OMARA	Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority
RMA	Registered Migration Agent (without legal practicing certificate)
VCoP	Virtual Community of Practice

Note: The three interviews with researchers are identified as 1, 2 or 3R.

The two interviews with facilitators are identified as 1 or 2F.

Facilitators are identified as F1 and F2. Proteges are identified as P1 – P18

Chapter 1 Introduction: The background and purpose of the study

This thesis examines the development of professional identity within a newly emergent profession that lacks traditional workplace support mechanisms. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how a Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP), designed as a supportive workplace, may enhance the professional identity of migration agents. It arises from the inability of an emergent profession to provide newly registered migration agents with supervised practice, and from concerns that this lack of exposure to practice amongst peers can hinder professional identity development.

The Protégé project was designed to consider the effect a VCoP would have on professional identity of newly registered migration agents. This thesis draws on data provided from the experience of 18 migration agents who took part in the Protégé project.

Chapter 1 introduces the rationale for this research. It provides a brief discussion of the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology and sources of data before explaining the background to this thesis. Migration advice as an emergent profession and the development of migration agents' professional identity, is considered through an introduction to the regulatory framework and professional landscape migration agents occupy. The researcher's motivation for the undertaking this work is presented through an autobiographical account that renders visible the possible biases and perceptions the researcher brings to this study (Ramalho et al., 2015). The chapter outlines the objectives, structure and implementation of the Protégé project. This includes an explanation of how the research participants were chosen and the rationale, aims and significance of the project for the profession. The significance of the research for the development of knowledge in the domain of CoPs and professional identity creation is discussed, before the expectations and limitations of the thesis are considered and addressed. Finally, the chapter provides a roadmap for this thesis.

1.1 Constructivist Grounded Theory

There are two areas of inquiry addressed in this thesis. One is the development of professional identity through work-based practice; the other is the conceptual framework of Communities of Practice as described by Lave and Wenger (1991). These two seemingly different areas of inquiry both share the same epistemological perspective regarding the role that acquiring specific knowledge within a community may play in developing a social identity such as that of a professional. This epistemological focus on knowledge and the construction of an identity through knowledge and practice has led to the use of Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014), which form the foundation behind methods to examine the role of a VCoP in developing the professional identity of migration agents.

Constructivist Grounded Theory provides the opportunity to engage with relevant data and study the experiences of research participants. It calls upon the researcher to make sense of the data and allows the experiences, reflections, and responses of the researcher to the data to enter the analysis (Ramalho et al., 2015). While Charmaz advocates for analysis that “culminates in a grounded theory”, which she describes as an “abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience” (2006, p. 4), the use of CGT methods can also allow the final analysis to extend or build upon current theory. Through the adoption of CGT methods, this thesis has sought to provide an account and insight into the process that may be involved in forming an identity as a professional migration agent, and to fill gaps in the extant theory, which enables consideration of structures that are currently deemed suitable for the development of a professional identity.

The use of CGT methods – coding and writing memos (Charmaz, 2017) - for analysis has revealed the process of an identity narrative, employed by migration agents who took part in this study, and it revealed a unique insight into the role a VCoP could

play in the development of a professional identity. Using CGT methods requires a researcher to acknowledge that their role involves actively reflecting on the issues raised by the data to create the text (Charmaz, 2006, p. 180). Following CGT methodology, sections of this thesis are written in the first person. The use of the researcher's voice in CGT is a technique Charmaz advocates as a method of rendering analysis that is "more than reporting" (2014, p. 314). Within this thesis, I acknowledge aspects that drove me to begin my doctoral studies and reveal any biases and views that inform the analysis of the data.

1.2 The legislative framework governing migration agents.

An examination of the history of Australian migration agents as a profession exposes the deep uncertainty stakeholders bring to their consideration of the role and professional behavior as migration agents. The regulatory framework governing migration agents in Australia is relatively new. Formal registration was introduced in 1992, with changes to the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth) and the *Migration Agents Regulations (Amendment) 1992* (Cth). The Code of Conduct governing the work of migration agents was codified in Schedule 2 of the *Migration Agent Regulations 1998* (Cth). The legislative framework lays out how migration agents interpret and apply the law to provide immigration assistance to people under s. 276 of the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth). To do so they must be qualified and registered with the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (OMARA). The OMARA is attached to the Department of Home Affairs and regulates the profession under s. 316 of the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth). Under these provisions, the OMARA can sanction and disqualify agents from practice, and determine the level of qualification needed for entry. Unlike lawyers, migration agents undergo relatively limited legal education and have no requirement for supervision, or peer recognition (through nomination and admittance to practice) before

they can enter practice directly. The majority of migration agents currently registered in Australia gained their formal qualification in a six-month Graduate Certificate course in Australian migration law and practice. In January 2018 the qualifications changed. The current knowledge requirements or “prescribed qualification for registration” is to either hold a current legal practicing certificate or complete the Graduate Diploma in Australian Migration Law and Practice and a prescribed exam (Migration Agent Regulations 1998 (Cth) s. 5; Migration (IMMI 18/003: Specified courses and exams for registration as a migration agent) Instrument 2018).

Despite rapid growth in the number of migration agents since the introduction of the Graduate Certificate in 2006, the profession has been known for the significant number of agents who work in sole practice, or who work as the only agent within a small firm of like-minded professionals (Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008; Kendall, 2014). Statistics provided by the Department of Home Affairs in the first half of 2019, note that 40% of agents currently registered, work in sole practice (Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority, Activity Report 2019). While this figure has been relatively stable since 2013, there is no differentiation made between those who work as the only agent within other areas of employment, such as law or accounting firms, and those who work alone but hold a legal practicing certificate. When this research began in 2013 the total number of agents working in sole or isolated practice as the only agent in a small firm was 80% (Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority Annual Report 2012 -2013, p.7).

The number of agents working in sole practice or small firms has led to a perceived inability of the profession to provide supervised practice for newly registered agents (Kendall, 2014). While supervised practice is not a legal requirement for newly registered agents, past government reviews have linked the lack of supervision to complaints against agents and a failure to develop ethical and competent standards of

practice (Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008; Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 2019; Kendall, 2014).¹ It is here where the need for an understanding of how sole practitioners in an emergent profession form their professional identity, is revealed. Academic literature considered in chapter 2 discusses the link between supervised practice and the formation of a professional identity.

Migration agents who hold a legal practicing certificate must also be registered to practice to provide immigration assistance. Government statistics do not record the number of agents who hold a law degree; however, they do note that currently, 33.3% of migration agents hold a legal practicing certificate (Office Migration Agents Registration Authority, 2019). The issue of dual registration for lawyers has been contested since the introduction of the registrar scheme. It has further highlighted the role of supervised practice in developing professional identity, and knowledge of norms and standards expected by stakeholders, such as government bodies and the broader community.

1.3 A fractured professional landscape

The term landscape is used multiple times in this thesis to describe the broader practice environment migration agents work within. This includes the legislative and social environment of the profession. The metaphorical use of the term landscape is not new. Wenger et al. (2014) use the term in multiple ways to describe practice as a locality, a social space or a means of viewing involvement within different communities of practice. Khan (2017) uses the term to describe new or emerging areas of practice, and network governance, and Henri and Pudelko (2003) use it to describe the environment of a virtual community. Migration agents work within a fractured landscape that has been caused by three specific factors. These are the constant changes in educational

¹ In 2020 the Migration Advice Industry Advisory Group was formed by Home Affairs to address improvements to qualification standards, professional standards, misconduct and unlawful activity. Supervised practice is one item on the agenda for discussion.

requirements needed to register to practice, the presence of multiple professional bodies purporting to represent agents, and the dual regulation that captures lawyers providing immigration assistance.

1.3.1 Education and registration

Despite working in a complex area of administrative law, the introduction of formal qualifications has been a slow process. When this research began, the regulatory scheme governing migration agents was twenty-two years old and continued to attract government scrutiny. Until 1992, when the Migration Agents Registration Scheme (MARS) was introduced, migration advice in Australia was largely unregulated (Robinson, 2019). Before the introduction of MARS, the *Immigration Act 1948* (Cth) provided that a person could register as an agent with the Minister if they followed prescribed rules for providing evidence that they were of “good fame, integrity and character” (Clitheroe, 2013). With the introduction of the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth), the scheme changed, and agents were given a practicing license upon notifying the secretary of their intention to practice. This license remained in effect until the Minister found adverse reasons to remove it (such as the agents were not of fit and proper character) (*Migration Amendment (No. 3) Act, 1992*). The *Migration Legislation Amendment Act 1989* (Cth) replaced the licensing scheme with a loose regulatory framework, which once again focused on the character of agents. However, complaints about unscrupulous agents, new rules regarding unlawful entrants, and increasingly complex legislation led to a review and the establishment of the Migration Agents Registration Scheme (MARS) in 1992. This scheme allowed only registered migration agents to provide immigration advice as defined in s.280 of the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth).

Following several government inquiries (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 1995) including an internal review

of the regulatory scheme (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1997, p. 16; Department of Parliamentary Library Commonwealth of Australia, 1997), the government determined that the profession could move to self-regulation following a period of statutory self-regulation (Clitheroe, 2013; Department of Parliamentary Library Commonwealth of Australia, 1997). In 1998 the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth) was amended to appoint the Migration Institute of Australia (MIA) “a voluntary professional institute for migration agent members, as the Migration Agents Registration Authority (MARA)” (Clitheroe, 2013 p. 54). This began what was to be a two-year transition phase to allow the profession to move towards self-regulation. In 2000, the government extended the period of statutory self-regulation until 2003. Further reviews followed (Allen, 2010; Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008; OMARA, 2012; Commonwealth Ombudsman, 2007) and in 2012 the MIA was removed from the role of the MARA within the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth), and the Office of the MARA (OMARA) was established as an independent body that reported to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (Clitheroe, 2013). The OMARA is current located within the Immigration Integrity and Community Protection Division in the Department of Home Affairs.

Prior to 2006, qualifications to practice as an agent varied widely and ranged from a multiple-choice exam to a ten-week distance education course followed by a three-hour exam. From 2006-2017 the Graduate Certificate in Australian Migration Law and Practice, as prescribed under the Act and Regulations, was the only legal education migration agents who did not hold a legal practicing certificate needed for registration. In 2018 the mandatory qualification was raised to a Graduate Diploma. The majority of students undertaking the qualification are mature aged students who are seeking a career change (Dickie & van Galen, 2014). The postgraduate qualification is not confined to students with a law degree but is open to graduates from all backgrounds, including areas

such as information technology, management, and humanities. Until 2018 graduates could register immediately and begin practice with no period of supervision. They are now required to pass a capstone exam after the completion of the Graduate Diploma before they can successfully register to practice. This exam is conducted by an external provider not linked to the universities that deliver the substantive qualification.² Once they have successfully registered with the OMARA, agents can practice across all areas of migration law.

The constant updating of qualifications is a response to continued government scrutiny of the profession. The Department noted this in their comments to the latest Senate Inquiry into migration agents: “the result of the introduction of the new higher level of entry arrangements will be that there will continue to be a hybrid of entry qualifications in the migration advice sector” (Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 2019, para. 2.34). While the Department did not comment further on the impact of different entry-level requirements, constant change has resulted in tiers of agents relying on different factors to establish their professional credibility rather than their membership of the profession. These factors can include their years of practice, their increased qualifications, or their law degree (Khan, 2017).

1.3.2 Multiple professional bodies

The regulatory framework that has prevented self-regulation has also stifled the role of professional bodies attempting to represent migration agents, resulting in multiple agencies claiming to represent the profession. This has created a fractured environment for the growth of a professional identity (Khan, 2017).

² Until December 2020 the external provider was the College of Law. Migration (IMMI 18/003: Specified courses and exams for registration as a migration agent) Instrument 2018). At January 2021 there was no provider.

While there is a potential for the profession to be represented by various bodies the pathway to these options has not always been useful. The Migration Institute of Australia was founded in 1991 as an institute which would provide professional support to migration agents (Clitheroe, 2013). The introduction of the MARA a year later and the subsequent appointment of the MIA as the MARA meant that the board operating as the MIA providing support and education for agents was the same board responsible for disciplining agents (Clitheroe, 2013). Clitheroe notes that three government inquiries into the MARA and the profession, held between 1999 and 2008, revealed “low levels of participation within the industry key body, the MIA” (p.55-56).

When the MIA was formed in 1991 Mary Crock was the Chair of the Migration Committee of the Law Council of Australia (LCA). She actively worked closely with the MIA and as Chair of the LCA sought to involve migration agents who did not hold practicing certificates, or law degrees, in the processes of education and regulation of the profession (Crock, 2013). However, her work to form an inclusive environment for all those working as professionals in the migration advice space was not always successful. In 2013 she wrote “Over the years, it’s been really interesting to see people who get about and start new organisations trying to undercut people who are in the field” (Crock, 2013, p.19).

The LCA has been instrumental in the passage of legislation that will finally remove lawyers with a practice certificate from the regulatory scheme governing the work of migration agents (see 1.3.3). Continued lobbying and opposition to the work of migration agents within areas such as the Administrative Review Tribunal by the LCA (Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 2019), has limited any perception that they may represent the profession as a whole.

Following the removal of the MIA from the role of the MARA a new professional body called the Migration Alliance (MA) formed (Kendall, 2014, p.35). The

creation of the new professional body was not without rancor. The MA initially adopted an opt out method of membership and actively contested the position of the MIA (Khan, 2017, p.48.). The aggressive agitation on the part of the MA continued for some years. In an open letter to her members in 2013 the founder of the MA, Liana Allen, wrote about the MIA and the then national president:

Ms Chan says, 'As a new Government is ushered in, the MIA continues to be the definitive voice representing Professional Registered Migration Agents in Australia' We say that this is just not true. If this was the case, then why is the MIA ranked lower online than Migration Alliance in the Australian Immigration space? Calling the MIA 'the definitive voice' is a bit much. Is this another comment made in a vacuum? How has Ms Chan formed a conclusion that this is the case? Overseas, Migration Alliance is also ranked higher online than the MIA by a long shot and the Migration Alliance website has far more traffic than the MIA. Check Alexa.com and see for yourself (Allan, 2013).

Smaller informal groups of agents have also arisen on social media to support agents in their daily professional work (Dickie, 2018). In July 2020, the RMA Voice Inc was formed “in response to the recent deregulation of the migration advice industry” (RMA Voice, 2020, July 25). It is not possible to gauge the efficacy of this group, however, since their formation in July 2020, three committee members have resigned (RMA Voice, 2020, December 1) indicating that they may not present a viable option for many agents seeking professional support and representation.

As a result, the migration advice profession remains an area where many new practitioners begin their practice without the recognised frameworks of workplace support (Eraut, 2000; Eraut & Hirsh, 2007; Lin & Bound, 2011; McKee & Eraut, 2011).

While it is clear that these features make it difficult to impose a legitimate period of mandatory supervision on new agents, they have also given rise to anecdotal commentary on graduates' isolation, satisfaction with the profession, and their skills and ability to begin practice (Allen, 2010, p. 10; Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 2019).

1.3.3 Dual regulation

The juxtaposition of professionals providing legal advice without a law degree in the same sphere as practitioner lawyers exposes the need for a defined and recognised professional identity for migration agents. In an ABC Radio National interview, focusing on “dodgy migration agents”, Erskin Rodan (2016), the head of the Law Council division specialising in migration law, highlighted the perception many in the legal profession had of agents. Rodan made it clear that he felt that the ability to practice within the same sphere as lawyers led to migration agents believing they had the same capabilities as lawyers:

Some of the pitfalls in going to a migration agent who's not a lawyer include the fact that they think they are lawyers and they're not; they don't have the knowledge; their code of conduct is much weaker than our ethics. Our lawyers' ethics, and lawyers are respected by people who believe that after four or five years at university you've got some kind of idea of what you are saying and what you are doing. (Rodan, 2016)

While Rodan's (2016) comments equated ethics, and knowledge of law, with a lengthy education, this is not the only difference between migration agents and practicing lawyers, nor is it the most important. There is a structural difference in the way a deliberate framework of peer recognition and practice experience, provided to lawyers, assists their professional development. Lawyers who wish to practice undertake a law

degree, followed by a graduate degree focused on practice, and another period of supervised practice, before they are nominated by a peer to be eligible for admission to practice. Admission to practice is a process usually conducted by the relevant State or Territory courts. Following admission to practice, the person becomes an officer of the courts (Noone, 2017, p. 508), and a two-year period of supervised practice is then required before they can practice unsupervised. The professional bodies representing those with a law degree use this lengthy process as evidence that professionalism and professional behaviour is higher in legal practitioners than in migration agents.

Rodan's (2016) comments simultaneously fails to consider, and highlights, the fact that this is an emergent area of law that many in the legal profession will never practice within. However, his statement does reveal the fundamental gaps the new profession is facing. Without a comprehensive structure to introduce a framework of professional practice for early career migration agents, the perception that they have no ethical base and lack sufficient grounding in knowledge of their practice to develop a professional identity, will continue.

The Law Council's view of migration agents remained at odds with the regulatory framework for many years. The inclusion of lawyers as a profession within the migration agent regulatory scheme from 1992 reflected the parliament's, and to some extent the Courts' view, that lawyers and agents are to be held to the same professional standards.

It is true that Pt 2A requires registration of those lawyers who give immigration assistance that is outside the definition of "immigration legal assistance". No doubt it appears curious that registration is required if assistance is given in one area of immigration assistance but not in another. But the difference can be justified on the ground that legal

qualifications do not always, or even naturally, fit a person for immigration practice and procedure that falls outside the area of "immigration legal assistance" as defined. *Cunliff v The Commonwealth* (1994) HCA 44, 10 (McHugh, J) (during argument).

In addition, the Federal Court held that the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (2004) had been correct in their observation that the expectations of professional standards and legal obligations towards clients are the same for lawyers and migration agents:

Both groups, migration agents and solicitors, owe a duty to a client to act in accordance with the law and the legitimate interests of the client ...the Tribunal's observation that the standard(s) of conduct for migration agents is no less than the standard(s) of conduct owed by lawyers, cannot amount to an error of law. (*Woods v Migration Agents Registration Authority* [2004] FCA 1622, 60 (Crennen, J.) (during argument))

The LCA's position also remained at odds with the view of the MIA (Migration Institute of Australia 2017, Law Council of Australia 2017).

A key recommendation of the Kendall Review (2014) was the removal of lawyers from the regulatory scheme. The MIA fought against the proposal and lobbied against the Migration Amendment (Regulation of Migration Agents) Bill 2017³ which eventually lapsed when parliament was prorogued. In 2019 it was reintroduced as the Migration Amendment (Regulation of Migration Agents) Bill 2019⁴. The MIA argued that "incompetent, unethical and fraudulent practice" (MIA, 2017, p. 4) by lawyers providing immigration assistance could best be investigated by the same body that was

3 Introduced On: 21/06/2017

4 Introduced On: 27/11/2019

responsible for migration agents. In addition, they raised concerns at the lack of law societies' recognition of immigration advice as a specific practice area or a subset of the broader profession:

...some law societies do not appear to have the same regard for migrant consumer protection as the OMARA. Lawyers have been allowed to continue practicing by their law societies even after being banned by the OMARA for providing fraudulent migration advice or breaches of fiduciary duties (MIA, 2017, p. 4).

Despite the decisions of courts and tribunals, and representations by professional bodies, the concept that there is a divide between the ethics and professionalism of lawyers and migration agents continued. In late June 2020, the Migration Amendment (Regulation of Migration Agents) Bill 2019 (Cth), passed into law. The legislation addresses one of the key issues facing legal practitioners wishing to provide immigration advice. The legislation removes dual regulation, and as a result, unrestricted legal practitioners will no longer be required to register with the OMARA in order to practice (s. 278A). However, it does not immediately remove all legal practitioners from the regulatory scheme. The legislation enables "eligible restricted legal practitioners" to register as migration agents for up to two years (s. 278A (3)). This will allow restricted legal practitioners to remain migration agents while they take part in mandatory supervision, which in turn will enable them to move on to unrestricted practice.

There is no doubt that ethical practice is an area that new agents need to develop in relative isolation. Currently the OMARA regulate unethical behaviour through identified breaches of the Code of Conduct. They also require agents to undertake one annual mandatory Continuing Professional Development course (CPD), which focuses on ethics. In addition, the OMARA rely on their Ethical Toolkit and Ethical Bytes, which

was developed in 2011 to assist agents to identify and manage ethical problems they may encounter in practice (Office of the MARA, 2011).

This leaves the responsibility of developing an ethical practice to the individual who must decide which professional body, individual, or mentor may meet their view of how they wish to act as a professional and in doing so can provide guidance when they need advice or training in specific areas.

1.4 Government anxiety about the profession

Since the introduction of the Graduate Certificate in Australian Migration Law and Practice in 2006, regular government reviews examining the regulatory scheme, specific areas of practice, and the education of migration agents have continued. Three of these reviews recommended lifting the qualification level and introducing a term of mandatory supervised practice (Allen, 2010; Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008; Kendall, 2014). On 14 March 2018, the Joint Standing Committee on Migration (the Committee) announced a new inquiry into the regulation of Australian migration agents (Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 2019). Surprisingly, the final report of this inquiry recommended that there be another parliamentary review of the current registration requirements for migration agents, with many of the same criteria the Committee had already examined⁵. Another recommendation was that all “new migration agents complete a period of supervised practice prior to being granted an unrestricted practicing certificate” (Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 2019). This recommendation is perplexing as the Committee did not recommend that a new regime of restricted practice be introduced into the regulatory scheme. As there are no current restrictions on practice for registered migration agents, the Committee may have

⁵ The Department of Home Affairs announced a review of the migration agent profession on the 24 June 2020. The review titled: Creating a world class migration advice industry, closes submissions on 27 July 2020.

confused the regulatory framework with that of legal practitioners, and therefore the Committee's final recommendation appears poorly phrased.

A continued failure to implement the recommendation of mandatory supervised practice reflects some critical features of the migration advice profession. One is the poor retention rate of agents within the profession. Government reports such as the OMARA Annual Report (2012) and the Department of Home Affairs Migration Agent Activity Report (2018), reveal that despite a dramatic rise in the number of agents the number of agents in practice for seven years or more remains low (see Table 8.1). Successive years of low retention rates have resulted in fewer agents being capable of supervising new graduates. The second factor is the consistently high number of sole practitioners. The Joint Standing Committee on Migration's report indicates that the numbers of sole practitioners have remained at a steady 40- 43% of all agents since 2014 (2019, p. 11).

1.5 Background: An autobiographical account of the researcher's motivation

My personal experience of a career transition provided me with an insight and understanding of the experiences of new migration agents. I entered academia as a secondary career. It was a field of work unlike any other I had experienced, filled with subtle but tangible politics, substantial divisions of labour, and invisible but substantive stratifications based on perceptions of credibility. Coming from a diverse employment background that predominantly focused on migration law, I had no idea of 'what was normal' for this profession.

I had previously worked for a Federal politician as a policy advisor in the portfolio of immigration from 1996 - 2005. These years were a crucial period for Australia in terms of national sovereignty and identity, and the implications of both played out in the arena of migration law with an increasing focus on refugees and asylum

seekers. It was also the period during which the parliament introduced the first statutory self-regulation regime for migration agents.

As a policy advisor my role included the consideration and research of legislative amendments (including drafting proposed amendments to government legislation), and government policy initiatives across several portfolios including migration. As an electoral officer, I was exempt from the need to be qualified to provide migration advice to constituents. I assisted the Senator with specific individual cases where migrants and Australian citizens, partners or employers needed help to progress their visa applications. Work included drafting requests for ministerial intervention for constituents whose visas were cancelled or who had exhausted all legal options for remaining in the country.

During this time, I developed a network of migration law practitioners I could rely on to assist with constituent work, and more importantly, to assist with assessing the impact of proposed changes to the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth). This liaison included working closely with the Migration Institute of Australia and their board of Directors. The work I was doing, and the exposure I had to migration law experts and practitioners, inspired me to qualify as a migration agent. The qualification to become a migration agent in 2002 was relatively straightforward. It involved a ten-week distance education course and a three-hour multiple-choice exam. In 2005, I left parliamentary work and began work as a full-time migration agent in a small law firm.

In 2006 the government introduced into legislation a threshold qualification for registration of migration agents (s. 289 *Migration Act 1958* (Cth)). Until 2018, providing the education for the qualification was restricted to four universities: Australian National University, Victoria University, Murdoch University, and Griffith University. I was invited to work at the Australian National University (ANU), College of Law, in 2007. My role involved teaching and managing academic staff in the new Graduate Certificate in Australian Migration Law and Practice. Initially appointed in an academic and

management role as Assistant Convenor of the Graduate Certificate, I became the Convenor, then the Director of the Migration Law Program. In 2014, I designed a migration law course stream within the Master of Law (LLM) and took on the additional role of Convenor LLM stream in 2015. From 2007 – 2017, I continuously practiced as a migration agent through a pro-bono migration advice clinic I had established in Canberra in 2008.

My transition to a new role straddling both academic and migration practice led to a strong interest in the formation of professional identity. The casual sessional practitioner academics I worked with came to their teaching role with strong migration practice backgrounds. As a manager of a growing team of casual sessional and early career academics, I identified similarities between the isolation and insecurity experienced by new academic staff and similar experiences of new migration agents working as sole practitioners.

The Graduate Certificate in Australian Migration Law and Practice (Graduate Certificate) at the Australian National University was online. Because the majority of the sessional teachers who taught into the course were offsite, we ran an online ‘staff room’, where queries, directions and course preparation took place within a learning management system (Moodle-based). One discussion forum in our ‘staff room’ was called ‘Help with Clients’ where we focused on our professional migration work and asked each other for advice or shared our practice experience without disclosing confidential information. My academic research exposed me to the concept of a ‘community of practice’(CoP), as initially proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), and further developed by Wenger and his colleagues (E. Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014; Wenger, 1998). I came to recognize that the discussion forums and online ‘staff room’ we had created, included many of the components of a Community of Practice. These

included a commitment and specific discourse related to both teaching and practice in migration law, and a desire to improve our knowledge in both areas of engagement.

Management of the Graduate Certificate also involved membership of an external Federal Government committee called the Migration Agents Registration Entrance Advisory Committee (MAREAC). This committee consisted of the four universities providing the entry-level qualification⁶, the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (OMARA) as the government body overseeing migration agents, and several key stakeholders such as the Law Council and the Migration Institute of Australia (MIA). The committee's role was to advise on educational matters primarily relating to the delivery of the Graduate Certificate.

I worked with the MAREAC committee from 2007 – 2015. During this time, the government members regularly presented anecdotal accounts of practices of migration agents and students that they found concerning. Their accounts influenced the way I developed both teaching practices and content within the Graduate Certificate Course through the introduction of virtual practice components and an emphasis on problem-based learning.

Within curriculum design, my focus was on finding the best way to prepare a student for practice. As a result, the curriculum I designed included authentic learning experiences such as virtual client casework and clinic work. However, virtual practice components within a university degree cannot equal the complexity and risks of working with clients. The inability of the profession to provide new graduates with a means of supervised practice became a new area of interest for me.

In 2010, I read a journal article by Leslie Levin (2009), which detailed a qualitative study she had conducted of backgrounds, career paths and the professional development of private United States of America (US) immigration lawyers. The article

described the experiences of US immigration lawyers and emphasised strategies they used to develop expertise and professional identity and ethical practices in a field dominated by isolated sole practitioners. The article resonated with my experience of working with migration agents and highlighted the isolation that sole practitioners in migration law in Australia might be experiencing. Her research spoke to the ongoing concerns many government reviews had emphasised about the ability of sole practitioners to develop their professional skills and knowledge in isolation (Dickie, 2015; Migration Institute of Australia, 2017; Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008; Kendall, 2014).

Levin's qualitative study (2009) was the inspiration for the Protégé project. The project intentionally set out to address issues of unsupervised practice and identity formation of new migration agents. The design of the project rested on specific concepts and aspects of working as a professional. The experiences and skills we had developed in the online collegiate CoP amongst academic practitioners in the Migration Law Program at ANU further influenced the final design of Protege as a VCoP.

The decision to pursue a professional doctorate within the Professional Studies program at the University of Southern Queensland, was based on the nature of the research and the goals of the program. Although Protégé as a project may have resulted in opportunities and insight into the design of post qualification courses, it was predominantly designed to assist the emerging profession. The Migration Institute of Australia (MIA) was a partner in the original research and provided support to the Protégé project. The aim of the Professional Studies program is to result in a triple dividend. That is, the research benefits the researcher, the practice domain and academia (Fergusson, et al., 2018), and as such, the goals of the program, which were orientated towards making a knowledge contribution to professional practice, were suitable to a research project such as Protégé.

1.6 Background: The Protégé project

The Australian National University (ANU) provided funding for the project in the form of a learning and teaching linkage grant. The research team partnered with the MIA, which was the first professional representative organisation for migration agents in Australia. The MIA was crucial to recruiting newly registered agents who had graduated from a range of university providers. Without their contribution, the cohort of participants would have been limited to Australian National University alumni.

The objective of the Protégé project was to find a practical means of addressing the lack of supervised practice for newly registered migration agents' through the provision of an online 'office-like' environment. The project was designed to work in a virtual environment designed as a VCoP (Kahan, 2004), based on the principles of the supportive workplace (Andresen et al., 1999; Dubé et al., 2006; Eraut, 2004a; Eraut, 2007; Eraut & Hirsh, 2007; Levin, 2009). The intention of the project was to apply these principles of a supportive workplace to this highly specialised field of law, in an effort to link new practitioners nationally and internationally through the VCoP.

The adoption of CoP principles (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) and the use of technology to provide an online environment that connected isolated practitioners was a relatively new concept in 2013. Connecting professional and community groups through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), predated the widespread popularity of social media such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn. The website design of Protégé intentionally allowed the protégés to undertake the activities identified by Eraut (2004a) and Levin (2009), as those that could assist workplace learning. Support structures for the VCoP echoed Vygotskian concepts of learning (Illeris, 2009), through social interaction, and included the purposeful adoption of roles by the facilitators as experts who withdrew their support over time (Dorner, 2012; Dorner & Kárpáti, 2010).

As newly registered agents, the protégés were already engaging with their clients, tackling new problems and seeking new solutions. What they lacked was consistent support of others, the ability to watch others at work, opportunities to work in groups, and importantly, the social interaction needed to build not only their competence and confidence but also their professional identity.

Chapter 5 includes a detailed discussion of the design of the Protégé site. Because the design was intended to replicate the physical and social spaces of a supportive work environment, the design included spaces to replicate circumstances where a new employee might ask someone who has been there slightly longer to explain a process, or they might seek specialist advice privately from their manager. The effect of chatting in a lunchroom and solving problems was also an avenue of knowledge sharing that the design sought to replicate. Importantly, the design included elements that promoted a sense of belonging.

In order to achieve these goals, the site included clearly defined spaces for interaction that mimicked an office. Protégés could discuss work with the group in a chat room called a “café”. They could hold private discussions with each other or their facilitator. A video facility was made available for proteges to talk directly with each other, work in groups or record any information they wanted to share. The ability to ask an anonymous question ensured that protégés who might be reluctant to discuss work concerns publicly could still engage with the facilitators and the broader group. In order to ensure that protégés had access to up-to-date information, the library was regularly updated with relevant case law. The design of the project included two professional development discussions with the facilitators, aimed at replicating the annual discussions an employer may have with their supervisor. To promote social links, protégés received badges when they completed specific tasks such as their first post, their first or second year of registration as an agent, and successful visa grants.

The ANU Human Research Ethics Committee approved the Protégé project in 2013. The approval process required procedures to address specific ethical issues that focused predominantly on participant confidentiality and security of the site. Protégés were made aware of the research project aims and processes, including ethics protocols. Informed consent was integrated into the recruitment process. The roles of the research team were clearly defined, and the first cohort of participants met for a briefing day on 10 August 2013 in Sydney before the project went online on 27 August 2013. A second small cohort of protégés were included in the project in 2014. Following an agreement by the research team involved in Protégé in 2015, approval was granted by the ANU Human Research Ethics committee to include this doctoral thesis within the original ethics regime.

The Protégé site was made secure through the use of firewall systems and security shielding from the internet on the hosting server. Database servers were not directly accessible. The entire site was password-protected, and the only page visible to an Internet search was the login page. Passwords were encrypted, and there were specific limitations built into the system, which prevented random requests for passwords. Finally, the site allowed for different security privileges for specific users.

Protégé participants were informed that they should treat the site as they would a professional workplace. ‘Netiquette’ guidelines were published. The content was moderated in the site to ensure that inappropriate discussions and disruptions did not occur and to ensure that no identifying details of clients or cases were discussed. A private forum for protégés was provided to enable discussion of client cases with facilitators.

1.6.1 The Protege research team

Table 1.1 describes the roles and members of the Protégé Research team. I acted in the role of a primary investigator for Protégé. In late 2013 approval was granted to expand the team to 6 investigators and one educational designer. All researchers undertook specific roles within the project. The educational designer worked with the researchers to design and modify the site when needed. Two academics took on a ‘mentor like’ role (called facilitator). In this role, they conducted two unstructured interviews with each of the protégés, which were intended to discuss their professional development, and they also interacted daily with the protégés in the site. Three academics (including the primary investigator) conducted semi-structured interviews with the protégés but played no role in the online CoP site. The remaining academic conducted unstructured interviews with the facilitators. The grant from the ANU allowed for a research assistant to transcribe all interviews conducted.

Table 1.1

The Protégé Research Team

Title	Role	Tasks
Academic 1	Primary Investigator	Interview proteges
Academic 2	Researcher	Interview proteges
Academic 3	Researcher	Interview proteges
Academic 4	Researcher	Interview facilitators
Academic 5	Facilitator	Work in site with proteges
Academic 6	Facilitator	Work in site with proteges
Educational Designer	Design of site	Design and facilitate site
Research Assistant	Assistant	Transcribe interviews

Note. Table 1.1 describes the role of the research team, demonstrating the manner in which each member interacted with the protégés.

1.6.2 Participants in Protégé

At the time of the Protégé project those who wished to become Migration Agents were required under s. 289A, of the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth) to complete a six-month Graduate Certificate in Australian Migration Law and Practice (unless they held a legal practicing certificate) and to formally register with the OMARA within twelve months of the completion of the qualification. Lawyers with a practicing certificate were not required to undertake the Graduate Certificate but were still required to register with the OMARA in order to provide immigration assistance. In June 2013, the OMARA Annual Report (2012) for the preceding year noted that the profession had grown by 4.3% in 12 months, with 4899 migration agents registering for practice in Australia. The average age of agents was 44.5 years, the majority were male, and 33.3% held a legal practicing certificate.

The OMARA report (2012) also listed that the majority of agents lived in New South Wales (40%) and Victoria, (27%), while the remainder lived in Queensland (12.9%) and Western Australia (9.6%). As agents must be registered to practice in Australia, but can operate offshore with no restrictions, only 3.7% of registered agents were based overseas. A high rate of sole or isolated practice was recorded with approximately 80% working in sole practice or in a business where they were the only migration agent. Despite 648 new applications for 2012, the total number of agents only increased in real terms by 212, reflecting the low retention rate within the profession and the reality that not all applications for registration were successful. In 2012/2013, the MIA reported that the gender split for their members was equal, that 70% of their members identified as sole traders and 20% held a practicing certificate (Migration Institute of Australia, 2013).

Privacy and membership obligations prevented the MIA from sharing details of their members with the research team. It is doubtful that the MIA would have had access to the majority of the 599 agents who had registered with the OMARA in the previous 12 months; therefore, in order to locate newly registered agents for the project, the MIA contacted all their new members, asking specifically if they were newly registered agents, and invited them to join the research project (see Appendix A).

Purposive sampling was the most suitable way to gather an information-rich, specific cohort. The project team had determined the parameters of the cohort we needed. These were agents who:

- were sole practitioners or worked in small firms with less than five agents with at least one active client file;
- were in their first 18 months of practice; and
- had no current mentor or supervisor.

The MIA provided contact details of 34 agents who expressed interest in joining the project and who fell within these parameters. In June 2013, these agents were issued invitations to complete a demographic survey and begin the process of formally entering into the project. This phase consisted of signing consent forms (see Appendix B) and attending a briefing session in Sydney on 10 August 2013, where the parameters of the project were explained (see Appendix C). The briefing provided an opportunity to meet the facilitators and the research team face to face. After the briefing day, twenty-four agents chose to begin the project. In 2013 two agents withdrew from the project, and the rest began to work in Protégé. The MIA issued a second call for agents to take part in the project in February 2014. Eight additional agents joined the project in March 2014 making up the thirty agents who took part in Protégé.

1.6.3 Data sources for Protégé

Protégés were made aware of the research project goals and the backgrounds of researchers involved in the project. The commitments they made when consenting to take part in the project was outlined clearly in the consent papers, during the briefing, and again when they joined the VCoP (see Appendix B).

While the research team agreed on loose areas of interest for the interviews held with the protégés, they were unstructured. Considerable care was involved in scheduling interviews to suit the needs of protégés, and as a result, they were held across a broader period than originally scheduled. The project design allowed for three interviews with each protégé. These were held at the beginning, in the middle and after the online site had closed. Researchers were careful not to provide client-specific advice during their interviews with protégés.

Two discussions were held between facilitators and protégés to discuss their work and professional development. These discussions about professional development also remained unstructured and provided time for protégés to share their experience of the CoP and their experience of working as a migration agent. Protégés were able to elicit specific advice about their business or client case work during these discussions. Not all participants in Protégé were available or chose to participate in all of the interviews and discussions. All active participants finalised their contribution to Protégé by June 2015 after their final interview.

1.7 Problem statement

Australian migration agents work within an emergent profession, in a tightly defined area of law. They are not required to hold a law degree and can practice without supervision after completion of limited legal education. Despite ongoing concern from stakeholders about the competency and professionalism of early career migration agents,

the work and experiences of migration agents constitute an area of practice that has been subjected to a minimal amount of academic scrutiny. There have been no empirical studies of early practitioners and the issues they face when entering such a complex practice environment. This project will be the first empirical research into the development of professional identity in this unique profession. As a result, it can influence the legislative and policy provisions governing the regulation of Australian migration agents. The insights gained may also be used to develop qualification levels, curriculum frameworks and mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) protocols for migration agents.

The purpose of this research was to examine the effect a VCoP had upon the professional identity formation and development of competence and confidence of new migration agents working in sole practice. It is expected that a better understanding of the experiences of newly registered migration agents, and the effects that working in a VCoP can have on their experiences, will enhance existing theories of both VCoPs and professional identity formation.

To address the research problem, this thesis explores the following question:

How and to what extent can a Virtual Community of Practice, designed as a ‘supportive workplace’, enhance the professional identity of migration agents in sole practice as determined by their ‘own’ and others’ perceived competence and confidence?

In considering this overarching question, two sub-questions were proposed:

1. What process may be involved in forming an identity as a professional migration agent?

2. How have the experiences in Protégé enhanced/influenced participant perception and development of their professional identity?

To address these questions, this thesis considers the experiences of individuals with the Protégé VCoP, and their perception of their professional identity, competence

and confidence as early career practitioners, and the effect of a specifically designed virtual community on their practice and professional identity.

In doing so, this thesis exposes the struggle of newly registered migration agents to begin their career and build their professional practice. It shows how the very nature of the role of a migration agent is steeped in unpredictability, and it discusses how the strategies new agents use to achieve their professional goals, and meet their client's needs, build their professional identity.

1.8 Expectations of the Protégé project

Based on my experience, both as an agent and academic stakeholder in the profession, I entered the research project with four primary preconceptions or expectations. These represent my experience as a migration agent and as an academic teaching into this area of law. It is important to note that these assumptions were not a source of investigation within this thesis. Nevertheless, as discussed in chapter 6, the final analysis of the data revealed that they were not upheld. This provides further insight into the aspects of professional identity formation considered by this thesis.

The four expectations that I held were:

1. As the Graduate Certificate in Australian Migration Law and Practice did not cover small business or accounting matters, I expected that newly registered migration agents would not be sufficiently cognizant of the business requirements of sole practice. I considered this would result in agents focusing on learning business skills and seeking advice from their peers and mentors about operating and managing a migration practice, not on the actual practice as an agent (legislative and policy advice).
2. I presumed that newly registered agents would not adopt the professional identity of a migration agent until they had been recognized

as such by their peers and clients. This presumption was premised on research that explains how specific professional skills, knowledge, and capabilities are essential for recognition by others as an ‘occupier’ of a specific professional role (Miscenko & Day, 2016).

3. I had expected that newly registered agents with a law degree or practicing certificate would be more confident in sharing their opinions on migration law and practice than agents from differing backgrounds. The assumption arose from knowing that lawyers have incorporated a solid legal and disciplinary background before their practice as migration agents.
4. I also expected that agents who had been practicing as lawyers or were in small firms would not experience the same benefits from Protégé as those who were operating in sole practice, as I presumed, they may already be receiving or had already experienced the kind of support Protégé was seeking to offer to new agents.

Chapter 6 discusses these expectations/preconceptions and argues that they were not upheld by the findings.

1.9 Significance of this thesis

Professional doctorates aim to contribute to the knowledge of the profession or the practice within the profession. This thesis aims to provide an insight into the work and identity development of an emergent and contested profession. The context of the research is therefore grounded in the framework of the work and experience of early career migration agents. It is set within a fractured landscape of practice that continues to face government and stakeholder scrutiny.

This thesis has sought to examine the effect of a VCoP on the development of the professional identity of migration agents, using constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2014), and the adoption of a narrative framework device (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Eraut, 2007) as a perspective to reflect and present the experiences of participants in this research. The findings can provide depth and meaning and a new direction to current theories on the development of professional identity and VCoPs.

It is anticipated that this thesis and resultant publications will contribute to the literature by drawing together strands of multidisciplinary evidence and applying them to an emerging professional context. The research outcomes from the project will be of benefit to a range of stakeholders' educators and professional bodies, by deepening the theoretical underpinnings surrounding professional identity formation and the use of a VCoP to support this. An improved approach to educating migration agents and an increased understanding of their daily practice may assist the Office of Migration Agents Registration Authority and migration agent professional bodies to support new and continuing agents. Improved education and awareness of practice can impact the broader profession and individual agents, as well as assist clients, many of whom are incredibly vulnerable. It can also reach beyond this profession to other professions, for instance lawyers more generally and dispute resolution practitioners.

1.10 Limitations

This research was a snapshot of time for a specific cohort of early-career migration agents. As the research intended to examine a phenomenon based on a particular profession, a small sample of migration agents and a period of engagement were the focus of the project. However, chapter 3 outlines how the sample of agents (18) considered in this research was representative of the broader profession. The project began in 2013 as a qualitative project, without a focus on a particular methodology such

as constructivist grounded theory. Because of this, the interview technique used by the researcher may not match the rigor of processes suggested by Charmaz, such as personally transcribing interviews and observing and recording the “silent dialogue” (Olesen & Whittaker, 1968, as cited in Charmaz, 2014, p. 93) of body language.

Charmaz (2011) notes that if interviews were the only source of data “30-40 interviews would provide a solid foundation for a detailed analysis” (p. 171). Interviews for this research project were conducted by telephone and transcribed by a research assistant; all were then reviewed and amended if needed, as data analysis was conducted. Quotes used in the text of this thesis do not include pauses, or laughter or verbal stutters unless this adds to the meaning of the quote. The 78 interviews used in this research were not the only source of data. Protégé provided over 1039 new topic discussions within the VCoP site. During theoretical sampling, 315 of these site interactions were used for coding. In keeping with constructivist grounded theory methods, memos from the researcher and the facilitator added to the data analysis.

In undertaking this research, I have focused on the experiences of a target group within a broader research project. In considering these experiences, I examined data from a project that had reached completion. The option to return and conduct further empirical inquiry, consistent with traditional methods of theoretical sampling, was not available to me. The use of a small sample and the inability to conduct further data collection directly with participants could be viewed as a limitation. However, private discussions with Kathy Charmaz, in June 2015, confirmed that returning to remaining sections of available data can provide enough data to develop the analysis further. Through the recommended method of constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling of new data sources from the original Protégé project, I sought to minimise any effect these limitations may have had on the development of the final analysis and themes. Within this thesis, I have

outlined the process and described how decisions were made to include or exclude data and to describe restrictions faced during the development of the thesis.

1.11 Thesis Chapter Summary

The thesis is organized into eight chapters. This chapter has provided an introduction into the background of the thesis and the research problem, and it has considered the impact the research may have for relevant stakeholders.

Chapter 2 explores the social learning theory of Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice, through an examination of the development of the theory. It addresses literature relating to the theory of professional identity formation and workplace learning and situates the profession of migration agents, as considered in this thesis, within their current professional milieu. While migration agents are not required to hold a law degree, their work as migration law practitioners provides opportunities for comparison with their legal counterparts when investigating traits linked to professional identity in this disciplinary area. Therefore, chapter 2 also draws on professional identity formation in law students and early career practitioners.

Importantly, the nature of a VCoP is considered to determine if the research has found any substantive differences between a predominantly face to face community of practice and one where participants are separated by time and space within a virtual site. While constructivist grounded theory allows for a preliminary literature review, the method of conducting the review is an iterative process that occurs throughout the research (Charmaz, 2014, p. 307). The purpose of the review is to establish the underlying basis for the presumptions of the research. Constant reviewing of the literature during the research analysis allowed the thesis to be positioned within a field of relevant studies, and it allowed gaps to be identified, which in turn enabled the development of the theory based on the data obtained from the research.

Chapter 3 is presented in the researcher's voice. This chapter discusses the methodology used for the research. It explains and describes how constructivist grounded theory provided a theoretical and analytical framework to assist with the 'how' questions the research set out to address. It explains the rationale for using a constructivist grounded theory framework based on the original design of the Protégé project. The chapter provides a detailed description of the approach taken in the data analysis. It outlines how constructivist grounded theory was used as the research methodology to investigate the experience of participating in, and the impact of, a VCoP on newly registered migration agents. Semi-structured interviews, site interactions, memos and artefacts have been used to understand the experiences.

Chapter 4 expands on the use of a metaphorical multi-dimensional narrative inquiry space as a heuristic device to present the findings of the analysis and organise data for presentation. It uses a framework favoured by Eraut (2007) to present the findings, and to highlight the inquiry space and the participants' role within that space. By utilising this concept as a heuristic device, similar to that used by narrative and constructivist grounded theorists (Charmaz, 2014; Clandinin, 2006), to create interpretive understandings, the stories presented by the protégés through interviews, site interactions and artefacts, such as their professional development videos, came to life as a reflection of their experiences and interpretation of "past events, and present situations and the imagined self" they wish to portray (Charmaz, 2010, p. 178). This chapter includes profiles of each participant, as presented through the adopted lens of locale, social positioning, and temporality. These profiles highlight the experiences of participants during their time in the Protégé project and contextualise the findings presented in chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 5 returns to the literature to address the difference between a CoP and a VCoP. The chapter includes a definition of a VCoP, as drawn from the literature review

and adapted to meet the requirements of the thesis. The chapter then establishes the parameters by which Protégé meets the definition presented. It discusses essential sections of the design and the role of participants within the virtual community. The chapter builds a clear picture of how Protégé fulfilled and exceeded traditional definitions of a community of practice through the data analysis of memos and site interactions. It concludes that the design of Protégé, and the role played by the facilitators, were crucial factors in differentiating the VCoP from networking opportunities and professional support currently available to new agents and at the time of Protégé.

Chapter 6 addresses the primary research question. The chapter returns to the theory addressed in chapter 2 and examines relevant literature, in order to establish how the research findings from the data provide new knowledge in the area of professional practice and workplace learning, and the impact of a VCoP on identity formation and learning. Chapter 6 addresses the preconceptions or expectations raised in this chapter.

Chapter 7 explains how the findings add to current theories. The chapter details the four theoretical concepts that underpin the analysis and findings presented in chapter 6. Importantly, participants' voices play a vital role in this chapter, demonstrating how the theoretical concepts are directly linked to their experiences.

Chapter 8 summarises the key findings of the research and demonstrates the relevance of the findings for the profession of migration agents. Recommendations for further study are drawn from the findings. This chapter also presents an autobiographical reflection through which the learning objectives required by the Professional Studies program are addressed.

Finally, this thesis presents appendices, sample documents from the Protégé study, diagrams and tables relevant to the research.

1.12 Summary of chapter 1

This chapter has introduced and positioned this thesis. It has described the legislative background migration agents work within and the challenges they face when they begin to practice. My background, including my work as an academic and as a migration agent, was discussed in an autobiographical account to demonstrate how my professional experiences led to an interest in the concept of a Community of Practice and the work and experiences of newly registered Australian migration agents. The chapter has also detailed the origins of the research project Protégé and the evolution of this current research. It has introduced the research questions and the significance this work may have for immediate and broader stakeholders. Importantly, the chapter has included a brief explanation of the importance of voice in constructivist grounded theory methodology and the role of the researcher as a participant and active determiner in the outcome of the analysis. Finally, the chapter has provided a synopsis of the chapters that follow. The next chapter introduces the theory and literature relevant to this project.

Chapter 2 The literature review

This chapter begins with a consideration of the role of a literature review in constructivist grounded theory, which has been described as “misunderstood” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 306). The literature review in this chapter provides a basis for the research through an exploration of the drivers behind the design of the research project and consideration of the factors facing the emerging profession of migration agents.

The chapter then addresses four key areas. The first is Communities of Practice (CoP), which presents a history of the development of the CoP and Wenger’s social learning theory in order to demonstrate the evolving nature of the concept of a CoP and to lay the groundwork for how a CoP can be created in the workplace and ultimately in a virtual environment. The second area focuses on workplace learning. It examines the work of Eraut (2004, 2007, 2010) and his concept of a supportive workplace that will enhance confidence, competence and build professional identity. The third explores professional identity formation from an individual perspective. It investigates the research on how a professional identity is formed, including theories on how to teach students to form their professional identity, and the role of a CoP and VCoP in enhancing professional identity. The final section explores the literature and the reality of the landscape within which migration agents work. The development of migration advice as a profession is addressed along with current research into the identity of migration agents.

2.1 The role of the literature review in constructivist grounded theory

Even though grounded theorists do not dispute the need for a literature review, they do not always agree on when the literature review should be carried out, which is why Charmaz (2014) describes the role of the literature review in grounded theory (GT)

as “disputed and misunderstood” (p. 306). Others describe it as a “polemical and divisive issue that continues to spark debate” (Dunne, 2011, p. 113) and a controversial issue made complex by the failure of “renowned GT scholars” to articulate clearly how a researcher should conduct the literature review (Hussein et al., 2017, p. 1206). These descriptions reflect the legacy left by traditionally grounded theorists who held the view that the literature review should be delayed until the data analysis was completed (Glaser & Holten, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ramalho et al., 2015).

Glaser and Holten (2004) maintained that it was critical in GT methodology to “avoid unduly influencing the pre-conceptualisation of the research through extensive reading in the substantive area and the forcing of extant theoretical overlays on the collection and analysis of data” (para. 3.4). They insisted that undertaking “an extensive review of literature before the emergence of core category violates the basic premise of GT, that being the theory emerges from the data not from extant theory” (2004, para. 3.4).

The work of Charmaz informed the iterative literature review process followed in this thesis. Charmaz rejects the notion that a preliminary literature review will affect the way data is perceived and holds the opinion that it is preferable to conduct the review iteratively. Charmaz (2014) advises researchers to undertake a preliminary literature review and to return to the literature after the data analysis is complete (p. 307). She explains that this will allow the researcher to take a “critical reflective stance” to the problem and use the review to “frame, integrate, and assess literature”, and to prompt “explicit and compelling connections between your study and previous work” that then “reveal gaps in extant knowledge and helps you position your study and permit your claims” (Charmaz, 2015, p. 8). This approach was taken in this thesis, with the literature review being conducted iteratively to take into account concepts and connections that arose from the data.

The university doctoral program for this thesis demanded a preliminary literature review that situated the proposed thesis within the extant theories. Academic literature relating to professional identity formation and communities of practice had influenced the design of the research project Protégé, and it had formed the basis of the preliminary literature review. During data analysis, a comprehensive review of literature, focusing on virtual communities of practice (VCoP) and professional identity, was undertaken. As a result, the literature has consistently been considered, reviewed, reflected upon and updated following the methodology of constructivist grounded theory (CGT).

2.2 Communities of Practice

This research focuses on the impact a VCoP, designed to include aspects of a supportive workplace, could play in enhancing the development of the professional identity of early-career migration agents. In order to explore and understand this premise, it is first necessary to consider the concept of a CoP and the different interpretations academics place on it. It is impossible, therefore, to begin this literature review without examining the work of Wenger⁷ and his colleagues over the past twenty-eight years.

The concept of a CoP is not new, Seely Brown et al. (1989) noted that practitioners in professions are “connected by far more than their ostensible tasks. They are bound by intricate socially constructed webs of belief which make it possible to see them as “cultures (Geertz 1983) (p.4)” ...and “membership of a culture provides a set of cultural eyeglasses that are key to understanding and carrying out its activities” (p. 5). Nevertheless, the original work of Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced new perspectives on concepts in learning, such as legitimate peripheral participation, situated learning, the domain of practice and, importantly, a definition of a CoP.

⁷ Etienne Wenger married Beverly Trayner in 2011 and adopted her surname. She in turn adopted his. Throughout the thesis I will refer to Etienne Wenger as ‘Wenger’. Direct citations of his work will be referenced according to the publication name of either Wenger or Wenger-Trayner. Citations of Beverly Wenger-Trayner are also in accordance with the relevant publication.

Since 1991, Wenger and his colleagues (Kahan, 2004; B. Wenger-Trayner et al., 2017) evolved, defined and redefined the theories raised in the original work with a consistent focus on building a distinctive theory of learning. The evolution of the concept of the CoP has been critiqued and analysed by multiple academics (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Dubé et al., 2006; Duguid, 2005; Omidvar & Kislov, 2014; Smith et al., 2017; Storberg-Walker, 2008) resulting in the rejection, adaptation and adoption of the original concepts they developed across a broad range of workplaces and academic contexts.

Consideration of Wenger's theory of learning in a CoP, across three specific points in time, allows for a useful glimpse of that evolution, and an insight into why academics focusing on education and management have adopted various aspects of his work but very few appear to have taken it up in its entirety (Duguid, 2005). This literature review examines the evolution of the concept of a CoP and focuses on the aspects of Wenger's work that have been adopted by legal academics and researchers, who have sought to use it to explain professional identity formation (Jawitz, 2009; Levin, 2009, 2011; Nyström, 2009a).

2.2.1 The Development of a theory of social learning

In his book *Communities of Practice: Learning meaning and identity*, Wenger (1998) opens with an anecdote that describes his attempts to credit his colleague Jean Lave with the term 'Community of Practice'. Lave responded, "I thought you were the one who came up with it?" (p. 8). This anecdote demonstrates the ubiquitous nature the concept of a CoP encapsulates, and the initial focus both Lave and Wenger put on understanding the learning process that occurs within a CoP, rather than the creation or definition of a CoP. Critics have claimed that CoPs are now an "umbrella concept" (Storberg-Walker, 2008, p. 556), or an "elusive concept with vague references" (Johnson, 2001, p. 53), whose appeal owes much to the "seductive character" of the word

‘community’ (Duguid, 2005, p. 109). Nevertheless, the term CoP continues to be used as a descriptor across management and education to describe the work, camaraderie and the learning undertaken by distinct groups of people.

2.2.1 (a) The beginning 1991 - 1998

Wenger’s definition and focus on specific aspects of a CoP appear to vary across time. Despite coining the phrase in his initial work on CoPs (Lave & Wenger, 1991), he later clarified that their goal was not to discuss the formation of a CoP but to “create a language for talking about how people learn” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 144). They did so through an exploration of apprenticeships and the role that ‘newcomers’ take on, while they learn their craft or profession. Drawing from the work of Vygotsky and his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (Chaiklin, 2003), Lave and Wenger (1991) used the phrase ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ to describe and explain how learners participate in communities of practitioners. They argued that peripheral participation would allow a newcomer to move towards full participation and mastery of knowledge and skills. This mastery of knowledge and skills required the internalisation of work practices, until they form part of the identity of the worker, thereby ensuring that they are fully participating in their CoP. For Lave and Wenger this development of a work, or occupational, identity was central to the career of the person in the CoP and “fundamental to the concept of Legitimate Peripheral Participation” (p. 108-109), a term used to describe how beginners or newcomers, are on the edges of workplace participation. They concluded that the issue for newcomers was “not to learn from talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation: it is to learn to talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation” (p. 108-109). Lave and Wenger’s use of the term ‘talk’ encompassed the discourse, behaviour and skills peculiar to the work environment an individual enters.

The focus by Lave and Wenger (1991) on workers partaking in apprenticeship models of learning highlighted the ways workplace practices can restrict or enable the participation of new workers. Seely Brown and Duguid (1991) responded positively to Lave and Wenger's concept of legitimate peripheral participation, calling it a "versatile account" of an "analytical tool" for "understanding learning" (p. 109) that emphasised the difference between teaching, and learning. They proposed that a theory that recognised the social construction of a shared understanding of work also meant that a worker was socially constructing their own identity as a member of that group or community (p. 47). They concluded that the work informal communities (those built on informal sharing of work practices) do in the workplace not only builds the workers professional identity, but also inspires innovation in work practice (p. 55).

However, the focus on apprenticeships as the model for a CoP has also come under criticism (Consalvo et al., 2015; Engestrom, 2007). Consalvo et al. (2015) argue that the emphasis of Lave and Wenger on legitimate peripheral participation as a means of learning relies too heavily on the concept of a master/apprentice relationship, which risks ignoring the importance of the relationship between the "more and less knowledgeable individuals" (p. 2). Their analysis of literacy research featuring legitimate peripheral participation identified competing views of the concept, and it raised critical aspects of learning that the presentation of legitimate peripheral participation by Lave and Wenger failed to address. The most crucial aspect was a need to define what it means to 'practice' in each specific situation, or the need to be explicit about what practices learners are considered to be peripherally participating in, and the need to recognise that the very concept of legitimate peripheral participation may not be applicable to learning relationships that could be described as an "apprenticeship model" (p. 16). These differentiations are particularly important when considering the effect of the social construction of knowledge in the context of a practice-based profession.

While Lave and Wenger did not precisely define a CoP in their original work, it was Wenger's later attempts to do so that opened his work up to frustration and criticism from academics, as his definition appears to have become increasingly dynamic (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Cox, 2005; Dubé et al., 2006; Engeström, 2007; Omidvar & Kislov, 2014; Storberg-Walker, 2008; Vollenbroek, 2019). In 1996 Wenger began to expand the notion of a CoP to include multiple communities, and Engeström (2007) warned that this expansion of the definition meant a CoP could be “practically anything” (p. 3).

In 1998 Wenger used vignette studies of the daily work experiences of health insurance claims processors to expand the notion of a CoP and the effect of social learning. Wenger (1998) outlined three dimensions of how a CoP should be viewed or defined along with “indicators that may indicate a CoP has formed” (p. 125). However, it was the three dimensions of “mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire” (p. 73) which were to become the enduring and most helpful conceptualisation of a CoP.

Wenger (1998) explained that the concept was not new and put forward his premise that “we all belong to a community of practice” (p. 6). However, he also emphasised that a CoP is “not a team, business unit or network” (p. 3); it is something with a completely different goal and outcome. His explanation broadened the original concept of a CoP and allowed for consideration that a CoP might occur within home and family, the workplace, clubs or hobby groups. Despite this exclusion of teams and work units, his expansive view of what can be a CoP was not a helpful one, as it left open the prospect that regular interaction between like-minded individuals or colleagues could be considered or re-imagined as a CoP, which detracted from the broader concepts he introduced about the way a CoP should function and the benefits it could provide.

Along with the expansion of the definition of a CoP, Wenger (1998) clarified and defined his concept of learning as a ‘social learning theory’. Wenger proposed that social

learning occurs outside of traditional institutional settings and incorporates the components of meaning, practice, community and identity (1998). Wenger argued that social learning theory “distinguishes between three modes of identification” or three ways to “orient ourselves in the landscape of practice in terms of our identity” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 150). These are an imagination, alignment, and engagement mode:

1. Imagination: when an individual begins to construct an image of self as another newer identity and determines what steps are needed to gain the imagined state of being.
2. Alignment: the point when the individual meets and complies with the expectations, standards and goals of the group.
3. Engagement: a process that makes it meaningful for participants and provides an incentive for them to continue to participate in the group.

This meaning-making process arises from two interaction components in the CoP, which he termed participation and reification; that is, the divide between disciplinary knowledge, artefacts or theory and theoretical labels, and practice of that knowledge through activity such as work, or participation in that knowledge through acceptance of a theory or a label (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 146; Hibbert & Rich, 2006; Smith et al., 2017).

Wenger’s emphasis on social learning theory moved the focus of his work to the impact of social learning on the formation of identity. Østerlund and Carlile (2005) have noted that Wenger “dedicates half his book to the notion of how people negotiate ways of being a person in a context” (p. 98). However, they argue that this results in a blurring of the category boundaries between practice and identity, and a change of focus from practice to identity as a fundamental building block of social learning theory; this ‘loses’ the individual and rests upon the similarities or sets of characteristics that define the group (p. 99).

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) critiqued the early work of Lave and Wenger and Wenger's subsequent publications in 1998. They argued that the change in definition of a CoP between 1991 and 1998 had both compounded and solved some shortcomings in the theory of CoPs and social learning, raised by the original 1991 publication.

Hodkinson and Hodkinson explained that the early description of a CoP was merely a claim that such an entity existed and failed to adequately describe or analyse what various CoPs may look like. In addition, they claimed it failed to explain if membership of a CoP is a condition of learning or whether a CoP merely describes a structure where some learning may take place.

Furthermore, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) critiqued the changes in Wenger's 1998 publications as reversing the original stance on legitimate peripheral participation, claiming they lost the focus on the individuality of workers and produced a tighter definition of a CoP. They argued that despite Lave and Wenger's original claims, namely that an individual is inherently social, and that learning is a social practice, Wenger's 1998 publications did not view workers and learners as individuals. They also rejected Lave and Wenger's emphasis on legitimate peripheral participation as a theoretical component that was useful for analysis, as they claimed it failed to acknowledge the fluidity of participation of members in communities, workplaces and learning groups, and the reasons why participation may change.

Hodkinson and Hodkinson's (2004) use of Bourdieu's concepts in their consideration of a CoP arose from the original definition of a CoP by Lave and Wenger, which they described as the entity individuals "need to belong to [to] learn and whatever we belong to can be called a CoP" (p. 5). They argued that this description of community came close to Bourdieu's concept of a field. Viewing a CoP in this way allowed them to consider a broader range of communities that were not restricted by Wenger's new 1998 defining characteristics. In doing so they could expand their consideration of CoPs to a

broad range of workplaces including those that were socially or geographically disparate (p. 4). Importantly, using this lens allowed them to argue that the concept of legitimate peripheral participation could be equated with Bourdieu's notion of social capital. This perspective brought the individual worker/learner to the front of the analysis. Their use of the concept of "habitus as the expression of the social structure through the person" (p. 9) ensured that the individual was considered both as a part of a social structure and as an entity embodying the social structure. This, they argued, was the only way of ensuring that a "social view of the individual could be connected to a social view of learning" (p. 10).

2.2.1 (b) The development of theory 2002 – 2009

The arguments put forward by Hodkinson and Hodkinson in 2004 presented unique ways of viewing the early work of Lave and Wenger. However, they did not take into account the changes Wenger had made to his theories in 2002. In 2002, Wenger et al. took a new turn when they defined the concept of a CoP as a "group of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al. 2002, p.4). Cox (2005) critiqued this evolution of the concept of a CoP as "popularisation, a simplification but also a commodification of the idea of community of practice" (p. 533). Wenger rejected this characterization and explained that the change of direction was a reaction to the need to make the concept accessible to business and management, particularly in the area of knowledge management, which became prominent in the late 1990s (Farnsworth et al., 2016). Despite the expanded definition, Wenger et al. (2002) still reinforced the three dimensions of 'mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire' as being "fundamental elements" of a CoP (p. 26).

As his focus at that time was on assisting organisations to establish their CoP, his work outlined the values of a CoP to organisations and included seven principles for cultivating a CoP that evoked “aliveness” (p. 51):

1. Design for evolution.
2. Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives.
3. Invite different levels of participation.
4. Develop both public and private community spaces.
5. Focus on value.
6. Combine familiarity and excitement.
7. Create a rhythm for the community (2002, p. 51).

Wenger et al. (2002) used the term “aliveness” (p. 51) in an architectural sense. They compared a CoP to a neighborhood, which captures principles of community. These include the integration of different uses, such as residential and commercial spaces, repeated patterns such as architectural features of buildings, and transitions to different spaces. They discussed these aspects of a community as ways of defining public and private spaces, which they claimed were key to “aliveness” (p. 51). Their use of architectural terminology and comparison is important to this thesis as it is reflected in aspects of Protégés design.

Nevertheless, at this stage Wenger et al. (2002) did not place an emphasis or focus on VCoPs, despite their recognition of the growth of technology-assisted communications within business. They referred to any community that could not meet face to face as the primary vehicle for connection as “distributed communities”. Splitting the definition of a CoPs from ‘local’ to ‘distributed’ led them to focus on examples of large organisations, such as Shell’s global communities. As a result, they argued that the number of disparate participants would be larger in a distributed community so they would be less present to each other as members and their work may cross organisational,

cultural and temporal boundaries (p. 115). Wenger et al. (2002) felt these problems would make it hard to reconcile the fundamental elements necessary for a successful CoP and, as a result, would require additional design efforts, including an additional four “developmental activities” that were essential to:

- achieve stakeholder alignment,
- create a structure that promotes both local variations and global connections,
- build a rhythm strong enough to maintain community visibility, and
- develop a private space of the community more systematically (Wenger et al. 2002).

Despite the new focus on CoPs as a purposefully cultivated learning community, the principles of sharing and deepening knowledge remained a central component of the 2002 work. Somewhat perversely, however, the focus at this point, was not on social learning, but on creating value by “connecting the personal development and professional identities of the practitioner to the strategy of the organisation” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 43). This iteration resulted in a more structured model of a CoP with an imposed domain of interest, which they defined as the knowledge developed within the CoP.

Wenger et al. (2002) also reconsidered the original view of legitimate peripheral participation, which was to be critiqued by Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) who felt it had focused too much on newcomers and ignored the learning of experienced workers. Wenger et al. (2002) acknowledged that their original vision of “encouraging all community members to participate equally” (p. 53) was unrealistic because it failed to take into account the agency of people and their reasons for participating. Instead they advocated designing a CoP that deliberately “invited different levels of participation” (p. 53). Still, they did not address the core issues raised by Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004), for example how experienced workers participated in a CoP, or the fluctuations of

participation a community of learners could experience as people moved from the periphery to the core and back out again, according to their needs or work requirements.

These changing descriptions of CoPs and their components were critiqued for being either too complex or too vague (Cox, 2005; Storberg-Walker 2008, p.556). Cox (2005) demonstrated, in his review of CoPs, that academic and practitioner thought had moved away from the concept of a CoP to focus instead on social networks and social capital. However, he also acknowledged the ongoing relevance of Wenger's work and predicted the continued uptake of principles associated with communities of practice theory amongst academics; foreshadowing that he expected to focus his own future research on virtual communities of practice in occupations and professions. Cox concluded that the expansion of the concept of a CoP might, in fact, have led to the unintended result of providing management with a "new form of normative control", which explains "why so many CoPs have failed" (p. 538).

However, Cox failed to predict the ongoing evolution of Wenger's social learning theory or the continued uptake of principles associated with CoP theory amongst academics (Cochrane & Narayan, 2016) and practitioners, or the evolution and rise of knowledge management between 2002 and 2015 (McDermott, 2000; O'Leary, 2016). The uptake of these principles explains why, despite the limited success of attempts to replicate a CoP within Wenger's descriptive indicators (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Dubé et al., 2006; Li et al., 2009), researchers continued to adapt and expand on the theory of a CoP (Duguid, 2005; Li et al., 2009).

In 2009 Wenger, White and Smith published a book exploring the role of technology in communities (Wenger et al., 2009). The authors were at pains to stress that the book was not a guide to choosing technology (p. 13). However, the result was a "how to guide" for those seeking to engage in what the authors refer to as a digital habitat (p. 53). Despite Hodkinson and Hodkinson's previous claims (2004) that Wenger did not

consider the individual when discussing learning in a CoP, the authors acknowledged that learning in a group is “realised in the experience of the individual” (p. 156). This may be because of the actuality of learning in an environment, which allows those separated by time and space to interact, presented them with a different and previously unconsidered view of learning in a community. Nevertheless, they emphasised that their focus remained on learning as a group, and as such the book focused on the communal aspects of learning that technology could offer.

Wenger’s (2002) previous concerns regarding the limitations of distributed communities (p. 115) were not addressed in this book. Wenger et al. (2009) did not define a digital habitat as a VCoP. Instead, the term was used to describe a “portion of a community’s habitat” (p. 53) that is enabled by a configuration of technology, and that may apply to the full community or be a part of it, such as the site that captures the technological functions of that community. The problems of large disparate groups of people, and their inability to meet the fundamental tenants Wenger had laid out for a CoP, were not addressed.

Wenger et al. (2009) identified three interrelating facets of a virtual community when addressing the use of technology, which they referred to as polarities (p. 73):

1. Rhythms: Togetherness and separation– participation can be asynchronous or synchronous. Learning together may be communal but it does not need to be synchronous. Technology creates a communal space in which to communicate across time and geography.
2. Interactions: Participation vs reification - meaningful learning requires both to be present. The individual must participate in the learning process in some way, which can include lurking (peripheral participation). The act of participating will create both physical and conceptual artifacts such as stories, links and documents.

3. Identities: Individual vs group - a technological tool may allow a group to interact, but it is the individual who accesses that technology.

Wenger et al. (2009) began their book with the claim that an email group of over 2,500 members, interested in, or suffering from, myeloproliferative disorder MPD, qualifies as a CoP. The claims were justified across three “fundamental dimensions” (p. 27) that differed from the usual examination of CoPs that Wenger had engaged in before. These dimensions were domain, practice and community. In what appeared to be a change of direction, Wenger et al. (2009) talked about practice as “practice of living with the disease” (p. 27). This definition allowed them to classify all members as practitioners, who read their emails with a “practitioners eye” (p. 2). This was a vast difference to the usual treatment of practice in a CoP, namely as an entity that arose through the work within the community. While there was no doubt the members of the email group shared stories, experiences and artifacts about MPD, the analysis was so different from the usual approach to CoPs that it became hard to compare it to Wenger’s traditional approaches to assessing and defining a CoP or the effect of learning within that CoP.

Along with an increasing interest in knowledge, education and working within organisations, Wenger continued to redefine not only his concept of a CoP (Cox, 2005; Kahan, 2004; Omidvar & Kislov, 2014; Storberg-Walker, 2008), but also his concepts of situated learning and social learning theory (Smith et al., 2017). As a result, the concept of a community of practice strengthened rather than diminished (De Cagna, 2004).

2.2.1 (c) 2011 Communities of Practice and social learning

In 2011 Wenger and De Laat (2011) describe a CoP as “a learning partnership among people who find it useful to learn from and with each other about a particular domain” (p. 9). Presenting a conceptual framework for assessing value creation in both communities and networks, the authors focused on ways to measure value in a CoP and

network through narrative or “value creation stories” (p. 7). They argued that a focus on narratives would emphasise both the individual and group experience and reinforce the concept of a shared identity and a deliberate intention by the group “to steward a domain of knowledge and to sustain learning about it” (p. 9). The intention to ‘steward a domain of knowledge’ also included the intention to “advance learning in a domain” through the enhancement of knowledge (p. 10). Therefore, the concept of intention became the key difference between a network of professionals, or between workers and a CoP.

Wenger (Farnsworth et al., 2016) has defended the changes in definitions and explanations of what could or could not be a CoP as an evolution of his social learning theory, which had the specific purpose of providing an “account of learning as a socially constituted experience of meaning making” (p. 142).

Wenger and B. Wenger-Trayner (2015) have defined ‘community’ as “members pursuing their interests in their domain” (p. 2) but stressed again that a CoP required three characteristics: the domain, the community and the practice. In 2016, Wenger cautioned against the notion of considering that a CoP refers to a ‘group’, saying that the consulting work with business had assisted him to further develop the notion as a “social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 143). Wenger (Farnsworth et al., 2016) explained that the term domain does not refer to a physical space: but is the area of knowledge within which a CoP community claims to have the legitimacy to define the competence of their participants (p. 143).

This concept of competence is a crucial factor in Wenger’s (Farnsworth et al., 2016) social learning theory. He claimed that the competence in a specific CoP “reflected the history of learning” (p. 145) within that CoP, thus rendering learners accountable to the “regimes of competence” the CoP created (p. 145). Learners or members of a CoP therefore negotiate their identity on multiple levels: as a participant in the community, in the way they express their competence in the communities’ stated domain/s of

knowledge, and in the way others in the community “recognise you as a member or not” (p. 145). The use of the term ‘domain’, as a reference to the specific knowledge linked to a shared interest, places a boundary on the knowledge and strengthens the image of a community able to claim legitimacy in their knowledge production (E. Wenger-Trayner & B. Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

McDonald et al. (2008) expanded the concept of a domain as knowledge within a CoP to include the locality as well as the social and collegial space the community inhabited. Their definition provides a realistic view of both a CoP and VCoP and expands the consideration of where and how knowledge production can take place. While the narratives included in the paper by McDonald et al. (2008) do not discuss or expand on the physical space where participants held their meetings, they do refer to “meetings” and “sessions” that imply a specific locality and time for attendance. A key feature of their study was the emphasis on the collegiality and social aspects the CoP provided to participants. These aspects include the ability to share stories, food and practice, and in contrast to Hibbert and Rich’s (2006) claim that only a VCoP can provide the unique aspect of an “enunciative space” (Smyth 2001), participants in the McDonald et al. (2008) study felt free to discuss work issues that impacted on their well-being and practice.

2.2.1 (d) Placing Wenger within the framework of this research

The basic tenets of social constructivism include a concern with the construction of knowledge, and an epistemological rather than ontological focus, that is, an emphasis on everyday interactions between people and the social processes they engage in as a focus of inquiry (Andrews, 2012). Consideration of these tenets appears to place Wenger’s theories and his work squarely in the paradigm of social constructivism. However, despite the fact Wenger has conceded that the origins of his concepts were

drawn from a range of theories and disciplines (Wenger, 2009), he has also been quick to clarify that he does not feel he is a pure constructivist (Baron & Corbin, 2012) and has stressed that he prefers the term “pragmatist constructivist”, describing his theories as “hybrid of pragmatism and contemporary constructivism” (B. Wenger-Trayner et al., 2017, p. 21). Nevertheless, Wenger’s theory fits under a constructivist framework in that the factors that enable or facilitate learning in a CoP, such as collaboration, facilitation and authentic ‘ill-structured problems’, are also considered to be critical aspects of constructivist teaching techniques (Johnson, 2001). Maxwell (2006) has reminded us that engaging in a CoP requires an acknowledgement that the CoP involves ways of working with the “non-human presences we construct (tools, media and artifacts...) and with whom we are in constant dialogue. To recognise this is to adopt a theory of human action that is inclusive of its technological and artifactual extensions...” (p. 289).

Wenger has argued that his social learning theory is still evolving (Omidvar & Kislov, 2014). It has opened up a pathway for academics to apply aspects of the concept of a CoP to their work while raising awareness of social learning and identity formation. He considers social learning theory to be a framework for understanding processes and building narratives about learning and identity formation, and a means of providing an account of a learning experience (2016, p. 142). In 2014 he raised the concept of multiple landscapes of practice and boundaries, to explain multiple areas of practice a person may encounter and work within but cannot claim competence in (Wenger et al., 2014). This development of his theories highlights three processes that have become central components in his definition of a CoP: learning as a means of gaining competence in practice, belonging to multiple communities of practice and negotiating identity. The need to negotiate an identity arose from the acknowledgement by Wenger that a person may have more than one identity. Therefore, belonging to a new group, workplace,

community, or role requires a social recognition by the community and understanding of the norms or requirements of the role by the individual (Farnsworth et al., 2016).

The fact that consideration of the basic components of a CoP as a community that is bounded by a domain of knowledge and shared practice have not been abandoned by academics, education or management theorists, demonstrates the robust attractiveness that the concept of a CoP holds for those seeking a way to explain and understand identity formation and workplace learning (Mercieca, 2017). For this reason, the potentially strong explanatory power of a CoP is a cornerstone conceptual construct for the development of the VCoP used in this thesis.

2.2.2 Sharing knowledge in a Community of Practice

Academic interest in CoPs has focused on the benefits they can bring to both the individual and the broader community they represent, be that a workplace or a cohort of like-minded individuals sharing knowledge (Cochrane & Narayan, 2017). While it may appear relatively easy to track the participation in a VCoP through its discussion forums, emails, and/or documents created, it is harder to expose how the intangible aspects of practice knowledge are shared. The concept of tacit knowledge can aid in understanding how interaction within a VCoP may assist practitioners to share aspects of practice previously hidden from view.

The expansion of concepts surrounding learning in the workplace and the development of social learning theory have been accompanied by a rising interest in tacit knowledge and the role it can play in professional practice and identity formation. Eraut (2000) queried the nature of tacit knowledge in his explorations of workplace learning by asking:

Does tacit knowledge refer to that which can or cannot be communicated? Is it an attribute of the knower which some can communicate, and some cannot; or is it an attribute of the knowledge itself? (p.118)

The premise that there are different kinds of shared knowledge fundamental to the formation of identity within an occupation, profession, or CoP is crucial to this thesis. The examination of professional development within a VCoP requires consideration of how social interaction affects learning, and how the practice knowledge gained in a VCoP then impacts on identity and professional practice. Learning in a professional context involves knowledge that becomes tacit as “expertise grows and the complexities of professional tasks are revealed” (Edwards, 2010, p.111).

Ray (2009) describes Polanyi’s concept of tacit knowledge as “knowing of more than we can tell” (p.78). He argued that Polanyi must be understood within the context of his spiritual and philosophical ideas, which related personal and tacit knowledge to an almost mystical revelation. Ray (2009) believes Polanyi’s perspective has very little to do with the role of ‘other people’ in developing knowledge, as opposed to a constructivist framework, which views both self and knowledge as constructed through experience (p. 78). Nevertheless, the concept that there is private, personal knowledge which is difficult to transfer has since been considered and incorporated into the analysis of learning in the workplace, within higher education, and in management studies (Amin & Roberts, 2008; Brown, 2017; Tschetter & Tschetter, 2012).

Tacit knowledge has also been described as “cultural knowledge”, which captures the social nuances of the profession that in turn inform professional identities (Hara & Kling, 2006, p. 865). Pyrko et al. (2017) have utilised Polanyi’s complex theories on how tacit knowledge is shared in their study of CoPs in the National Health

System. Despite the consideration by Wenger (2002) that a CoP is a perfect place to combine tacit and explicit aspects of specific knowledge and practice (p. 10), Pyrko et al. (2017) claim that Wenger has been silent on tacit knowledge, and conclude that because knowledge sharing must be meaningful, a true CoP would be rare in many organisations (p. 404). This stands directly opposed to Wenger's concept that most workplaces have functioning CoPs (1998c, p. 6). However, Pyrko et al. (2017) failed to note Wenger et al.'s (2002) references to tacit knowledge as "embodied expertise" (p. 9). Wenger et al. (2002) have described how sharing tacit knowledge involves "story-telling, conversation, and apprenticeship of the kind communities of practice provide" (p. 9). Importantly, they noted that explicit knowledge is always "dependent on tacit knowledge to be applied" (p. 9). Nevertheless, the conclusion by Pyrko et al. (2017) that a CoP may be a more fragile and rarer occurrence than that envisaged by Wenger, has been a consistent concern for those questioning the importance a CoP can have for both the individual and the workplace (Cox, 2005; Eraut, 2002; Storberg-Walker, 2008).

Eraut (2002) considered tacit knowledge and in particular the sharing of that knowledge essential to the development of professional practice and a professional identity. He defined three types of tacit knowledge:

- Context - an understanding of people and situations,
- Actions – work or task actions that become routinised,
- Rules – the constraints that underpin decision making (p.113).

Eraut (2002) considered that all three forms of tacit knowledge came together when a person was doing professional work that required a series of actions, each "punctuated by rapid intuitive decisions based on tacit understanding of the situation." (p. 113). For Eraut (2002) it was the area of non-formal learning that exposed tacit knowledge. This consideration of non-formal, or informal learning in the workplace was

essential to his consideration of the workplace as a social enterprise or community of practice.

The three types of tacit knowledge described by Eraut (2002) capture the tacit knowledge described in this thesis. Therefore, this thesis adopts the concept that tacit knowledge requires an understanding of specific contexts, and an ability to complete tasks or actions that will in time become routinised, guided by a system of rules that determine how to make decisions and carry out actions or tasks within the specific context; in other words, “a tacit understanding of the situation” (p.113).

2.2.3 The workplace as a Community of Practice

Protégé was focused on practice in migration law and designed to mimic a supportive workplace. The term ‘supportive workplace’ came from the work of Eraut (2004a, 2007, 2010). Although Eraut (2002) granted little acknowledgement to the theories of Wenger, nor to the benefits or validity of a CoP, his work did cross over to some aspects that also concerned Wenger, such as the formation of an occupational identity through learning. However, the focus of Eraut’s work was not so much on social learning as a means of forming a professional identity as it was on the role of the workplace and the impact workplace learning had for professional practice, and in turn the development of competence and confidence in practice which could result in a shift in professional identity.

Eraut (2002) presented a paper at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, in which he analysed the concept of a CoP and the value it may add to consideration of professional learning and the development of competence. While he ultimately agreed with Wenger that community, or social support, plays a role in ‘worker’ identity formation, he found issue with the emphasis Lave and Wenger placed on CoPs as the site of learning and participation, and as the only way to

learn. Eraut believed that there is a broader influence on knowledge than the CoP or workplace. Instead of focusing on the community as the center of learning, Eraut placed practice at the center of his research. Yet, like Wenger, he also believed that learning took place within and outside of traditional settings (Eraut, 2007).

Eraut (2002), in describing the concept of a CoP as “problematic and parochial” (pp. 12, 14), viewed the work of Wenger as a simplification of how learning occurred within communities, warning that there is a difference between learning as a community and learning as an individual member of a community (p. 6). It should be noted that Eraut’s focus was always centered on professional practice, and in areas of work where the professional is required to engage with clients. This broadened his scope of concern away from the activity and social learning within a confined CoP or specific workplace, and it embraced the work of professional organisations, as well as ensuring that learning activities such as conferences and workshops were taken into account.

In an analysis of two research projects focusing on professional learning in a CoP, Eraut (2002) emphasised the role a professional community plays in professional identity formation, saying:

Miller’s paper challenges the notion of a community of practice with the evidence that occupational identity is still linked in several important aspects to membership of a profession; and a profession is much larger and more diverse community than any community of practice. (p. 11)

His perception that Wenger ignores the broader impact of a professional community may have been mitigated if Eraut (2002) had considered Wenger’s later work (E.Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014) on boundaries and multiple landscapes of knowledge and practice worthy of consideration and comment. Nevertheless, this 2002 analysis appears to have left Eraut unconvinced that all elements of learning professional practice

could be met by a CoP. Overall, he felt that Lave and Wenger's concept of a CoP remained "somewhat ideological" (2002, p. 7) and therefore, not a consistently reliable theory for examining workplace learning. The perception that a CoP presented a problematic and simplistic view of sharing knowledge was one that Eraut continued to hold. He has further warned that knowledge is not shared or used in an equal manner, arguing instead that sharing practical knowledge can have alternate goals, such as protecting individuals from criticism, and asked: "...how often does the accolade of being described as a 'community of practice' go beyond wishful thinking?" (2004a, p. 266).

2.2.4 Defining a Virtual Community of Practice

Eraut's (2002) critique of the impact of a CoP extended to the concept of a virtual community. He argued that modern technology communications systems that "transcended time and space" (2002, p. 6) were not up to the task of allowing working and social relationships that held the required mutual trust and regard needed for workplace learning to develop. However, his concerns indicated that he had not considered the academic research that had already focused on how a CoP could be formed using modern technology (Johnson, 2001; Vollenbroek, 2019). In 2007 Eraut and Hirsh (2007) acknowledged that the development and impact of ICT had increased the prospect that a CoP might "stretch geographically" (p. 62). However, they warned that a temporal and geographical distance might present problems for the transfer of tacit knowledge.

Subsequent advances in both technical and social forms of communication, along with rapid uptake of technology, have ensured that concerns regarding the need to meet "in the same time and place" (Eraut, 2002, p. 6) are perhaps no longer valid. Nevertheless, the prospect that tacit knowledge can be transferred within a VCoP is yet to be formally investigated. Ongoing development of definitions of a CoP has paralleled

growth and change in technology that is available to those seeking to mirror the experiences of a CoP in a virtual setting. Wenger's initial structural elements of "joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire" (1998, p. 73) remain consistent elements of his concept of a CoP and extend to elements of VCoPs (Dube et al. 2006; Barnett et al. 2012; Smith et al. 2017).

Academic research has focused attention on the impact of the internet and technology, the role and nature of 'virtual' CoPs and the difference between a CoP and a VCoP (Barnett et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2017). Academics have also been at pains to delineate a VCoP from online education and industry networking groups. While the majority of studies of VCoPs appear to agree that the VCoP must still include key characteristics outlined by Wenger (Smith et al., 2017), they often provide additional criteria for either the success or the recognition of virtual sites as a CoP (Hibbert & Rich, 2006; Johnson, 2001; Vollenbroek, 2019).

For example, an early study by Johnson (2001) surveyed the available research on VCoPs and concluded that while Wenger's fluid definitions of a CoP have increased the difficulty of defining a CoP, the definition of a VCoP was "clear" (p. 52). His review is more than seventeen years old. However, it was conducted at a defining moment for the development of technologically enhanced learning, teaching, and communicating with large groups. It remains a valid assessment of the qualities of a VCoP because it was written at a time when the original work of Lave and Wenger, and the subsequent work of Wenger was being actively applied and considered in a range of organisations, educational facilities and teaching modalities. Unsurprisingly, Johnson (2001) identified that the use of technology was a definitive trait of all VCoPs. He defined a VCoP "as a group of individuals separated by space and time...who use networked technology" (p. 52) that was intentionally designed to allow members to collaborate and communicate for a specific goal or purpose.

Johnson (2001) also warned that the VCoP would not arise from a designed space but from the activity within that space. He proposed that the crucial difference between a face-to-face CoP and a “networked” or VCoP was the restrictive mode of communication participants had to adopt. Ignoring for example vision or hearing-impaired participants, he argued that traditional methods of communication include facial expressions, tone, body language and visible reactions to comments, such that these physical and visible actions provide feedback and help participants assess and learn the norms of the group. Despite these concerns he considered that asynchronous written communication freed the individual from these constraints, and the lack of norms in communication. He concluded that the freedom of constraints and norms present in usual forms of communication, combined with the permanence of written discourse, resulted in the need for increased trust between members (2001, p. 55).

Many of the studies that consider VCoPs, measure aspects such as knowledge production, learning or access as a means of establishing if a virtual community has evolved into a VCoP (Barnett et al., 2012; Hibbert & Rich, 2006). However, they have not defined what they consider a VCoP to be and have instead relied on Wenger’s original definition with technological or social aspects as an added definer. For example, Ardichvili et al. (2003) examined barriers to motivation and participation within a VCoP. They found that factors such as active participation, a willingness to use the CoP as a source of new knowledge, and readiness to participate in a computer-mediated environment with little face-to-face communication, were essential for the success of VCoP (2003, p. 4).

Ardichvili et al. (2005) have examined cultural differences in knowledge sharing in one large corporation’s virtual communities across international boundaries. Their study considered how cultural mores such as ‘saving face’ and ‘modesty’ (p. 688) would affect behaviour in the virtual world. In a finding that supports Johnson’s (2001) analysis

of the importance of the permanence of the written word on behaviour, they found that the ability to write English correctly was a defining feature in how participants asked questions and pursued knowledge. For example, Chinese employees with strong language skills had an overwhelming concern about whether their written English was grammatically correct, which then affected the timeliness and spontaneity of their contributions. As a consequence, participants in the CoP spent too much time trying to improve their writing or abandoned their attempts to join in the discussion (p. 689). The observations of Ardichvili et al. (2005) and Johnson (2001) may be drastically different today with the adoption of social media, text communications and the rise in video linked communication, both socially and professionally.

Henri and Pudelko (2003) suggested that a theoretical framework was needed to capture the evolving and often contradictory perspectives on what constituted a virtual community. Using Wenger's social learning theory (1998), Henri and Pudelko identified four types of virtual learning communities:

- A Community of Interest. This community is designed around a topic or common interest. This type of community could have a variety of lifespans. The activities were not necessarily a common or collective endeavour; instead, there may be more than one topic of interest within the group or between the group members. Engagement between members is usually limited and must involve a constant negotiation of meaning.
- A Goal-Oriented Community of Interest. This is a community created to meet a specific need. As a result, its lifespan is fixed. Expert individuals join and share their knowledge about a specific domain. They must develop common meanings between complex areas of expertise, in order to share their knowledge and build a shared understanding. Members identify with the project more than with each other as a whole community.

- A Learner's Community. This community is formed to learn or collaborate on a specific action or project, usually within an educational setting. Its lifespan is fixed. The goal is knowledge construction, which is dependent on participation by all members.
- A Community of Practice. This community usually develops amongst people who are already members of a broader given community of practice. It emerges from collective activity. It has no predetermined lifespan. It is characterized by a slow evolution and has the capacity to integrate new members continuously. The goal is to develop and enrich knowledge in a specific area. It is centered on the day-to-day work within an area of practice and allows the development of a collective identity to form (Henri & Pudelko, 2003).

Like Eraut, Henri and Pudelko (2003) drew a distinction between learning and the learning community, concluding that social learning theory as proposed by Wenger, meant all virtual communities were learning communities "because their members learn while taking part in their activity" (p. 476). They found that the definition of a community of practice was specific and relied upon more than the activity of learning.

By defining and separating differential communities working in a virtual landscape, Henri and Pudelko's (2003) analysis both limited and expanded the concept of a VCoP. Their proposal that members of a VCoP were already members of a "given community of practice" (p. 483), such as a trade, even if they were not actively aware of it, raised the image of Benedict Anderson's (1983) definition of nations as "imagined communities ...because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). Henri and Pudelko's definition resulted in the conception of a virtual community that evolved from the imagined belonging of a broader

community. This evolution determined the membership of the VCoP as well as the creation of knowledge within that VCoP. The CoP was seen as emerging from collective activity. It did not constitute an aim in itself but was seen as the result of involvement of individuals in the actions of professional practice. For each individual, the VCoP represented a means of investing themselves in the social or professional definition of their trade, to reinforce their professional identity and to enrich or perfect their daily practice while contributing to the practice of the community (p. 483).

Through the expansion of the CoP to an imagined community of unknown and unmet members who are in the same profession, Henri and Pudelko (2003) also limited the definition of a VCoP. Their VCoP was seen as a microcosm of that broader community. It was slow to form and emerged from 'collective action', which implies that it was driven by the need to learn specific knowledge, amongst a limited group of individuals. How these individuals were related (geographically or professionally) was not addressed.

Dubé, Bourhis, and Jacob (2006) conducted a comprehensive study of eighteen VCoP's and proposed typography to demonstrate how different their 'basic characteristics' were from each other. The typology consisted of 21 defining characteristics and four key categories, with each characteristic presented as a measurement on a spectrum from high to low. This was useful in outlining aspects of different VCoPs as well as ascertaining what may be important in building a new one. However, it demonstrated very few areas where a VCoP differs from a CoP other than the use of technology creating a specific environment for participation that is not present in a CoP. Although Dubé et al. (2006) concluded that a VCoP used different methods to select members and as a result may have more control of their members characteristics, they did not justify why a face-to-face CoP could not have the same methods to control member selection processes. The fact that such a comprehensive typology failed to find significant

differences between a VCoP, and a CoP, set the scene for the examination of Protégé as a VCoP in chapter 5 and the discussion of how its design may be different to previous professional or social VCoP's.

Hibbert and Rich (2006) argued that VCoPs shared all the same characteristics “as outlined by Wenger” but had the defining feature of providing an “enunciative space” (2006, p. 567; Spivak 1998, in Smyth, 2001). This evocative term referred to the way participants made meaning of their profession, shedding their “cover stories” and openly discussing their practice, problems and broader social issues relating to their profession and professional work. When Smyth (1998) initially used the term, he was referring to the way schools had found a “reflective space” to “engage their communities around the issues of teaching and learning” (p. 196). At no time was he referring to a virtual community. It is, therefore, puzzling that while Hibbert and Rich (2006) proposed the concept of an enunciative space as a clear point of difference to the way participants made meaning of their work within the VCoP, they failed to outline why this space could not be part of a face-to-face CoP. Nevertheless, the concept strongly suggests that the participants in a VCoP were working in an environment of safety and trust, which allowed them to freely discuss their practice and broader issues and may provide an explanation of how tacit knowledge could be transferred within the VCoP (Vollenbroek, 2019, p. 47).

The need to build trust within a CoP and a workplace remain critical to theories that focus on social learning and professional development. A consideration of how trust is formed in a community of individuals separated by time and space was one that Eraut (2002) rejected and did not pursue, despite his work emphasising that trust was essential to building professional knowledge through interaction and formative feedback (Eraut, 2002; Eraut & Hirsh, 2007).

Since Johnson's (2001) review of research into both CoPs and VCoPs, the acknowledgement that meaningful design is needed to both establish and ensure the success of a VCoP has remained one of the key differences in subsequent studies of VCoPs and CoPs. Barnett et al. (2012) have examined available studies on the use of VCoPs in medical practice training, to establish the use of research in assisting geographically dispersed and professionally isolated general practitioners in Australia. They adopted part of Wenger's concept of a CoP as "group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (E. Wenger-Trayner & B. Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 1). They concluded that a VCoP was "an entity that arises from the use of online tools combined with a CoP" (Barnett et al., 2012, p. 3). The authors have considered the characteristics that commonly affect CoPs and they acknowledge that the addition of the two specific features, accessible technology and effective community, are design features unique to a VCoP.

Smith et al. (2017) undertook a study of empirical work conducted between 2000 and 2014 that was, "inspired by Lave and Wenger's, and Wenger's theories of social learning" (p. 209). Their study investigated online/blended learning in higher education and professional development with an aim to see if previous research had established a strong link between the CoP framework and the specific findings of each research project. While this was not a study of research that only considered VCoPs, their final review noted several important facets that pertain to learning in a virtual space and should be considered further. They concluded that despite the emphasis Wenger placed on the importance of time in developing competence and identity (p. 220) very few studies examined how time contributes to the growth of a professional from novice to expert within an online environment (p. 221). Furthermore, no studies explored how time contributed to the functioning of a CoP or how it contributed to the development of participants identifying with the CoP (p. 221). One of the most interesting observations

was their realisation that Henri and Pudelko's (2003) classification of four levels of communities "recognised the idea that learners do not necessarily form a CoP when they are part of a learning environment" (Smith et al., 2017, p. 220). This observation supports the notion that a CoP includes more aspects than the desire or ability to learn within a specific environment and may depend on the goals of the learner or the community.

The need for a successful VCoP to have clearly defined goals or objectives has been noted by several researchers focusing on virtual communities (Probst & Borzillo, 2008; Wenger et al., 2002). However, Barnett et al. (2012) concluded that specific or clearly defined goals were not essential factors of success and may lead to problems if they were too broad or lacked focus. They noted that in some cases the defined goals were replaced by goals the users had developed "through posted queries and responses" and networks could achieve success "without a high degree of clarity around their goals" (Barnett et al., 2012, p. 8). The ability to form a VCoP in a loose framework was not restricted to virtual communities. Pyrko et al. (2017) also warned that setting too tight a goal can "deprive CoP members of a sense of ownership in their community" (p. 1969). This form of psychological ownership has been linked to the development of a positive self-identity and sense of belonging (Lee & Suh, 2015).

In identifying that there are many different ways of recognising a VCoP, the two central aspects that all studies fall back on, are the retention of the key characteristics of a CoP as defined by Wenger, plus the use of technology. The fundamental differences identified in the literature between a VCoP and a CoP are:

- the use of technology (Barnett et al., 2012; Johnson, 2001; Smith et al., 2017),
- the necessity for a purposeful design (Barnett et al. 2012; Dorner & Kárpáti, 2010; Johnson, 2001),

- a space that is by its very nature of existing through technology, bounded (Barnett et al., 2012, Smith et al. 2017)
- the role of a facilitator (Barnett et al., 2012; Dorner, 2012)
- a risk-free environment (Hibbert & Rich, 2006; Vollenbroek, 2019).

Despite ongoing debates about the ability of CoPs to work in a completely online space (McLoughlin et al., 2018), the differences listed above indicate that unlike Henri and Pudelko (2003), the majority of academics consider a VCoP to be the actual online site where interaction takes place, rather than the particular nature or quality of the interactions that take place within the site.

Criteria such as the deliberate creation or encouragement of an enunciative space (Hibbert & Rich, 2006), the benefits or drawbacks of asynchronous communication (Johnson, 2001) or the development of defined goals (Barnett et al. 2012) can be viewed as consequences of participating in a VCoP or as the deliberate design features built into a VCoP. But they do not define the characteristics previous researchers have considered essential for a virtual community to be defined as a VCoP. Chapter 5 will return to the consideration of criteria that are considered essential to the success of a VCoP in order to examine how Protégé met the basic characteristics of a CoP; that is, mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire as outlined by Wenger (1998), as well as the use of technology (Barnett et al. 2001; Johnson, 2001; Smith et al.2017; Vollenbroek, 2019). Meeting these criteria ensured Protégé could be classified as a VCoP; and exposes how Protégé went beyond the criteria previous researchers have identified as crucial to the success of a VCoP.

2.3 Workplace learning

If, as Wenger theorised, workplaces can consist of multiple CoPs, some of which forming spontaneously, and contributing to learning and building confidence, competence

and a common identity amongst their participants (Farnsworth et al., 2016), what role does the workplace itself play in developing a professional identity? Wenger's notion of identity is linked directly to identification with the practices, domain and community of the CoP, and the challenge of Protégé was to assess how a professional identity, presumably developed and located outside of the VCoP, could be enhanced within it.

A central focus of this research project is the formation of a professional identity linked directly to the work practices of the chosen profession. While Protégé was designed as a VCoP, the design also included crucial aspects or structures that were identified by Eraut (2004a) as being present in a supportive workplace. These aspects were not included in Wenger's social learning theory and add an additional criterion to the design and efficacy of a VCoP.

Research has confirmed that a supportive workplace is essential to building the practice knowledge, expertise and confidence that are necessary for professional identity formation (Bridges & Bpharm, 2018; Eraut, 2005; Lin & Bound, 2011). Furthermore, academics have identified that support provided through positive and timely feedback by more experienced co-workers and peers is key to building confidence and competence (Eraut, 2007; Foley et al., 2012; Holmes et al., 2009).

Eraut (2004a) determined that successful learning at work depended on the quality of workplace relationships. He found that the most important factor for learning was confidence. This meant having the confidence to try new challenges and grasp opportunities. Support provided through positive and timely feedback, from more experienced workers and peers, was the key to confidence. In turn, support and confidence increased motivation and commitment amongst workers (p. 267). Eraut described this as a triangular relationship between challenge, support and confidence that created the crucial factors for workplace learning. In raising the focus of workplace relationships, he stressed that the confidence early career professionals needed in

relationships with their colleagues, including those who were in “senior, junior or parallel jobs” (p. 270), was a critical factor in their ability to learn and grow confidence in their ability. A key element of his triangle of learning was feedback, which included feedback from those who did not have a specific support role, such as a supervisor which would confirm the value of the work (p. 270). It is clear then that learning in the workplace is crucial to understanding how a professional might develop a sense of belonging and professional identity. Consequently, a genuinely supportive workplace would consist of an environment that challenged workers, fostered learning, encouraged communication and social inclusion between all levels of workers, and actively provided opportunities for feedback that acknowledged the value of work undertaken.

2.3.1 Learning to practice in the workplace

Eraut (2005, 2007) defined practice as an action within a particular field that develops competence and expertise. His treatment of the concepts of practice mirrors that of Levin (2009) and Mather et al. (2001) in that he considered ‘practice’ to be both a verb, i.e., the act of ‘doing’ professional tasks and duties, and a noun, i.e., a description of those tasks (Eraut & Hirsh, 2007). In particular, he has consistently referred to graduates working and learning from their interactions with clients when practicing their professional role (Eraut, 2004a, 2007, 2010, 2011). While Eraut (2004a) considered that ‘most’ professional learning occurred within a social context, he positioned practice, or the performance of a professional role, as the primary instigator of learning. This embrace of the influence of the informal aspects of workplace culture echoes some aspects of Wenger’s theories on social learning:

Thus, the episodic memories of individuals are influenced by both the semi-conscious socialization process through which norms, values,

perspectives and interpretations of events are shaped by the local workplace culture, and by their conscious learning from others and with others as they engage in cooperative work and tackle challenging tasks.

(Eraut, 2004a, p. 254)

Unlike Wenger, who failed to define which aspects of practice were involved in legitimate peripheral participation, Eraut's (2007, 2010, 2011) work addresses Consalvo's (2015) concerns about what it means to practice. Eraut (2007) devised an epistemology of practice in an attempt to capture the knowledge, thoughts and actions that take place during professional practice. In creating this epistemology, Eraut (2007) focused on "performance" and built his analysis around three dimensions of practice, the first of which consisted of four interconnected processes of practice:

- assessing clients and situations and monitoring their condition,
- deciding on the action to take immediately and over the long term,
- pursuing a course of action modifying consulting and reassessing, and
- metacognitive monitoring oneself, which includes one's continuing learning in the context of time, resources, priorities and complex professional relationships, people needing attention and the general case, problem or situation. (p. 406)

The second dimension focused on "how time variables affect the modes of cognition of the professionals themselves" (Eraut, 2007, p. 407) when undertaking these processes. Time influenced the way action was carried out, the thought processes in conducting the action, and the learning that resulted from the event. For Eraut, the temporal relationship between a learning episode, and the experiences that give rise to it, requires the individual to construct meaning from both the past and the present. The context of learning is always present, but the focus of learning can be in the past, present

or future. A practitioner can compare what they are presently doing with a past episode by reflecting on an event and discussing or reviewing the event. Practitioners are learning at the time of acting; they can be adapting the way they practice or recognising ways they will learn in the future from the incident (Eraut, 2004a). The contribution practice makes to learning can often be identified when the individual reflects on what occurred, or is occurring, in a particular situation and changes or adapts the way they respond at that time or in the future. “The learning process is commonly described as a reflective process incorporating prior explicit knowledge as well as recent experience.” (Eraut, 2000, p. 132).

This is made clear in practice situations that challenge values or present ethical problems. For Eraut (2002), this means the intuitive feeling a practitioner may have that ‘something is not right’, can cause them to reflect on their experiences and look at a situation from different viewpoints and perspectives. A migration law expert described an ethical problem during his Law Council conference presentation as a “gut feeling that something is amiss” (Yip, 2018). For the OMARA, an ethical problem can be identified by a feeling that you are uncomfortable with a proposed course of action (2011). Eventually, practitioners will build on past experience and search for ways to frame their problem until they find a solution, resulting in a growth in their professional knowledge and confidence.

The third dimension of practice that Eraut emphasised was the social context of work. He examined mid-career learning in professionals and found that while those who were new to the workplace benefited from formal support in the workplace, they received most of their advice and feedback informally from peers. As a result, the majority of workplace learning was occurring in informal settings. Eraut progressed his theories on workplace learning across his career. In 2004 he identified four main types of work activity that gave rise to learning (2004a, p. 267). His subsequent typology of early career

learning (Eraut 2007) provided the key to the processes that evoked learning, including processes where he identified learning as a by-product of a particular activity.

Levin (2009) confirmed that early-career immigration lawyers in sole practice also used many of the same processes. These learning processes go beyond the social learning within the boundaries of a CoP that Wenger had identified.

2.3.2 The role of the workplace in developing confidence and competence

Eraut's work on experiential learning is essential to understanding his findings regarding confidence, competence in practice and how practitioners are recognised by their peers and others as experts. He was clear that learning was situated within a context and the quality of learning at work was highly dependent on the relationships in the workplace (Eraut, 2004a). Furthermore, he defined competence as "meeting others' expectations" (Eraut, 2004a), explaining that competence becomes a "mediating concept" between "professionals and their clients and the general public" (p. 264). Eraut (2004a) also portrayed competence as a "moving target" (p. 264), explaining that as new professionals gain experience, they are judged to be confident in a broader range of tasks and their competence increases. In a comment that evokes Lave and Wenger's concept of 'legitimate peripheral participation', Eraut (2004a) noted:

The ideal work situation for apprentices allows them to consolidate their competence through further practice, while also expanding their competence through a combination of peripheral participation and coaching. However, even for more experienced workers, what counts as competence will change over time as practices change, and the speed and quality of work improves. (p. 264)

However, developing competence also requires the confidence to learn through practice, creating a continuous loop of learning and increase in knowledge (Eraut, 2004a). For Wenger (2017), competence in the domain of the CoP (which he called practice) arose from learning together. Similarly, for Eraut (2007), competence in practice within the workplace arose from learning from, and with others. He maintained that confidence and an increase in competence came from practice and constructive feedback, which created a continual loop of learning. He considered feedback from peers and supervisors to be crucial for developing confidence and commitment to the workplace, which in turn allowed the newcomer to begin to identify professionally with their work and increase their competence. He repeatedly emphasised that improvement of performance, confidence and commitment to a workplace was particularly dependent on quality support and timely feedback from others. Feedback, in his view, included short term, task-specific and longer-term strategic feedback (Eraut, 2007, p. 416). Inadequate feedback weakened both a worker's motivation and their commitment to the workplace (Eraut, 2011, p. 9).

Describing the finding of the importance of support (through feedback) and confidence to learning as “prominent”, Eraut's (2004a; 2007) conclusion, namely that there was a “triangular relationship between challenge, support and confidence” (2007, p. 417), proposed that the ideal workplace for early career professionals to develop confidence and competence in professional practice would provide a range of learning opportunities. Ideally, these would include the learning processes Eraut (2007) identified in his typology of early career learning outlines in Table 2.1, such as the ability to work with others, take on challenging problems and tasks, working with clients, access to timely and strategic feedback, and learning from one's mistakes (p. 409).

Table 2.1

A typology of early career learning

Work processes learning as a by-product	Learning activities located within work or learning processes	Learning processes at or near the workplace
Participation in group processes	Asking questions	Being supervised
Working alongside others	Getting information	Being coached
Consultations	Locating resource people	Being mentored
Tackling challenging tasks and roles	Listening and observing	Shadowing others work
Problem solving	Reflecting	Attending conferences
Trying things out	Learning by mistakes	Attending Short courses
Consolidating, extending and refining skills	Giving and receiving feedback	Working for a qualification
Working with clients	Using mediated artifacts	Independent study

Note. Table 2.1 presents Eraut’s typology of early career learning where he identifies how practitioners learn through particular activities. From. Learning from other people in the workplace, Eraut, M. 2007, *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(4) 403–422.

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Studies of Australian early career professionals have echoed these findings. Foley et al. (2015) have found the workplace to be crucial to supporting the formation of professional identity in ‘junior’ lawyers. The link between competence, or a ‘sense of competence’, and the development of a professional identity was identified in their pilot study of graduate lawyers, where they found that the process of professional identity ‘acquisition’ was reliant on the many of the same factors identified by Eraut. In particular, this included “the importance of competence and autonomy, the development of judgement through uncertainty, the search for a comfortable value match” (Foley et al., 2011, p. 11). Their further research found workplaces that supported autonomy and relatedness, and that actively encouraged new lawyers to engage in work that built their competence, along with a culture of organisational learning, which resulted in junior

lawyers who were the most “satisfied and had the strongest professional identity” (Foley et al., 2015, p. 45).

2.4 Professional identity formation: An individual perspective

The concept that a person may hold several ‘identities’ or different types of identities and develop new identities to accommodate new work environments is well established (Hall et al., 2010; Miscenko & Day, 2016; Nyström, 2009a; Trede & Mcewen, 2012; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2009). However, the definition of a professional identity remains elusive (Evetts, 2003; Trede et al., 2012). The Australian Council of Professions offers a generic definition of a professional, which encompasses traits and knowledge applicable across a range of occupations:

A disciplined group of individuals who adhere to high ethical standards and uphold themselves to, and are accepted by, the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised, organised body of learning derived from education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to exercise this knowledge and these skills in the interests of others. (Australian Council of Professions, 2003)

Nevertheless, amongst professions, there are differing views on what makes up professional identity (Collin, 2009; Field, 2007; Lin & Bound, 2011; Thomson, 2015; Ticknor, 2016; Trede et al., 2012). Virta et al. (2019) describe the current view of professional identity as one that is “dynamic in nature yet with a thread of continuity. It is also seen as compromising both social and individual dimensions and negotiated in the interactions of individual resources and their social environments.” (p.193).

This reflects the integral nature the occupational role plays in a profession and professional identity and supports Evett’s (2003) suggestion that academia should move

away from the concept of a professional identity entirely and focus on professionalism, because the practice of defining a professional identity usually ends with a list of “relevant occupational groups” (p. 397). Evett (2003) stressed that the importance of “drawing a line between professions and other occupations” is diminishing, as all work is increasingly considered in a social context with both occupations and professions sharing many of the same characteristics (p. 397). While Collin (2009) has differentiated between a work-related identity and a professional identity, she too observed that there was a difficulty in providing a holistic definition of identity itself, let alone one that embraces all professions. She also pointed out that the concept of professional identity was usually connected to a particular discipline that underpins a profession or vocation (p. 24). The inability to clearly define a professional identity may go some way to explaining the ephemeral traits, and the tacit knowledge that some legal academics claim are essential to the development of a professional identity as a legal practitioner (Fruehwald, 2015), while others acknowledge that these traits may be applicable to most areas of employment (Thornton, 2017, p. 553)

Trede and McEwen (2012) are not constrained by traditional notions of a profession that balk at differentiation between an occupation and a profession. Instead, they propose a broad and succinct way of viewing professional identity:

Within the context of professionalism, professional identity formation can be seen as an ongoing life-wide context-specific phenomenon that occurs at the junction of self-development, practice based (field of occupation) affiliations and institutional associations (Billet, 2007; Ni, 2011). A professional identity is thus constructed through experiences and the expression of ideas of self and one’s field or communities of practice in shared public and professional spheres...This process of

becoming a professional involves learning to connect all aspects of professional practice in a responsible and reasoned manner. (Trede & Mcewen, 2012, p. 32)

Because professional identity construction is considered to be situated in both a disciplinary and work environment, the need to demonstrate specific skills and knowledge, or competencies, (as opposed to the competence or level of expertise in applying this skill and knowledge) which are linked to particular professional capabilities, becomes a pre-requisite for recognition by others that one has a right to claim belonging to the particular profession (Miscenko & Day, 2016, p. 217). Acquiring these specific skills and professional knowledge usually begins with formal education. However, the transfer of that knowledge from the education setting to the workplace is a complex process and may not include the tacit knowledge needed for practice. While disciplinary knowledge is adapted and built upon in the workplace, tacit knowledge that is associated with expertise and competence might arise out of the work role itself (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Holden et al., 2015). Trede (2012) is also clear that the focus upon competencies as an indicator of professionalism actually “erodes the notion of professionalism” (p. 163). It ignores the basis of professional identity which is situated in the individual as much as the intricacies of practice:

Professional identity formation means becoming aware of what matters most in practice, what values and interest shape decision making. Being, thinking and acting as a professional are underpinned by professionalism and a sense of professional identity. (Trede, 2012, p. 163)

2.4.1 Identifying as a professional

It has been proposed that a professional or occupational identity requires both the individual and broader society to recognise the person embodied in the role, placing the formation of professional identity firmly into the social arena (Eraut, 1994; Meister et al., 2014; Miscenko & Day, 2016). For those transitioning from formal study to work, there may be a gap before the social world recognises and acknowledges their new identity. This liminal space is a time of great learning and adaptation, a contested space where the responsibility for learning ‘how to think and do’ like a professional is often left to the new practitioner (Foley et al., 2011, 2015; Silver et al., 2011).

By its very nature, a professional identity simultaneously defines and confines an individual to the particular profession and the discipline in which the work is based (Collin, 2009). Hall et al. (2010) and others consider professional identity to be a by-product of work, that is, as being dependent on recognition by both the individual and the external community that one belongs to before it will become real (Meister et al., 2014). This view reinforces Wenger’s assertion that recognition of an individual’s status relies on an agreement by peers and others that the individual has the requisite skills, attitudes, knowledge and competence to ‘belong’ to a specific closed group of people (Farnsworth et al., 2016).

In order to determine how professionals develop their identity in line with the norms and values of their professional field, Nyström (2009a) drew on Wenger’s early theories of multi-membership of communities and identity formation. In describing the connection between practice and identity, Wenger (1998) raised the concept of identity as a ‘nexus of multi membership’, where individuals define who they are by the ways they reconcile various forms of membership into their identity (p. 149). Nyström’s (2009a) research looked at the way individuals viewed their own identity from the time when they

were students, to graduation and early career experiences, and how their perceptions changed during their first years of practice. Despite the difference in perspectives, Nyström (2009a) agreed with Wenger that there was a need in the individual to maintain a constant identity base across boundaries of participation or membership in various professional communities and areas of life (p. 4).

Nyström's (2009a) study of psychologists and political science students focused solely on their perception of their identity and did not engage with the question of recognition of competence or identity by their broader community. Echoing Ezzy's (2017) conclusion that narrative provides a "sense of personal continuity through time grounded in social networks" (p. 251), Nyström (2009b) identified three social spheres of life, the private, the professional and the personal, which promote consistency in a personal narrative. She claimed that these spheres influenced the graduate's concept of their own professional identity. At the beginning of their study and practice, students and early career professionals would differentiate who they were from who they were to become. Some students used this awareness to build a boundary between their professional "sphere of life" (p. 6). Nyström concluded that these three spheres did not remain fragmented but were continuously negotiated. Thus, they were almost sequential and would eventually merge or become "integrated" (pp. 6, 17). She argued that integrated identity requires a professional to combine their personal with their professional identity. "Integrated identity can also be interpreted as a process for professional identity formation that emerges, develops and becomes a sustainable attitude towards one profession and professional role" (p. 12).

Her study revealed that there was a noticeable difference in how students considered their professional identity. She concluded that psychology students knew their professional goal before graduation and had begun to integrate their spheres of self earlier than political students who were destined to work in diverse roles post-graduation

(Nyström, 2009b, p. 8). While both cohorts felt that the ability to navigate their way into their professional community was difficult and involved cracking “the ‘professional code’ or how to be a psychologist/political scientist in a particular workplace” (Nyström, 2009b, p. 8), by the time they had all become early career professionals the differences between the way the two cohorts perceived their identities had dissipated.

Nyström’s (2009a; 2009 b) study reflects the complexity graduates face in transferring their knowledge and skills from the educational arena to the workplace. Nyström’s graduates and early career professionals revealed how they reconciled their identities while navigating their way in their new professional roles. In some cases, entry into a professional role and identifying with that role, required them to “downplay” their private identity sphere, or compartmentalise their private and professional identities, until these became reconciled and integrated (2009, p. 15). Her focus on the individual’s recognition of their professional identity, and concept of an ‘integrated identity’ formed through ‘multiple social spheres’, remain valuable when considering the ways migration agents as early career professionals perceive their own professional identity.

The ability to navigate one’s way into the professional community is also an integral factor in Wenger’s theory of social learning. He maintains that “participants have their own experience of practice” (Wenger, 2009, p. 24), and it may be a while before their experience “reflects the competence” of the community and one’s “relationship with it will become part of one’s identity” (Wenger, 2002, p. 5). For Nyström (2009a), this view was not enough to explain the complexities of professional identity formation, or the processes people went through in “actively sorting out or downplaying, some communities at the expense of others in order to focus attention, i.e., the private sphere for the professional” (p. 15), because despite discussion of multiple boundaries or communities, Wenger remained focused on identity formation within each CoP.

2.4.2 Assisting students to develop their professional identity

Although Wenger and his colleagues did not focus solely on professionals learning within a CoP, their work has been embraced by academics responsible for education or research focused on education for professions such as medicine, teaching and law (Baron & Corbin, 2012; Levin, 2009, 2011). Their interest in a CoP stems from an increasing focus on the need for graduates to move quickly into the role of competent professional. Unlike students of trades, professional studies have traditionally focused on declarative knowledge (Fruehwald, 2015; James, 2017). Current trends to include experiential and problem-based learning in academic curricula have arisen from stakeholder and industry pressure on universities to graduate job-ready professionals (James, 2017). In addition to the requisite declarative knowledge required for their profession, graduates are increasingly expected to embody specific traits and skills that set them apart from other employees (Bartlett & Dickie, 2012).

2.4.3 Learning to be a lawyer

There is a considerable amount of academic research and consideration of the role education plays in developing a professional identity, including that of lawyers in Australia. There has also been a recognition that the work lawyers do, in the arena of migration law, overlaps with that of migration agents. This raises the issue of one profession ‘owning’ the right to have higher standards. This right has been disputed and points again to the link and the difference between professionalism and professional identity.

An issue that did emerge in these proceedings was whether the duties and responsibilities owed by migration agents to their clients were any different to the duties and responsibilities owed by lawyers. We think

not. We have concluded having regard to the objectives of the Act, the intention of the Parliament as evident by the Minister's speech upon introduction of the Act, the numerous decisions of superior courts referring to the vulnerability of migration applicants and the duty generally of a professional seeking reward and – not insignificantly- the prescription of a Code of Conduct applicable to migration agents... that the standard of conduct of migration agents is no less than the standard of conduct owed by lawyers. (Administrative Appeals Tribunal, 2004, para. 359)

As there have been few studies of migration agents as a profession or the development of their professional identity (Khan, 2017), the consideration given to law students by academics provides the closest analogy. This literature review, therefore, draws from the research into the professional identity formation of lawyers, and the role a CoP may play in forming their professional identity. However, despite the observations of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in 2004, that a migration agent has the same responsibilities as a lawyer, there is no doubt that lawyers are an established profession, unlike the migration agent profession, which is still emerging as a separate professional group.

Thomson (2015) noted that publication of the Carnegie Report in 1929, in relation to law students, raised the need to intentionally focus on developing a student's sense of professional identity (p. 304). In recent years legal academics have focused on individual traits, and their intersection with practice, as a means of drawing out a definition of the professional identity of a lawyer (James, 2017; Thomson, 2015). This approach means that the traits legal academics assign to lawyers are highly subjective and located within the individual. They include morality, integrity, legal ethics, relationship

skills, collaborative skills, acceptance of ambiguity, a sense of purpose, and a commitment to the public good (Fruehwald, 2015; Madison & Natt Gantt, 2015). For example, Thomson (2015) defines a professional legal identity to be “lawyering done as a common calling... in the spirit of public service” (p. 306).

A strong focus on legal ethics and professional behaviour, as the primary component of a professional identity, has been disputed by academics who argue for consideration of individual agency in discussions of professional identity formation (Fruehwald, 2016; Thomson, 2015). Thomson (2015) warns against confusing professionalism and professional identity, distinguishing between the ability of an individual to make a decision about professional behaviour and their “sense of duty as an officer of the legal system on the one hand, and their responsibility as a part of a system in our society that is engaged in preserving, maintaining and upholding the rule of law on the other (p. 315). Similarly, Fruehwald (2015) explains that professional identity should be “distinguished from legal ethics and professionalism. Ethics is the rules of professional conduct while professionalism is the ability to *act* in a professional manner” (p. 2).

Fruehwald (2015) takes on the task of helping “law professors understand the fundamentals of legal professional identity” to “show them how to help students create their own identities” (p. 2). He advocates teaching a legal “professional identity”, through reflection and metacognitive techniques that bring about a “perspective transformation” or even “epistemological change” to the individual (pp. 18, 21). He claims that a professional legal identity “encompasses a lawyer’s personal legal morality, values, decision-making processes and self-consciousness in relation to the practices of the legal profession” (2016, p. 3), and he concludes that because moral reasoning can be taught, it follows logically that professional identity can be fostered in all students. The key to fostering a professional identity is providing authentic learning opportunities that allow for reflection and change. Underlying his premise is a focus on what he terms “the main

components of professional identity”, which include “metacognition, self-regulation and self-efficacy” (2015, p. 5). Fruehwald (2015) goes into great detail on the role these components play in ensuring a practitioner can develop a professional identity through metacognitive skills such as reflection, which will “facilitate practitioners to draw from their previous experience and apply that which is relevant to new and unfamiliar practice situations” (p. 12). He insists that these attributes should be taught in specific professional identity classes.

Providing coaches is not enough to fully develop students’ professional identities. Students need for professional identity to be taught explicitly, they need to develop the ability to reflect on their professional role, and they need to learn in situated authentic activities. (Fruehwald, 2015, p. 19)

Despite distinguishing between external and internal components of professional practice, Fruehwald’s (2015) description of a legal professional identity, as “the way a lawyer understands his or her role relative to all of the stakeholders in the legal system (p. 3), demonstrates the complexity of the concept. Although he covers a range of attributes a professional should develop, including self-consciousness, constructive introspection, and the necessity to believe in their professional persona (p. 3), he fails to indicate why these behaviours are specific to a legal professional identity and not applicable across a range of vocations.

Fruehwald’s (2015) proposal echoes that of Alexander (2011) who maintained that ethical, and social values form a core “sense of professional identity” (p. 465) that can be taught in law school. Alexander did not attempt to define a legal professional identity but quoted the Carnegie report and its emphasis on an “ethical commitment to the profession” (p. 477). She proposed a model for “integrating a focus on professional

identity into the law school curriculum” (p. 466) that was reliant on the teaching of lawyering skills, law practice management and ethical decision making to provide a framework for the development of a professional identity.

The inability to teach and assess traits such as a ‘sense of duty’, ‘values’ and ‘ethics’, in comparison to codified knowledge, emphasises the difficulty educators face in providing their graduates with the required experience needed to develop the professional identity their community demands. In Australia, academics have used these descriptions of personal traits to define a “legal professional identity”. Coper (2010) advocated for law schools to embed values of social justice and service to the public into the education of students and joined Economides (2009) in calling for the inclusion of “a lawyer’s oath, analogous to the way in which medical graduates take a modern version of the Hippocratic Oath” (p. 36), as a means of ensuring all law schools give prominence to these values. In 2018 the Australian National University’s College of Law announced that their law graduates had become the first in Australia to recite a pledge at their graduation ceremony in acknowledgement of their ethical and professional responsibilities as students who had completed a legal education.⁸

Hall et al. (2010) focused on perceived aspects of a legal professional identity that they felt should be encouraged in law school. They stressed that law schools, by their nature, tend to encourage students to learn or adopt specific traits that will prepare them to work in an adversarial profession, such as “thinking like a lawyer” and “individualism” (p. 43):

Those who embrace these qualities and traits are rewarded, and those who deviate from them can often pay a high price. So, embracing and developing [the lawyer] personality becomes a constant goal and a

⁸ See (<https://law.anu.edu.au/news-and-events/news/anu-law-graduates-recite-pledge-acknowledgment-ethical-and-professional>)

consistent defining process for those who want to become lawyers. (p. 33)

They concluded that generic traits such as empathy and resilience would assist law students to build a healthier and more flexible professional identity (Hall et al., 2010, p. 45). Their conclusions continue to be supported by Australian academics researching legal education, who describe a rapidly changing environment that future graduate lawyers will enter into (Collins, 2016). The efforts of universities, professional bodies, and government to meet these new demands have led to discussions on the focus of university curricula and graduate outcomes, causing legal education to seek new and innovative ways to encourage a specific professional identity. Collins (2016) advocates training awareness in intrinsic values such as empathy, which will assist graduate lawyers to navigate the modern workplace. She maintains that developing emotional awareness and empathy, as required in the legal process of alternative dispute resolution, can only assist in improving self-awareness around work/life balance and ethical behaviours. Attention to specific attributes, such as those used in teaching alternative dispute resolution, could address “many of the concerns presenting to professional accreditation bodies and legal educators when approaching this crossroad in legal education” (Collins, 2016, p. 36).

The role of education, therefore, appears crucial to developing a professional identity. In the case of migration agents, the short time spent in undergoing their formal qualification would seem to reduce the opportunities their education has on developing a solid understanding of the norms and values of the profession. However, the expectations imposed on migration agents to think and act ethically, and to practice as professionally as their legal counterparts, regardless of the length of their formal qualifications, exposes the crucial role even limited education must play. This problem highlights the issues that

may arise for those in similarly emergent professions, who move quickly into sole practice. For them acquiring the norms and values and skills associated with their profession in a timely manner may also be severely hampered.

For Collins (2016), law graduates, and experienced lawyers face a similar challenge when moving into emerging streams of legal practice. Collins proposes that the “age of relational mediational and collaborative lawyering has arrived” (2016, p. 36), a proposal that may lead to a re-examination of the professional identity and traits for those already practicing law. Developing and evolving these new aspects of their professional identity will depend significantly on the educational and workplace environments they encounter.

2.4.4 Developing a professional identity in a CoP.

Levin’s (2009, 2011) research focused on migration lawyers in the United States of America, (US) working as sole practitioners. She examined how they overcame their isolation and engaged in social interaction and learning through working with their peers. Her work reveals that her conception of a CoP varies widely from Wenger and his colleagues; and aligns more with Eraut’s (2004a) definitions of practice in the workplace. In her first study of migration lawyers, Levin (2009) used Mather, McEwin and Maiman’s (2001) definition of a CoP as a “group of lawyers with whom other lawyers interact and to whom they look for their understanding of practice norms and their decision making in practice” (Mather et al., in Levin, 2009, p. 402). This interpretation of a CoP ignores the emphasis Wenger places on a commitment to social learning in order to build up a body of knowledge and focuses instead on a shared understanding of practice, and professional socialisation through the development of “normative boundaries for conduct” (Mather et al., 2001, p. 41).

The key to this difference in their interpretations of a CoP may lie in the way they interpret the concept of practice. Like Eraut (2007), Mather et al. (2001) and Levin (2009) describe practice as the “practice of law”, both generally across all areas of law and particularised in a specific area of law, such as a divorce lawyer or an immigration lawyer. In this way, Levin (2009) acknowledges that lawyers will belong to more than one CoP, as they encounter colleagues in the courts and their general community of the “profession of law” (p. 403).

Wenger considered the term ‘practice’ as integral to the term ‘Community of Practice’. Describing the community in a CoP as the “social fabric of learning” (2002, p. 27), Wenger has consistently defined practice as the domain of knowledge within a specific community; the “know-how” that learning together generates and reinforces (2002, p. 27), a “set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information styles, language stories and documents that community members share (2002, p. 27). He has also used the term in broader ways:

- Practice as a continual process of learning (E.Wenger-Trayner & B.Wenger- Trayner, 2015)
- Practice as a boundary (B. Wenger-Trayner et al., 2017, p. 6)
- Practice as a locality or a social landscape (E.Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014)
- Practice as the social production of meaning: stories and cases that become a repertoire for practice (E.Wenger-Trayner & B.Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2)
- Practice as both tacit and explicit knowledge (Wenger, 2009).

- Despite defining practice in multiple ways, he has acknowledged that the typical use of the term, when discussing the work of professionals, is different:

The term practice is used here in the sense it has in an expression like “reasonable medical practice” used to justify a doctor’s action in a malpractice lawsuit. It denotes a set of socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain: a set of common approaches and shared standards that create a basis for action, communication, problem solving, performance and accountability. (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 33)

The identification that practice denotes a set of socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain allows for a consideration of specific ways of viewing or considering professional practice, such as those that Levin (2009) and Mather (2001) defined in their consideration of a CoP. Levin’s (2009) definition of practice as “the practice of law” focused on the act of providing legal advice and excluded other aspects of sole practice, such as running a small business. She was specifically interested in how and why immigration lawyers came to work in this specialty area and how they considered they learnt to practice immigration law. Levin’s research revealed that immigration lawyers in sole practice took ‘four different approaches’ when learning to practice law (p. 426). She loosely categorised these as the “guided approach, scholars’ approach, the see one do one approach and the sink or swim approach”, supplemented by occasional advice from more experienced practitioners that immigration lawyers specifically sought out, or by the “receipt of unsolicited advice from strangers” (p. 425). For some, the specialty bar (the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA)) mentor system provided a way to seek advice about their practice (p. 428).

In both of Levin's (2009; 2011) studies of immigration lawyers, and the influence of the AILA on their professional development and professional identity, Levin found that the majority of participants viewed the AILA as a small, supportive community, whose influence on their culture of work was so strong that some found it "difficult to separate the AILA from their day to day work" (2009, p. 430). Levin described how engaging with the AILA kept members informed of legal changes, reinforced practice norms, built practice competence and created a sense of belonging to a broader community. While her initial research (Levin, 2009) revealed that immigration lawyers appeared to form networks and connections with people who could provide information and assistance on an ad hoc basis, her subsequent study of Specialty Bars (Levin, 2011) demonstrated the impact and influence the AILA had on immigration lawyers' knowledge of law, practice and ethics. She concluded that the AILA formed a CoP, as it was a site where "lawyers' norms and values are constructed", creating a place for "like-minded lawyers to come together" (2011, p. 223).

In considering the issues of workplace learning and the experiences of immigration lawyers, Levin (2009, 2011) highlighted issues facing sole practitioners. Her work exposed the need practitioners felt for a community of support and the various methods they used to learn the specifics and tacit elements of their work. The AILA provided a means for immigration lawyers to derive and construct their understanding of what it means to be a professional, through a forum that allowed them to:

- Link in with a collegial community,
- Exchange information,
- Learn to practice immigration law,
- Stay up to date with the ever-changing law,
- Share information,

- Find mentors,
- Establish norms and values, and
- Identify ethical issues (Levin, 2011, p. 221).

Consideration of her research in the light of Wenger's definition of a CoP and Eraut's (2007) description of a supportive workplace, exposes how the AILA provided a locality for coming together, creating meaning and learning, whereby building professional competence was an outcome of the interaction between the participating lawyers. While she did not directly mention identity or peer recognition, Levin's (2009) discussions of the roles that support and collegiality play in assisting lawyers to "learn how to practice law" (p. 440), mimicked some factors identified by Eraut for workplace learning. Levin (2009) maintained that the support and guidance provided by the AILA was so essential to the lawyers' development that she proposed that a supportive CoP, such as the AILA, may overlap so crucially with the work and identity of sole practitioners that it becomes the place where they develop their understanding of their professional practice:

Closer analysis may reveal that AILA is not a separate arena of professionalism but rather one of the overlapping communities of practice to which immigration lawyers look for their understanding of their professional role and the norms and values of practice (Levin, 2009, p. 433).

Levin's (2009) work exposed how professionals formed a professional identity outside of the boundaries of a traditionally conceived law firm. Her concept that a CoP may overlap with the workplace makes it possible to consider whether professional identity and competence can be formed within a CoP of people that is linked to the norms and values of the broader profession.

The two studies by Levin (2009, 2011) were the spark that led to this research project. The similarities between the experiences of Levin's US Immigration lawyers and Australian migration agents appeared to be close. Her findings that a CoP could be external to and overlap with a workplace were incredibly important to the design of the project as they presented the premise that a VCoP may be useful for sole practitioner migration agents in Australia. The decision to make the project reach further by including aspects of a supportive workplace into the VCoP was based on Eraut's research into workplace learning (2004, 2007).

2.5 The professional landscape of migration agents

While Levin's (2009, 2011) examination of the role of the AILA, in relation to immigration lawyers in the US, included some analysis of their work in a broader legal landscape, little attention has been afforded to the specific role Australian migration agents play in the Australian legal context, or to the way they develop a sense of professional identity and understanding of their practice (Bartlett & Dickie, 2012; Dickie, 2013, 2015; Dickie & Tongue, 2009; Khan, 2017).

In the only study to consider the profession of migration agents, Marina Khan (2017) uses network governance to "understand the mechanisms that have given rise to the role of "migration intermediaries" (2017, p. 6). In particular, she considers how migration agents view the development of their professional identities and how they "navigate their legitimacy in a stigmatised profession" (2017, p. 19).

Khan's (2017) research has confirmed the perceived political divide between migration lawyers and agents and exposed the emergent nature of the professional landscape migration agents occupy. While her work reveals some of the difficulty's agents experience when navigating their identity within an emergent professional landscape, she has failed to explore their professional identity development within that

landscape fully. This is due to the way Khan includes registered migration agents (RMA's), education agents, unregistered agents and unregistered legal practitioners under the umbrella term of "migration advice industry" (p. 59). She raises concerns that actors within the migration advice industry are often positioned as a "homogenous group in media and academic literature" (p. 59), which means that an issue of professional behaviour in one segment can affect the reputation of the industry as a whole. However, her study fails to remove migration agents from this homogenous group. The failure to fully differentiate between all the actors in what she calls the migration advice industry demonstrates there is a long way to go for the emergent profession of migration agents to be fully realised as an independent profession.

Despite her concerns, the inclusion of multiple actors working within the migration advice space results in an inability by Khan (2017) herself to focus specifically on migration agents. Indeed, her inclusion of education agents and unregistered practitioners in her study is too broad. The concept of intermediaries in migration is so broad it could also have extended, beyond the multiple actors she included, to others such as travel agents, as they also play a role as an intermediary. Nevertheless, Khan's study carefully identifies the hierarchical and political divide between lawyers acting as agents and registered migration agents, by saying: "...what appears is an industry in which [an] individual's professional identities, competence, and capabilities are often challenged by others due to industry reputation, boundaries set by territorially embedded relations and variations in qualifications" (p. 54).

Moreover, while Khan (2017) concludes that the professional identity of lawyers is uncontested, she demonstrates that the professional identity of migration agents, remains contested:

For lawyers occupying the top tier appears to be taken for granted by virtue of their qualifications and professional affiliations. For non-lawyers, RMA's, their credibility appears to be questioned and therefore is not a 'given' but rather has to be constructed validated and justified by individuals. (p. 79)

As discussed previously the divide identified by Khan (2017) reflects the inability of the professional bodies to play a clear and consistent role as a CoP for sole practitioner migration agents. Unlike Levin's (2009, 2011) AILA, there are multiple bodies where agents may turn to for advice. While there are no restrictions to belonging to the MIA and Migration Alliance (MA), the struggle for primacy between the two main bodies continues (Levingston, 2019).

The contestation over who has the primacy in practice as revealed by the Kendall review, the subsequent legislation, and the antagonism between the professional representative organisations, all show that the very concepts introduced in this thesis as a means of developing a professional identity are not in place for this emergent profession. Instead of one professional body or a supportive workplace, migration agents in sole practice are faced with a landscape of multiple, yet conflicting professional bodies that may provide some assistance but are not readily accessible to all.

The work of Khan (2017) also highlights the fractured nature of the profession, which is exacerbated by the frequent changes in qualification and registration requirements and the struggles between representative bodies. Rachel Field (2007) provided an excellent analysis of mediation as an emerging profession, concluding that in order to be a profession member one must "declare [one's] commitment to shared ideals" (p. 6). The lack of cohesion within the migration agent profession has led to an inability

to articulate a shared set of ideals. This demonstrates the need to explore further how an individual can build a professional identity within this fractured landscape.

However, despite the obvious issues caused by dual regulation and the unknown impact of the new legislation, this research began in a period when the prospect of removing lawyers from the scheme was not before the profession. Therefore, the research purposefully did not attempt to explore the difference (perceived or otherwise) in identity between RMA's and lawyer agents but allowed the data to reveal how each participant felt or viewed their own professional identity.

2.6 Chapter summary

In keeping with CGT methodology, the literature in this thesis is examined in an iterative fashion. Preliminary consideration of literature, which is presented in this chapter began before the data was analysed. This literature review has presented a broad view of the aspects the research question seeks to address. It has done so in order to present a background for an analysis of new migration agents' experiences within a purpose-built VCoP. This allowed a broad consideration of aspects that may affect the inquiry into the formation of the professional identity of early career migration agents participating in a VCoP. As a result, addressing the research problem led to a consideration of the origins and definitions of a CoP, and a VCoP, and the role they may play in identity formation, through the work of Wenger, his critics and those who seek to employ some of the principles he espoused as critical in creating and nurturing a CoP.

The chapter also examined the differences and similarities between virtual and traditional forms of a CoP and highlighted that despite multiple ways of viewing a VCoP, researchers examining the phenomenon have all concluded that the factor differentiating a VCoP from a CoP is the use of technology. And that the common factors between the two forms of a CoP were Wenger's three dimensions of "mutual engagement, a joint

enterprise and a shared repertoire” (Wenger et al. 2002). Wenger’s primary focus remained on the role of social learning within a community and identity formation as a result of learning together. Wenger was clear that his concept of identity allowed for multiple identities associated with multiple experiences, his prime consideration of identity focused on the formation of a shared identity within CoPs through the process of social learning. His examination of social learning expanded the notion of practice beyond the traditional concepts applied to the work of professionals and those who regularly work with clients.

The nature of the research question led to the need to consider seemingly disparate areas of previous research such as workplace learning and professional identity formation for new professionals. The work of Eraut and Levin guided the design of Protégé as a research project, their work on professional identity and workplace learning was considered in detail, revealing similarities and differences between Wenger, Eraut and Levin in their perception of how to define practice, and how a professional identity is formed in a social setting such as the workplace.

The importance of Levin (2009, 2011) and Khan (2017) to this thesis lies in their examination of professional identity formation and the role of a CoP for practitioners working in the unique field of migration law. Levin (2009, 2011) examined the role of peers and professional bodies in providing a CoP that “overlaps” with the workplace and provided immigration lawyers in sole practice with the support and guidance they needed to build an understanding of their professional identity and norms of practice. The support that the AILA provided to their lawyers, as described by Levin, contrasted with the fractured landscape Khan (2017) described in her study of immigration intermediaries, which included migration agents. Khan’s research exposed the lack of clarity surrounding the professional role of migration agents and revealed the impact the

lack of an overarching professional body may have on the ability of this emergent profession to provide a coherent professional identity to its practitioners.

An examination of Nyström's (2009a; 2009b) research into the formation of professional identity in early-career practitioners has considered her findings that a practitioner undergoes a process of reconciling several identities, including their "personal identity", with their newly emerging professional identity. Her research revealed the role the graduate's idea of the "profession" played in the early adoption of a professional identity. Her early career professionals spoke of the need to "crack the code" of the workplace before a new practitioner could fully adopt the professional identity. Nyström's (2009b) work lends credence to the concept that early-career practitioners may adopt aspects of professional identity before they begin their actual practice in the workplace.

This chapter reinforces why the work of Levin, Eraut and Wenger was crucial to the design of Protégé. It provides evidence that a supportive, trusting environment is essential to learning practice norms, developing competence, confidence, and professional identity. It confirms that prior literature into the development and success of CoP's virtual or otherwise, supports the notion that all CoP's must include Wenger's three dimensions, and discusses the conclusion that the use of technology as the main form of interaction, is considered to be the key difference between a VCoP from a CoP.

In keeping with the iterative nature of the examination of literature as discussed here, this review was put aside until the data was analysed. Chapters 5, 6 and 7, return to the literature considered in this chapter, to discuss how the design of Protégé, ensured it was a successful VCoP and examine additional literature that sheds light on the findings revealed by the data analysis.

Consideration of a legal professional identity focused on individual traits and where they intersect with the profession (Coper, 2010; Economides, 2009; Fruewhald,

2015; Thornton, 2017). However, the results of the data analysis and further review of literature confirmed the theoretical propositions of professional identity formation that look to the construction of a professional identity within a narrative (Ezzy, 2017, Khan 2017). This thesis supports the view that a professional identity is not a new or separate identity, but one that is maintained across various areas of life through an ongoing personal narrative (Foley et al. 2011, Nyström 2009a). Chapters 6 and 7 detail how protégés recognised traits within themselves that aligned with a specific professional identity and how they maintained and developed their professional identity across their time in Protégé.

Chapter 3 Method

This chapter outlines the methods used for this thesis. It explains and describes how constructivist grounded theory provided a theoretical and analytical framework to assist with the ‘how’ questions engaged with in this thesis. The chapter provides a brief overview of the development and differences between Grounded Theory and Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) and the relevance this method has for this research study. It outlines the analytical method used and provides examples of the process as it unfolds. The nature of CGT requires the researcher to use reflective and personal interpretations when coding and analysing data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 314). The personal nature of this process results in a chapter that is presented in the researcher’s voice.

In determining a suitable method, I considered my own ontological and epistemological standpoint regarding knowledge and the role knowledge plays in identity formation. I looked for a methodology that would allow me to consider my experiences as the researcher and capture the experiences of participants in the project. My ontological belief relies upon the premise that reality is constructed through multiple perspectives. This premise relies upon the understanding that perceptions of reality rely upon personal experience. Adopting this point of view risks falling into a strict relativist position, where multiple realities exist side by side with no one taking precedence. However, my acceptance that my ontological perspective is constructed from my experiences as a researcher, an academic, and a migration agent, as well as more personal experiences in my life, does not preclude the ability to consider others or the ability to draw meaning from other people’s experiences and perceptions. The life experiences of

participants in this project differ from mine, and as a result, it was necessary to find a methodology that allowed for multiple views and perspectives.

Qualitative research provides the means to examine the interactions within a social situation, and its methods value the subjectivity of the researcher and the participants (Grbich, 2007, p. 4).

3.1 Theoretical influences and rationale for the qualitative research design

My epistemological focus on constructivism led me to favour CGT over more traditional forms of Grounded Theory (GT). I had encountered the work of Kathy Charmaz, and her work on Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) during the design of the Protégé project. In pursuing this thesis, I attended intensive workshops by Kathy Charmaz in 2015, and since then I have maintained a research approach that is informed by the methodology of CGT (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz & Wertz, 2011).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) formulated the traditional GT method in the mid-1960s (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014, p. 8). Initially, it was ‘partially’ developed by Glaser with quantitative methods and has become synonymous with qualitative or mixed methods research. Grounded theory is now considered to be a methodology that provides a “total package” (Glaser, 2010, p. 3), taking a researcher from data collection to theory development. As a result, it fits well with both qualitative and mixed-method projects.

Charmaz and others (Charmaz, 2017; Creswell et al., 2007; Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014; Mills et al., 2006b) present the historical progress of grounded theory and the evolution of CGT in a range of explanatory texts, highlighting the similarities and differences that eventually arose between Glaser and Strauss. These authors also outline the development of CGT and the differences between classic GT and CGT. These differences have been critiqued as methodologies that have lost the “original purpose” of grounded theory (Simmons, 2010, p. 33).

Despite the eventual divergence by Glaser and Strauss in their theoretical and epistemological focus (Creswell et al., 2007), similarities and overlaps remain between the two methods. Both CGT and GT methodologies propose that a constant comparison of data and theoretical categories should be the guiding force for the analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin et al., 2013). While Glaser has continued to assert that his version was the 'true' form of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2010, p. 167), Strauss worked closely with Corbin to pursue a post-positivist methodology and theory influenced by both symbolic interactionism and constructivist ideology (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014).

Charmaz (2014) advocates using symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective for analysing and constructing meaning from data. Despite acknowledging that symbolic interactionism is one of the "major theoretical perspectives associated with grounded theory" (p. 261), Charmaz is clear that while CGT "adopts the methodological strategies" of classic GT "it does not endorse its epistemology" (Charmaz & Wertz, 2011, p. 168), explaining that it is the world view guiding the analysis, rather than the method of analysis, that differentiates CGT from other forms of Grounded Theory (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014; L. Johnson, 2014, p. 105).

Although Charmaz has written the definitive guides and texts on the methodology of CGT, she is clear that she developed CGT with Antony Bryant as "a version of the method that explicitly moved it into the social constructivist paradigm" (Charmaz & Wertz, 2011, p. 168). Working from a positivist framework, Charmaz developed both a methodology of analysis and a theoretical framework (Johnson, 2014, p. 101).

Creswell and Miller (2000, p. 125) explained that the constructivist (sometimes referred to as interpretivist) paradigm, which focuses on multiple realities constructed through the lived experiences and interactions of individuals, allows the researcher to consider all social aspects of individuals, their interactions, and the contexts in which

they work and live. The methodology also acknowledges and recognises the researcher and their background in the final analysis of data. CGT provides the researcher with both a theoretical lens and a methodology with which to uncover and determine how actors react to specific social conditions, providing a means through which multiple sources of data can be analysed to build a picture of the individual and group experiences within a specific social environment. As such, this is an appropriate methodological and theoretical lens for this thesis, which seeks to understand and explain the role of a purposely designed VCoP and the impact it has on an individual's professional identity formation and growth in personal professional competence and confidence.

Higginbottom and Lauridsen (2014) point out that the name 'Constructivist' distinguishes CGT from other forms of grounded theory, because the process used in CGT to interpret data enables the researcher to construct a theory from the data that is co-constructed from both the research and participants' realities (p. 11). The concept of co-constructing theory is a defining area of difference between classic GT and CGT. Traditional methods emphasise the need for the researcher to put aside their personal and professional preconceptions and let everything emerge from the data (Simmons, 2010, p. 36). By contrast, CGT emphasises the need for the researcher's voice to be acknowledged and included in the analysis. As such, CGT rests on the premise that knowledge and personal realities are constructed through social interaction, and shared experiences and viewpoints, including those of both the participants and the researcher (Charmaz, 2014, 2017).

The use of CGT research methods has allowed me to explore the diverse and often tacit knowledge and experiences gained by participants in Protégé and their work as new migration agents. Importantly, it has enabled me, as a researcher familiar with the professional issues facing migration agents, to acknowledge my point of view within the interpretation of the data (Charmaz, 2014). This approach has ensured that the data

guided analysis, and it has assisted in the creation of a theoretical framework to explore the phenomena identified and revealed by the data. As a result, I faced the dilemma of whether my initial thesis standpoint had the potential to impose a preconceived result on my data analysis.

Charmaz (2014) reminds the researcher that there is a paradox involved in grounded theory studies (p. 106). By their nature, grounded theory studies do not set out to answer a particular question; instead, they pursue a ‘research problem’ and are guided by the data to develop theories that may address this ‘problem’ (Charmaz, 2014, p. 288). However, the nature of doctoral research often requires the researcher to identify and present a thesis standpoint before data gathering and analysis, and as such, the initial ‘how question’ or research problem provides a useful guide and beginning for analysis of the data. The research question for this thesis was:

How and to what extent can a Virtual Community of Practice, designed as a ‘supportive workplace’, enhance the professional identity of migration agents in sole practice, as determined by their ‘own and ‘others’’ perceived competence and confidence?

This thesis has also addressed the following sub-questions:

1. What process may be involved in forming an identity as a professional migration agent?
2. How have the experiences in Protégé enhanced/influenced participants’ perceptions and development of their professional identity?

3.2 Research methods

3.2.1 Data used

This project used criterion-based sampling to find a representative sample of people who had all experienced and participated fully in Protégé. Not all participants

within the original research project completed the required interviews with the researchers and facilitators. Data were drawn from the twelve protégés who had completed three interviews with a researcher and two with a facilitator. This was essential designed to get a breadth of experience, as evidenced by engagement with both researchers and facilitators. When I moved into theoretical sampling, I drew additional data from six protégés who had completed all their interviews with a researcher, but not with their facilitators, and from site interactions between all eighteen proteges (Table 3.1).

Charmaz (2006) allowed for the emerging analysis in grounded theory to lead the researcher to “pursue their inquiry in several sites” (p. 178). In keeping with this approach, this thesis has relied upon multiple sites to obtain data. The final analysis for this thesis is based on the following data:

- 78 interviews with 18 of the 30 protégés (Table 3.1)
- 315 topics (interactions between the protégés and facilitators in the VCoP site)
- Cluster maps used to develop the categories (Figure 3.2 and 3.3)
- 500 Memos of varying length written during all phases of coding (see Appendix F)

3.2.2 Coding software

MAXQDA was the software used for coding, and analysing interviews and social interactions. This software provides a means of integrating recordings of interviews, transcriptions and data from interactions on the protégé site. It includes functions that allow memos, notes and summaries to be written, saved, searched and analysed, as well as visual mapping and analysis functions.

3.3 Data analysis through coding

Crucial to CGT is the method of coding used during analysis. Charmaz (2006) has noted that the study we are undertaking fits an “empirical world when you have constructed codes and developed them into categories that crystallize participants experience” (p. 69). Employing the principles of CGT analysis (Charmaz, 2014), I moved through three stages of coding.

1. Initial coding
2. Focused coding
3. Theoretical sampling.

I adopted a method of developing categories and/or concepts, following focused coding through a review of my memos and through the use of clustering maps, to explore the properties of each code. Categories were then used for theoretical sampling.

3.3.1 Initial coding: Interviews

Using MAXQDA, I began my initial coding of the interviews. Charmaz recommends line by line coding of interviews for this stage as a ‘heuristic device’ (2014, p. 127) but I found that coding transcripts line by line yielded little value or context to my data. I remain aware however that coding line by line or incident by incident is also dependent on the interview itself and how the transcript appears on the page. A narrow page width will restrict lines to words with no meanings and lengthens ‘incidents’ to the point that the meaning is diffused. Charmaz (2014) also discusses incident coding, which provides a broader reach for interpretation (p. 128). Incident coding requires the researcher to code a specific incident that occurs or is described during the interview and provides a more transparent means of considering the data.

However, the structure and appearance of interview transcripts within MAXQDA meant that line by line coding provided no meaning or insight into the nature of the

experience. Incident coding proved difficult as protégés' discussions may not have focused on particular incidents, or proved too lengthy, which, again, dissipated the meaning and risked the coding becoming an interpretation or labelling process. Coding by paragraph allowed me to remove myself as much as possible from the professional context of the work being discussed by agents, and to gain an understanding of their reactions to their work or the issues in their life. I would ask myself questions about the data in each section - "What is going on here? What is happening? How can I define what process or incident is occurring?" - to ensure that I continually questioned and considered what I was reading. By doing this, I forced myself to step back and resist imposing my view of practice as an agent onto the data.

The style of discussions between facilitator and protégé was different from the style of an interview between protégés and the researchers. Facilitator discussions did not seek to elicit information about the protégés' working life. Instead, they were designed as a support for the protégés' professional development. In addition, each facilitator had their style and method of engaging with the protégés. This was revealing and provided useful data for my research, so I coded the facilitator questions and responses as well as those of the protégés. This was to become important when I moved on to theoretical sampling and consideration of the site interactions.

Using gerunds (Charmaz, 2014, p. 121) to code for action, and memos to record, explain, and describe what I was finding, I began to build a picture of the life of the agent, their daily work, motivations and experiences. Coding is an iterative process; the researcher moves between codes, between incidents and events. It became necessary for me to combine spontaneity with a sense of order. I felt it necessary to include a parent code that was more descriptive and would enable me to categorise these individual moments into concepts that capture the moment. For example, the code 'seeing the role as a business opportunity' was located under the parent code of 'Motivation to Work as

an Agent’, while ‘gaining confidence in a firm from other agent’s experience’, and ‘struggling to inspire confidence’ both fell under the parent category of ‘Confidence’.

3.3.2 Initial coding: NVivo codes

NVivo codes provide a means of capturing the meaning and experiences of research participants by ‘paying attention to language’ (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55). Charmaz described three kinds of NVivo codes, warning the researcher that they cannot be used as standalone codes but must be integrated into the theory:

1. general concepts recognised by everyone, concepts that flag a condensed but significant meaning,
2. innovative terms that capture meanings or experience; and
3. insider shorthand.

NVivo codes are considered an initial coding device, used as another means of exploring a problem. The knowledge that specific NVivo codes engendered was crucial to the development of the final theory and provided a useful doorway to look back through and understand how the findings had addressed the research questions. During the data analysis, specific statements or terms were both descriptive and insightful. These terms described or reflected both the actual event and the emotions protégés experienced as they engaged in their practice. These NVivo codes did not directly refer to any consideration by the protégés of their professional identity. However, second-order coding revealed that the NVivo codes all spoke to practice as an agent. They spoke of clients, the weight of responsibility, ability to cope with ambiguity, and uncertainty, as well as the lack of confidence protégés had in their ability to practice. They encapsulated their daily work and concerns and were applicable across the cohort. Some of these NVivo codes are listed below:

- I’m only a newbie

- Training wheels
- A lot of work and a fair amount of frustration
- I think you just do not know what you don't know yet
- It's a jigsaw; you need to find the correct piece
- People's lives are in question
- I did not think I would feel the responsibility so much
- When someone's dream is weighing on you
- It's all about gaining confidence
- Safety net

Through all stages of coding, particularly in the initial stage, NVivo codes, such as 'I'm just a newbie', were extremely helpful in capturing the way participants felt about or described particular incidents in their life. Sometimes more than one participant used the same term such as 'newbie' when interacting in the VCoP with other protégés, or repeatedly when describing themselves to the researcher. Sometimes they used a colloquial phrase to capture a range of feelings and make it easy for me to understand what they were saying. By adopting their expressions as initial codes to explain and frame their narrative, an insight into their world view revealed how they perceived the events and their unfolding experiences.

3.3.3 Initial coding: Comparative data

Charmaz (2014) advocates coding and comparing incidents, so if something similar appears in another interview, you can compare it and see if you can break it down to "discern their properties" (p. 120). In keeping with grounded theory methodology, I used a constant comparative method for coding data, comparing each individual's interview across time and then looking across all interviews as a whole, to ascertain any

codes that became consistent or relevant. Through constant comparison of data, I could see if the protégés spoke of the same incident or experiences, and I could ascertain if the coding would sustain itself. I was able to build a picture of the protégés' experiences across eighteen months of practice. This first phase of rapid initial coding resulted in a large number (2,370) of codes.

3.3.4 Initial coding: Memos

During initial coding, I wrote 401 short memos. Many were comments on what was happening and how I perceived the protégés' actions: 'XX sounds in charge from the beginning of the interview, he says it's 'his pleasure to attend', he understands the equipment and his business is steady and 'complex'. Other memos note what I thought was going on across a range of interviews: 'in these early interviews there is a lot of categorising the work as marketing and going through emails or providing free advice etc...'. Others were a means of recording gerunds fast and fitting them into established codes. For example, the code 'Lifestyle Considerations' had a memo that included gerunds:

- balancing work and family
- spending time with children
- explaining why family is important
- the feeling of well-being is connected to family.

Memos offered an insight into my initial thoughts when coding and have raised the analysis of the code far higher than a descriptive code could have done. For example, 'seeking connections with other agents' was linked to a memo that said: 'feels she needs a social link before she can ask about work - otherwise there is no reciprocity to the relationship'. Others served as important reminders about my past work across the year of coding:

Okay went back and recoded a lot I'm not sure what happened with P16's
I really am not sure what happened. I may have stopped halfway and
forgot about it. MEMO (12/12/17)

3.3.5 Initial coding: Memo structure

Charmaz advocates “working quickly to spark thinking”: this is where memos were a vital record for me. However, she also recommends revising codes if needed to ensure they “fit the data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 118). When analysing data over time and over a series of stages, the process of reflecting, reviewing, revising and analysing requires memos to be ‘catalogued’ in a meaningful way. Following the example of Hutchison, Johnston and Breckon (2010), I used my software to organize the memos. MAXQDA includes a facility called ‘Overview of Coded Segments’, which allowed me to see the data, the code and my memo simultaneously. MAXQDA also includes a ‘Memo Manager’ that provides a view of all memos, symbols and data. The symbol-function categorised the memos and enabled me to sort them easily (Table 3.2).

3.4 Focused coding

Focused coding is the point where the researcher makes decisions about which initial codes make analytical sense with regard to the data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 138). When determining which codes, I could keep or develop the parent codes, NVivo codes, initial codes and memos, and they all informed the choices I made. My initial codes were grouped under each interview, enabling broad consideration across the interviews, and allowed me to consider what each code and parent code was describing. Following this process, initial codes that offered more theoretical insight and direction to follow were identified.

While initial coding was time-consuming, it was focused coding that became the most problematic and challenging period of coding. This is despite Charmaz claiming that it is a process that is “straightforward and proceeds quickly” (2014, p. 140). I found it was not a linear process. It required me to go back and forth to my initial coding, considering the importance of codes, checking if they remained viable, and analysing interactions. In order to coalesce codes, I considered each interview and again asked myself “what is going on here?”. I looked to the nature of my responses to the codes and the reasons for the allocation (Table 3.3).

I worked hard to avoid selecting or ‘designing’ codes that described a cohort, or interested me the most, and relied on my memos to select those that best accounted for the data. For example, a code that arose during initial coding was ‘Building a bridge between past and present’. It resonated so strongly that I went back through all interviews seeking confirmation that it provided an analytical framework for the experience of the protégés. Another was ‘A lot of work and a fair amount of frustration’. Both encapsulated a range of experiences and were noted for the potential to become theoretical categories.

The first phase of focused coding resulted in 408 codes. Through constant comparison and reference to the data and memos, this was reduced to the following 14 codes:

1. Building a bridge between the past and the present
2. Learning from others in Protégé
3. Working with people’s lives
4. Establishing a common experience
5. Identifying as an agent
6. Learning to practice
7. Changing careers
8. Developing self-confidence through Protégé

9. Building rapport
10. Rejecting the professional development plan
11. Working in Protégé
12. Maintaining networks
13. Building a practice
14. A lot of work and a fair amount of frustration

3.4.1 Focused coding: Memos

Sixty-eight memos were written during this phase. At this point the majority of the memos were explanatory. As I went through the initial codes, I wrote down thoughts and explanations for them. I was able to review, reject and refine codes, linking memos to specific areas, and to reduce the number of codes to those that provided an analytical as well as an explanatory focus. When using this methodology, there is a constant struggle with the desire to categorise the codes in an explanatory manner. Memos served to create a narrative about codes, and to define and expand the meanings behind codes. Consider for instance the memo I wrote on the code Learning to Practice:

One aspect of this I keep returning to is the NVivo code “people’s lives are in question.” I haven’t made it a category yet because there is more to learning practice than this. But it encapsulates the essence of how agents approach their work. It arises under particular conditions. When discussing the stress of working with vulnerable clients such as refugees and asylum seekers, when they are discussing visa outcomes, when they fear making a mistake, and when they discuss the importance of their role, sometimes it’s revealed when they are talking about people or ‘clients as people’... When they say, ‘people’s lives are in question’, they

really mean it. They remain concerned about their client's life 'because something horrible could happen', many agents mention the risk of something horrible happening, the burden of responsibility that they have as agents, is the burden of the client dreams, and the recognition of humanity and how it brings an emotional toll. MEMO (11/05/2017)

3.5 Developing theoretical categories

Focused coding allowed me to build a stronger understanding of the work agents were doing, the approaches they were taking to their work, and how they viewed their role during this time. Importantly, the differences in interviews, undertaken by the facilitators and the researchers, became clearer. I worked through the focused codes to develop six tentative categories that allowed me to 'theorize' the significance of each. Considering the NVivo code 'peoples' lives are in question', mentioned in the memo above, this captured the attitudes and emotions of the agents towards their practice. My memos show that when developing my theoretical categories I considered moving this under the broader category of 'focusing on a client-centered practice', because I felt it was a better way to capture the protégé's feelings and actions. I was not to know that this category was to become important in progressing my analysis when I needed to work through a discrepancy I identified in the next stage of coding. Raising the codes to categories rendered the data meaningful and carried the analysis forward.

1. Building a bridge between past and present
2. Building a viable practice
3. Focusing on a client centered practice
4. Learning through others in Protégé
5. Being a migration agent
6. Navigating the unpredictable

Within each of these categories, I generated codes, all relating to the work that the protégés as migration agents do or believe they do. Memos used during this phase of coding further define each category. Cluster maps were another method of analysis recommended by Charmaz (2014, p. 187) that I used to explore how a category arose, what maintained it, and how it might change (Figure 3.2).

3.5.1 Sampling: working with tentative categories.

Charmaz (2014) explains that theoretical sampling can take different forms (p. 216) and “pertains only to conceptual and theoretical development of your analysis” (p. 198). It involves a method whereby the researcher considers all plausible explanations for the data and begins to form a hypothesis for each explanation. This is done by going back and forward over the data and seeking out new data to test the categories. At this stage, researchers may typically go back to the field and seek new interviews or test categories with participants. However, the closure of Protégé prevented me from going back to the protégés (interviewees) to test the viability and sustainability of the categories. Nevertheless, there was data I could use to explore the categories further. Using theoretical categories, I was able to turn to this data as a means of theoretical sampling. Data used in theoretical sampling included:

- Site interactions between the protégés and facilitators
- Videos
- Cluster maps used to develop the categories
- Memos written by a facilitator
- Memos
- Remaining interviews

3.5.2 Theoretical sampling: Using site interactions

Interactions on site were defined by engagement with a topic. Over 1039 new topics were discussed on the VCoP site during the Protégé project. These interactions were again coded and sorted to cover interactions between the selected protégés in this thesis, and to consider topics that covered incidents, meaning, and depth. In order to sample the codes in relation to the protégés' experiences in Protégé, I took the six sampling categories and examined the interactions on the virtual CoP site. As the primary researcher on Protégé, I had already read over all the interviews with protégés and conducted several of them myself. I was aware of the sentiments protégés expressed regarding their experiences within the VCoP site, and their declarations about the effect their time in Protégé had on their confidence in practice.

However, prior to undertaking this thesis I had not read any of the interactions within the VCoP site. Once again, this data provided a new perspective with which to test the developed categories. A final 315 interactions were selected and coded. These online interactions consisted of specific topics that demonstrated engagement by one or more of the 18 protégés chosen for the research.

Using this data, I went back and began to consider the codes and categories again, defining the codes into incidents that had meaning, connecting the codes, or further defining them. It became clear that the pathway to working as an agent, becoming a viable agent, and internalizing the work of an agent involves taking simultaneous routes. For example, I could confirm through the site interactions that the protégés needed to learn to practice and learn how to build a viable practice.

I returned to the interviews to consider an additional six protégés who had completed their interviews with researchers, and coded each interview again with initial codes, staying aware of the categories I had developed. During this process, I was able to

reflect on memos and cluster maps, creating new memos and maps as a means of comparing and developing the properties of the codes. Categories were then refined to see if they were sustainable and could be raised to a conceptual category. This stage of the analysis highlighted a difference between the descriptions of clients that protégés gave researchers and the discussions they had with each other on the VCoP site (see Appendix E). Site interactions revealed a different ‘client view’ that presented a variation in the coding and led to the final concepts used. Consider this memo on the category Focusing on a Client centered practice:

There is a difference between the site interactions and the interviews...What is going on? Are they useful for considering the categories or are they problematic? I can see practice for the agents is client-centered. When talking about ‘being an agent’ they do so through stories about their clients and visa problems but on the site, they talk about clients as a burden. In the interview the burden of practice is presented differently: Because they are scared of ruining their clients lives and something terrible will happen ...? But on the site discussing clients between themselves they also discuss clients differently. Because some clients don’t listen to advice ...because they find they are fixing a lot of mistakes the client has made...because clients ‘know it all’...because clients don’t tell them all the information they need. So why do the negative aspects of client-centered work come out in the site interactions? Why do some agents describe their clients in the negative? Is it because client interaction personifies in some way the unpredictability of practice? Is it the shared unpredictability of practice

that is used as a means of binding the protégés? So, they can find their way together...? MEMO (06/09/2017)

Raising the categories requires constant comparison with the data and, in light of the data, noting how each concept arose and is sustained. Charmaz (2014) reminds us of Glaser's warning that the researcher should continually ask themselves "what is this data a study of?" (p. 246). I reminded myself of the premise of the research, namely that this was a study of newly registered migration agents working in a VCoP. As such, it encompassed the impact of the VCoP on the agent's work and their perception of their competence and confidence in relation to their professional identity.

The analysis of interviews and site interactions demonstrated clearly that practice required the protégés to interpret legislation and navigate around external agencies and policies, in order to facilitate the granting of a visa which brings change or resolution for their client. Importantly, they do this in a complex and dynamic environment. I considered raising the category *Navigating the Unpredictable* to a core category, as it explained not only the protégés' work as migration agents', but also identified key aspects of the development of their professional identity.

The data analysis initially provided insight into the sub-question, "*What processes may be involved in forming an identity as a migration agent*". However, it is important to acknowledge that these insights were revealed in two very different ways: firstly through the interactions between protégés and researchers during interviews, and secondly through the interactions within the VCoP site. Using Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) acknowledges the researcher's involvement (Charmaz, 2014), allowing the interview to become the "site for the construction of knowledge" (Mills et al., 2006a, p. 9). Mills et al. have explained that acknowledging this premise provides the researcher with an analytical lens through which to examine the data to the extent that it becomes

impossible to “separate the inquirer from the inquired into” (Guba, Egon & Lincoln, 1989, in Mills et al., 2006a, p.9). Describing the interview process as ‘narrative interaction’, they argued that this interaction creates knowledge from the combined input of both researcher and interviewee (2006a, p. 9).

As a core concept, ‘Navigating the Unpredictable’ offered scope and seemed to capture the essence of the data. However, it was also self-limiting and excluded components of working in a CoP and of identity development. Protégés as agents faced much more and overcame much more than the unpredictable events in their work. Charmaz reinforces the need to return to memos when faced with a category that is weak or incomplete (Charmaz, 2017). One of my final memos provided an answer.

The data was considered again in light of the research question. The memo exposes the problem with reconciling two discreet aspects of the thesis. Despite the critical insight protégés’ discussions of their clients had provided, I had failed to include systemic factors that assisted them to engage with their narrative. These factors were the design of Protégé as a project, which included research interviews, support interviews with facilitators, and site interactions. The project provided two fundamental processes:

1. A means for the migration agents (protégés) to reflect on their past, their present work, and their future goals. When all aspects of the project were included, the importance of the reflective activities undertaken by agents (protégés) was reinforced.
2. A place to learn practice in a community of like-minded professionals.

The realisation that systemic issues played a role exposed a different way to view the data and the design of the project. I had noted that the content within the VCoP site was vastly different from the content within interviews. The personal narrative was largely absent, as agents primarily discussed practice matters rather than feelings, thoughts or personal actions. The categories held up, revealing that they were substantial.

The interactions within the VCoP site allowed me to consider the categories I had developed from the data and provided me with confidence to continue until I could find no further insights. Charmaz (2006) has called this “saturation” (p. 113), a term that refers to the time “when gathering fresh data no longer sparks theoretical insights” (p. 113).

Crucial to the identity work new agents were undergoing was their perception of their role, and of themselves, as they worked in the role of a migration agent. Coding had identified clear and meaningful categories that reflected the experiences of protégés in the project, as well as their perceptions of their identity as agents and the work they were doing. Further analysis of the theoretical categories provided me with a means of raising the categories to broader core concepts. Charmaz maintains that raising specific categories to concepts includes subjecting them to further analytical refinement and involves showing their relationship to other concepts (Charmaz, 2014, p. 247). She does so by creating more abstract concepts and allowing them to subsume high-level categories. Accordingly, I began to build a broader picture of concepts that could embrace the hundreds of codes I had found in the initial stages of analyses. I was initially searching for one overarching concept to encapsulate all the complexity of the data. As a result of further analysis, I realized there was more to ‘becoming’ a migration agent, and more to the role Protégé, as a CoP, played in the development of an agent’s professional identity, than one single process or core concept could define.

With the inclusion of the data from the CoP interactions, the final four core theoretical concepts were:

1. Building a bridge between past and present. This is a narrative device used by protégés to describe their decisions, choices and experiences. It allows them to maintain a coherent identity narrative during times of disruption.

2. Focusing on a client-centered practice. This is the strongest concept, as practice as a migration agent is focused totally on the client. It requires navigating a path through the legislation and policy in order to facilitate change for the client. It includes the viability of practice and maintaining client confidence in your abilities as an agent.
3. Navigating the unpredictable. The instability of practice forces changes and adaptation in professional and private life. The way the protégés react to change and the choices they make provide the basis for this concept.
4. Co-creating knowledge. This concept describes both how the VCoP site works and how the protégés learnt and worked within the site. The interactions on the site become the strongest element to building trust between the protégés.

Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) precludes the notion that a researcher will enter the field with a set of questions seeking answers. The research problems provided a background but not a framework for the analysis. CGT researchers look to the data for a theory that explains the “what and the how questions” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 255). While I entered the project with prior knowledge of the work of migration agents, a framework of questions for consideration, and presumptions regarding the outcome, I remained open to new knowledge and insights that may arise from the data.

At times the task of meeting the questions in this research project, and staying true to the methodology chosen, seemed onerous if not impossible. As described in the previous chapter, in order to resist seeking answers from the data, I put aside the research question and sub-questions during the analysis phase. Following the analysis phase, I returned to the questions. The analysis revealed discrepancies between the presentation of the ‘self as agent’ by protégés within the site (as a virtual workplace and community),

and during their interviews with both researchers and facilitators. These discrepancies prompted me to go back to the questions and consider what was happening.

Charmaz (2014) warns against developing theoretical codes and concepts based on repetition, or frequency of phrases and words. There is no doubt that the data contained repetition and common themes and incidents. It is their commonality which speaks to broader concepts addressed by the findings. Following the last stages of analysis, I returned to the questions and found that the data led to the sub-question: *What process may be involved in forming an identity as a professional migration agent?* This question, and the final analysis of data, provided the best insight into the main research problem. The question links to not only the profession and broader community's perception of what a migration agent 'is', but to an individual agent's 'conception of self as agent'. The analysis of interviews revealed how each protégé perceived themselves and their role as an agent throughout the project. The presentation of 'self as agent' and their discussions of client work within the VCoP site was radically different to the way protégés described and projected their 'self as agent' and their client work in the interviews with the researchers and facilitators.

This difference in the presentation of self was crucial to the consideration of the research problem and the sub-questions. This research presents a new perspective for those considering the process of professional identity development based on the analysis of protégé data and supported by protégés' quotes and narratives. This thesis proposes that professional identity is enhanced by participation within a VCoP but is formed through a three-stage process of self-recognition and self-identification with others.

Charmaz advocates the use of a theoretical perspective (or perspectives) to take the analysis of the data to a new level. She suggests that using multiple theoretical perspectives can assist with drawing a grounded theory into a coherent whole (2006, 2007). The findings presented in this thesis were viewed through a narrative framework

employed by Eraut (2007) in his epistemology of practice. This framework is similar to that used in narrative identity theory (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and it acts as a heuristic device to situate the emergent theory. It allows the research to acknowledge the role of the individual and their circumstances in their identity creation. It has been suggested that the emphasis narrative theory places on the meaning of symbolic systems, such as language, presents a ‘theoretical’ possibility that there is a compatibility between narrative theory and constructivist grounded theory (Lal et al., 2012, p. 8). These theoretical perspectives acknowledge the compelling role narrative plays in forming a self-identity. Like those engaged in narrative theory/inquiry, grounded theorists embed themselves into theory and acknowledge their role in the interpretive and analytical process, and they acknowledge the reader as the interpreter of the story. They also use stories to assist with the descriptions of analysis, as a way to “view data as mutually constructed by the researcher and the researched” (Charmaz, 2010, p. 169), and they advocate presenting the research findings as a coherent, structured narrative (Charmaz, 1999).

Clandinin and Huber (2010) have proposed three “commonplaces of narrative inquiry” that can serve as a conceptual framework (,p. 3): temporality, sociality and place. The axis of temporality captures the transition of time; past, present and future events, people and concepts that participants engaged with. The axis of sociality encompasses both personal and social interactions and processes experienced. The axis of place refers to actual physical places where the events occur. The use of such a perspective is also advocated by Eraut, in his epistemology of practice (2007). In adopting his heuristic device, narrative inquiry was not used as a research methodology. However, the concept of using a metaphorical multi-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50) provides a theoretical perspective through which to present the findings of this thesis. As a heuristic device, the use of this framework has

allowed the thesis to address both the crucial link between practice as a migration agent and identity formation.

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has explained the linkage between the Protégé project, which began with a team and the current thesis. It has outlined the processes used in the earlier project to gather data, the demographics of the participants, and the roles played by academic researchers in the project.

To explore the problem central to this thesis, I chose a theory-building research method which could expose and explain what was happening to new agents in the VCoP and this crucial part of their career. This chapter has described in detail how I used this method, including how I selected and coded data, and the iterative process so crucial to Constructivist Grounded theory. Examples of the stages of analysis of the data were outlined to demonstrate how I arrived at the final four theoretical concepts underpinning the presentation of the data and the findings that arose from them. As with the analysis process, writing this chapter has been iterative. It has enabled me to detail the steps I have taken as a researcher and has assisted me to review and reflect upon that process constantly. The next chapter will provide a detailed account of the inquiry space and participants' experiences within the VCoP site and the broader Protégé project, in order to present the theoretical proposition arising out of this research.

This research has retained familiarity with the topic through the inclusion of interviews, discussions, memos and site interactions. The use of a systematic constant comparative method to analyse data has ensured that the resulting analysis retained strong links between the original data and the final categories. Chapter 4 will include personal vignettes of the protégés in order to place them into the inquiry space. The presentation of

the final analysis in chapters 6 and 7 will use direct quotes from interviews, memos and discussions to provide evidence that supports the analytical claims made in the thesis.

The findings both challenge and uphold many aspects and preconceptions of professional identity development. As discussed in chapter 2, previous studies addressed in this thesis have failed to acknowledge the strong link between the role of the individual within a CoP, their past perceptions of personal and professional identity, and their adoption of a new professional identity.

Chapter 4 will discuss the VCoP inquiry space and what it entails. Using a narrative lens, it will present vignettes of each participant. Each presents a brief overview of the protégés, including details such as their past professional experiences, the drivers that led them to be migration agents, their time in Protégé and a snapshot of their career after protégé had ended. The use of vignettes situates the protégés in the project and provides an insight into the narratives they use to describe their experiences.

Chapter 4 Protégés within the inquiry space

Chapter 4 presents the inquiry space of the VCoP. The concept of a VCoP is extended to take into account aspects of the research process itself. This premise is expanded on in the following chapters. The chapter includes vignettes intended to bring the individual experiences of protégés and the perception of their professional identity to life. The vignettes exclude demographic information in order to maintain the anonymity of the protégés. The inability to include gender, location and personal circumstances that identify protégés presents a risk that these descriptions will lack clarity and life. In order to ameliorate this and present descriptions of experiences that traverse across time and location, the narrative lens used by Eraut (2007) to examine practice is utilised.

Ezzy (2017) proposes that the consideration of self must include an integration of both narrative theory and sociological conceptions of self. He explains that Ricoeur's hermeneutics emphasise the reality of the lived experience, "...life as a nascent story" (p. 244), which results in a narrative of identity that is fluid, and "fictively" reinterpreted, and constructed by an individual but constructed in interaction and in dialogue with other people" (p. 246). Ezzy argues that self-identity is formed as a narrative plot of self through "interaction between events, imagination, significant others, routines and habits, and the structure of the soliloquy that forms a persona's self-narrative" (p. 251). Data from both the interviews and the site interactions provide an insight into how protégés build a "coherent but fluid" (p. 246) narrative of "self as an agent."

The integrity of these vignettes is upheld through the protégés' own words, building a solid description of the participants who took part in this research. The vignettes focus on the temporal, the social, and the locale of protégé experiences before during and after Protégé. The use of a narrative lens to describe personal characteristics and experiences compresses time and enables significant aspects of their narrative to

come into focus. These aspects reveal their aspirations, the challenges they faced, and the impact of Protégé upon their early career and professional identity.

4.1 The VCoP inquiry space

The design of the Protégé project as a VCoP provided participants with multiple ways to interact socially and professionally. As a result, the inquiry space for this thesis rests within the overlap of the VCoP, as well as within interactions that occurred outside the online site. It is important to note that no interviews and discussions occurred face to face, thus maintaining the nature of a VCoP. The inquiry space captured protégés' experiences within their physical workplace as they brought these experiences into their discussions online, their discussions with facilitators, and into their interviews. This overlap is similar to that noted by Levin (2009) when she concluded that the AILA might be an overlapping community of practice for immigration lawyers, working in sole practice.

Therefore, the overlap for the inquiry space that this thesis considers includes all the interactions and experiences protégés had while they were in the Protégé project, filtered through the VCoP. This includes the Protégé VCoP site, which had public forums and chat rooms, as well as the process of undertaking interviews with researchers and discussions with facilitators. All of these experiences played a role in providing a means for the protégés to reflect on, verbalise and acknowledge the experiences they were having in their practice lives outside of the VCoP. In particular, the interviews and discussions presented a means of creating a narrative of self that reinforced the experiences, decisions, and outcomes protégés were encountering.

The inclusion of the effect an interview can have upon an interviewee into the VCoP, rather than restricting it to a means for collecting data, is crucial to the understanding of Protégé as a VCoP. This unintended outcome arose from the

observation that the ‘self as agent’, portrayed within the VCoP site, was different from that revealed through the interviews with researchers and discussions with facilitators. The discussions with facilitators focused on the ‘practice’ of protégés, including the business aspects of their work and interactions they had with clients and colleagues. These were often more personal conversations that revealed insecurities and choices facing the protégés. The researcher interviews intended to allow the protégés to reflect on their interactions with each other, their families, their clients and the broader profession. The online site contained data which demonstrated the way agents approached their client practice.

Eraut (2002) critiqued Lave and Wenger’s 1991 concept of a CoP as limiting. He argued that the focus on community relationships alone placed too much emphasis on the learning community and risked losing sight of the learning and occupational identity development of individuals. Focusing on all broad aspects of the VCoP provided a closer understanding of the social and psychological processes each individual was experiencing and the context in which they experienced them. It ensured that the concerns Eraut expressed about the individual and their identity could be addressed.

Although the various internal and external experiences that the protégés in the Protégé project encountered took place across time, the experiences that resulted in changes to the way protégés worked, practiced and perceived themselves and each other did not always occur chronologically. New agents gained and lost confidence, and many showed signs of going backwards in practice, confidence, and competence before they could move forward, often due to personal or external events. Therefore, a heuristic device was adopted to present the role Protégé played in the processes that protégés used to build a ‘coherent narrative of self’, and to locate the understanding of their experiences within “particularities of time, space and situation” (Charmaz, 2010, p. 168), or “time, place, culture and situation” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131).

4.2 Protégé profiles: Lives through the lens of temporal, social and locale

This section uses the lens of temporal, social and locale to provide a narrative overview of each protégé and their experiences across the project, through the presentation of brief vignettes. The lens is adopted from Eraut's (2007) epistemology of practice, which considered workplace learning through the prism of locality, and the social and temporal aspects of learning. Clandinin and Connelly have referred to 'place' (2000), while Charmaz (2011) has also used the term 'place' or 'situation.' This thesis has adopted the terminology of Eraut and refers to 'locale'. It has done so to provide a broader scope for the dimension it represents. A locale can refer to locality or place, a destination where an event occurred, or setting for a story such as a play or novel. It captures the Protégé project as a whole, the VCoP site, and the private workplace and lives of the protégés.

Although the work of Constructivist Grounded theories focuses on social interactions, situations and events, Charmaz does not refer to sociality, the terminology used by narrative researchers (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). However, Eraut maintains that the social context in which an event takes place is an important factor in both learning and identity development (Eraut & Hirsh, 2007). The following section provides context for the experiences of the protégés in the VCoP. Moving briefly from the statistical data that describes the cohort to the social context of their time in the VCoP.

4.3 Protégé profiles: Statistical details of protégés

The 18 research participants chosen for this thesis were adults with ages ranging from 27 to 71 years of age (M= 47.5). The majority (66.67%) described themselves as having a migrant background, either as migrants or through their parents or partners (n=12). Only one protégé did not hold an undergraduate degree, 2 held a Doctorate in Science and one was undertaking doctoral studies. One-third of the protégés held a law

degree (n=6) (27.78%) and had worked for either a government department, including the Department of Immigration, or a non-government organisation that provided migrant services (n=5).

Their work and location circumstances changed across the course of the project (2013 – 2014). At the beginning of the project, 77.78% worked as sole practitioners (n=14), 11% worked in small law firms smaller than four (n=2), and 11% worked in a law firm as the only migration agent (n=2). By the end of the project, eleven of the eighteen protégés had described themselves as self-employed. Three of the protégés had moved location during their time in the project due to financial or family concerns. One had relocated from a regional town to a city interstate, and two had moved across States.

Despite the small number of agents who participated in this research, the OMARA Annual Report (2012- 2013) statistics show that of the 8499 registered migration agents, 33.8% held or had held a legal practicing certificate, 80% operated in sole practice or worked in a business as the only migration agent, and they had an average age of 44.5 years (p.7). This demonstrates that the sample of migration agents taken from the Protégé project remained representative of the broader profession.

4.4 Protégé vignettes

These vignettes are intended to highlight the diversity of life experiences each protégé had during their time engaging with the Protégé project. They are based on the information protégés revealed during their interviews with researchers and facilitators. They are also built on the raw data collected when protégés provided information such as their address, gender, age, immediate past employment, and present practice status on their initial survey forms. Direct quotes from protégés provide rich descriptions and help to contextualise the findings presented in chapter 6 and chapter 7. Finally, these vignettes allow for a broader narrative picture that highlights how protégés considered their

professional identity, and they reveal their aspirations, goals and changes in their circumstances during interviews, and in forum discussions on Protégé.

4.4.1 Protégé 1 (P1)

P1 was in their early 50s from a migrant background, married with children. P1 had been registered as an agent for one year when they entered the project with the second intake of protégés. P1 had graduated with a law degree overseas and had practiced offshore for several years. While P1 initially found it difficult to practice law in Australia, they eventually moved into working in private industry and government. The impact of the global economic crisis forced a change in career. P1 viewed this as an opportunity to do something for themselves. When P1 entered Protégé, they worked as a sole practitioner migration agent from home. Due to their legal background, P1 initially considered migration law as an area they were well equipped to undertake, and they were confident in their ability to cope with the law, research and practice advice the role would entail:

Well, my goal is simple, to make sure that I know everything about immigration law, which is not difficult. I'm probably now... I have to do a bit more work... but my goal is to be on top of that and provide a very quick response to client's enquiries and also to make it affordable for clients. Good service, good advice at the reasonable price and not exorbitant price. *Interview 1R. P1*

During the first few months of participation in the Protégé project, P1 expressed uncertainty regarding the purpose of the project and the VCoP site. This uncertainty continued despite several conversations with the research team, briefing papers and interviews with facilitators. This confusion may have been due to the fact that they had

not been able to attend a face-to-face meeting, and briefing. Nevertheless, P1 eventually participated in the Protégé site regularly if not expansively. The interactions P1 had with the facilitators and protégés demonstrated they gained a new understanding of the complexity of the legislation and policy that needed interpretation and implementation in this new role. The initial bravado and questions P1 posted in the VCoP was met with gentle guidance by others, and P1 was gradually able to contribute their own valued advice to the group. By the end of the project, P1 articulated clearly the benefits of the Protégé project and revealed the growth they felt they had made through Protégé:

Immigration law is very broad and very confusing, so having a group of people to talk to or having people to share with is invaluable to assure you you're doing the right thing or going down the right paths so it's very good. Ultimately you still rely on your research and everything, but a quick assurance is really useful. *Interview 3R. P1*

Throughout the time P1 was in Protégé, they moved from sole practice at home to a shared office with other agents and then back home with a small office. During this period, P1 consistently described their professional identity as a “lawyer as well as a registered migration agent, focusing on immigration law”.

4.4.2 Protégé 2 (P2)

P2 was in their early 50s, they came from a migrant background, and held degrees in commerce and science, and they had been registered as an agent for two years before joining the project. P2 had worked offshore for ten years and continued to work offshore as a sole practitioner when they registered as a migration agent. When P2 entered the project, they were unequivocal in their description of their professional identity as either a project manager or businessperson, not a migration agent:

Look, it would only become an identity should this become my full-time role, where I feel that it has traction in terms of a business for me.

Interview 1R. P2

P2 considered that the ability to provide migration advice was a part-time business role, not a full-time profession. P2's goal was to value add to this role through education and job placement services. P2's partner worked as an education agent, and P2 felt this would assist in building the practice to the stage where three agents could be employed:

It might be. I will see, how do I phrase it? Kind of like a B2B, like a business-to-business relationship either with the providers of education or suppliers of work; and going direct to individuals or through recruitment agents to place them. And in tandem with other migration agents, but not, my first approach. I think migration work is only part of the service and I don't want it to go wide in one strata. I'd like to go vertical and migration work is one little piece of that slice. *Interview 1R.*

P2

During their time in Protégé, their business grew to the extent P2 needed to limit the scope of work and focus on specific visas. P2 changed focus from education to skilled employment and New Zealand visas. While P2 was initially skeptical at the role Protégé could play, they volunteered to build a replica site for agents to join when the project ended.

4.4.3 Protégé 3 (P3)

P3 was in their early 30s, with a law and communications degree. When P3 joined Protégé, they were working as one of three migration agents, as ‘in-house’ staff, in a large firm, handling recruitment and offshore placements. P3 was initially reluctant to describe themselves as a migration agent; instead, they would tell people they worked “within the employee relation team of a company”, handling “immigration issues and stuff.” At that time, P3 identified migration agent work as “part of the role, not the whole of it”. P3 had no plans to go into sole practice describing it as a “terrible idea”. Despite a broad approach to work, P3’s expertise in migration law was a key asset. During their time in the Protégé project, P3’s employment situation changed. P3 ended their time in the Protégé project working for a government agency. They maintained registration as an agent and referred to themselves as a migration consultant:

I did find it helpful. I think at the time, especially if I really couldn’t, you know, if I had sort of exhausted all of my resources, in terms of trying to look at something from a different angle, it was the little things that someone might come up with that would point you in the right direction.

Interview 3R. P3

4.4.4 Protégé 4 (P4)

P4 was in their early 40s, married with children. P4 was a migrant to Australia, a professional in health care, and midway through a struggle with a severe health issue that offered a 30% survival rate, when they decided to change careers. P4 had made the deliberate choice to choose a career that would assist the whole family if their health deteriorated again. P4’s career goal was to build a sustainable business, which would benefit them all and allow their partner to join in the business. P4 had migrated to

Australia and left their previous profession behind, which, along with illness, had changed their life goals:

So... then I... I got ill, and I thought, “You know what? New life, new start. Let’s do something different.” And my migration agent and someone that works for the Government who I know in migration, was moaning at me, “Oh why don’t you do migration? You’d be really good at it.” And I was like basically I was at home recovering and I thought I’d do the course because I was bored and needed something to do. And I thought “Well, why not? It’s a new start for me. Why not try and do it and if I manage it, I do. And if I don’t, I won’t.” sort of thing... *Interview 3R. P4*

P4 opened a sole practice in a regional city working from an office. P4 felt they needed the discipline of working outside the home to succeed. P4 openly identified as a migration agent and participated actively in the Protégé VCoP. The business grew steadily, and they began to take leadership roles in external professional organisations and within the VCoP. When the Protégé project ended, P4 was instrumental in leading the organisation of a new VCoP. However, P4 did not join the new site when it was established, instead taking a leadership role in their local division of one of the professional bodies representing migration agents.

4.4.5 Protégé 5 (P5)

P5 was in their early 50s when they joined the Protégé project. P5 held a Doctorate in Science before beginning work with various government departments, including immigration, where they worked for a substantial period. When they joined Protégé, P5 was a very new agent in their first year of practice. They described being

comfortable with their professional identity as a registered migration agent. P5 felt their work background would stand them in good stead with clients as they felt they would be able to handle the legislative burdens associated with providing advice. The interactions in Protégé enabled P5 to share tacit information with other protégés and to “share opinions and learn off each other”. When P5 first joined Protégé, they were living in a major city and working in a small firm with five other migration agents. During the project, P5 and their partner moved to the coast “for lifestyle options”, where they began their practice. P5’s goal was to build up enough “bread-and-butter cases to keep the business ticking over”, which would free them up to be able to take on more interesting cases, “maybe like review, or protection visas”. While P5’s goal to work on review applications was not forthcoming, they did begin to undertake contract work with a major firm that focused on offshore refugee applications. P5 worked from their home with an external office they used for meeting with clients. P5’s goals included employing at least two people. By the end of Protégé, the business had not achieved the growth needed to expand:

I mean I would eventually like to get a place and have at least, I mean not more than 2 people. At this point in time it is growing away from me... that vision, rather than coming closer. *Interview 3R. P5*

P5 was at the end of their second year working as a migration agent when Protégé ended, and they remained committed to continuing working as an agent for at least five years:

I guess long term, I’ll give it 5 years, if I’ve put in a reasonable effort, I’ve got to look at all my options and try something else. *Interview 3R.*

P5

4.4.6 Protégé 6 (P6)

P6 was a migrant to Australia in their early 60s. P6 did not hold an undergraduate degree, having entered university through recognition of previous skills. P6 joined Protégé at the end of their first year of practice. They ran a construction company with their partner and had first-hand experience in finding and assisting migrants to work with their firm. This exposure inspired P6 to become a migration agent. While P6 was initially concerned with their lack of formal education and the complexity of legislative interpretation required for migration work; they found that Protégé assisted them to feel more confident and be less panicky. Their contributions to the site became regular and they interacted confidently:

When I started off, I knew nothing, I have to put it as, sort of nothing. [Laughs] compared to what I know now. I'd be a bit more confident to try and find information myself, whereas if I hadn't had Protégé to get me from the swimming... it would have been hard, it would've been scary, a bit too scary possibly to re-register, whereas now I will re-register again. *Interview 3R. P6*

4.4.7 Protégé 7 (P7)

P7 was in their late 20s and had travelled extensively. The exposure to different cultures had inspired P7 to become a migration agent. P7 worked for another agent for one year before starting their own firm in tandem with a family company. Their goal was to employ more agents and establish an overseas office. P7 admitted these were big goals but remained committed to pursuing them throughout the project. P7 did employ another agent for a short time, and when Protégé finished was considering establishing an office

overseas due to the ‘language barriers’. Work at that point was steady, but not hugely profitable, yet it provided the lifestyle P7 felt they needed:

I cover my wage, and expenses, and, am able to sort of ... take long weekends or time off, or have a public holiday when there is one, which is really nice. *Interview 3R. P7*

P7 expressed real concerns during the project about their ability to assist clients and navigate the complexity of practice. Still, P7 experienced significant growth in their ability to interpret and apply legislation and to deal with clients, and business over the year they were in Protégé. P7’s focus became more client and business centered, revealing the understanding of the impact of their work on clients. While P7 felt they learnt to handle the stresses of business and clients through the support of Protégé and the networks they built, they also felt the stress could have been mitigated through professional development courses that focused on the reality of dealing with clients:

And I think now, you know, if I were to talk to a younger agent, I would be saying, as a person, you know, and as a businessperson, maybe that’s something that I would say you should look into. Professional development courses for yourself on how to handle those situations, that rejection, client confidence, all sorts of, you know, conflicts, all sorts of things. *Interview 3R. P7*

4.4.8 Protégé 8 (P8)

P8 was a migrant to Australia in their mid-40s, married with a child. P8 sought flexible employment that was similar to the work arrangements they had experienced overseas. P8 was a sole practitioner, working from home and undertaking doctoral studies

as well as working. Initially, P8 wanted to broaden the business out to provide career development for migrants as well as migration advice. At times the doctoral studies overwhelmed the work as a migration agent, while at other times responsibilities of parenthood crowded out both work and study:

I think it's about finding the balance between the two. Because in a way I think my studies will assist me in, developing the business where I want it to go. That's why I wanted to actually do it as fast as I can, but then on the other hand, I feel that I'm losing all the other kind of you know knowledge or the amount of knowledge I have in the migration side.

Interview 1F.P8

By the end of the Protégé project, P8 was working with a larger team of contract agents as a migration agent. Even though they worked from home, they felt part of the team and were happy in the support they received from the agents they worked with, describing them as a 'fantastic support network'. Their struggle juggling work, study and parenthood had been resolved, and P8 rated family as their number one priority, the work as an agent at number two, and studies at number three. This method of prioritising had allowed P8 to remove the psychological stress of carrying multiple workloads:

So, I'm trying to accept the fact that I can't do everything to the standard I want if I try to do everything I want at the same time. So, I need to prioritise some things over others and that's what I've been trying to do. Prioritise the work is more important because it's a question about peoples' lives whereas my studies only have an impact on myself.

Interview 3R. P8

After the VCoP site was closed, P8 continued to do contract work with a team of agents dispersed across Australia and contributed their ongoing practice and registration to their involvement in Protégé.

4.4.9 Protégé 9 (P9)

P9 was a migrant to Australia in their early 50s, with a background of diverse employment in areas of business, law and research. In response to a question about their motivation to become an agent, P9 reflected on their abilities and past saying they chose this career because they wanted to help people:

Just to associate with people, helping people a bit more. Because I have the language skills, so I thought I'll use these abilities to help people.

Interview 1R. P9

Initially, their previous positive experiences in employment across a broad range of areas led P9 to have high expectations of this new career. They set up a sole practice in a major city, working every day, and they commenced marketing. Their goals included employing people and taking the company offshore. However, their client base did not increase, and they found full-time work as an agent was not sustainable. P9 described their identity by referring to the broad range of jobs they had held in the past, but clarified that if asked to describe their profession, they would write 'a migration agent of course!' P9 appeared to appreciate their ability to be part of Protégé and claimed they regularly read posts, but they did not contribute to any discussions. P9 explained this was because they either did not have clients or cases to contribute or wanted to learn themselves from the thing's others were saying:

I think it's a very, very, good idea to have that available so people put questions and share information. I think it's a great idea because sometimes a few things, some of the questions, not all of the questions...I don't know the answer and I have to look up myself and see what's the answer. But sometimes I don't have enough time so I [am] just looking at it and I don't do anything. *Interview 2F. P9*

P9 struggled to connect with Protégé as a concept and with fellow agents taking part in Protégé, preferring to link with agents they already knew. Eventually P9 became disillusioned with the role of agent and their ability to make it a successful business venture, and they discussed taking on work elsewhere.

4.4.10 Protégé 10 (P10)

P10 was in their mid-50s and came from a varied employment background but identified themselves professionally as a solicitor. P10 had previously worked as a lawyer with refugees in detention and as an agent contracted to a large migration firm working with offshore detainees. When P10 joined Protégé, they were working as a sole practitioner in Victoria and found the work isolating and often stressful. Their goal was to build a viable business, focused on humanitarian and refugee visas. P10 felt their experience in this area provided an insight into creating a successful business. However, P10 admitted that they had worked pro bono in the initial stages of their practice and as the workload increased moved to a fee-paying service, working full time on refugee cases. P10 remained concerned about the stress and demands working with these vulnerable clients. P10's partner registered as an agent to join the business, and they moved interstate to set up a new practice co-located with another migration agent. During their time in Protégé, P10 continued to practice in humanitarian and refugee casework but

consistently looked towards other models of practice as a means of moving away from the stress of working within the refugee area:

...the asylum seeker work is also very interesting, um, but I've been doing it, I've done quite a lot of it, and I just don't think I have, ... I can devote the passion to it that it needs, you know, anymore. In fairness to the clients, as much as to me. Not that I'm doing a bad job, but you really need the fire in the belly to do the, the asylum seeker work well.

Interview 3R. P10

However, they continued to volunteer at a primary service for refugees, saying it was better to do pro bono work in the 'structured environment of a legal centre'. Despite this expertise in refugee and humanitarian law, interactions and interviews with other protégés revealed P10 was not considered by them to be an expert in refugee or humanitarian visas. P10's advice was sought across a diverse range of visas and they contributed to the VCoP on multiple topics.

4.4.11 Protégé 11 (P11)

P11 was in their early 40s and married with a young child. They had an employment background in government and before working as a migration agent, had worked in settlement services in a regional town. During Protégé, P11 moved location between states to accommodate their partners' work. Nevertheless, they viewed the move as a positive step for the family, and P11 felt less isolated working in a large city as a practitioner despite working from home. However, they found that building a new client base remained a challenge. P11 had an initial goal of expanding the practice to include English tutoring, along with migration advice, and to be in a place where they could hire staff to assist with the work. Over time, as the workload increased, P11 hired meeting

rooms in the city but remained working on a part-time basis for flexibility with the family. While P11 was initially concerned about the reputation of migration agents in general, they were positive about telling people this was their new profession. Over time in Protégé, their confidence in owning the label of migration agent increased:

I think that I'm pretty confident about my identity, and confident about telling people that that's what I do. I know when I first started out that you would, I was a little bit, um, ah, I suppose not as confident about telling people that that's what I do. I suppose I'm proud of what I do, and I've had very positive feedback, so that helps me, that I'm doing the right thing. So yeah, no, I'm in a good place, I suppose, and I perceive myself as being a good agent. *Interview 2R. P11*

4.4.12 Protégé 12 (P12)

P12 had a migrant background and wanted to focus their practice on migrants from their country of origin. Even though P12 was in their mid-40s and held a practicing certificate in law, their business cards declared their profession as a migration agent and carried the symbol of their ethnic community. This created a distinct separation between their identity and practice as a solicitor and migration agent:

... Migration law will be the sole interest. I operate as a migration agent and I have clients sign a disclaimer to make them understand that I'm not a migration lawyer. You know, it's a totally separate business as far as I'm concerned. *Interview 1R. P12*

P12 had experience running a business and was comfortable in establishing the practice with an 'office front'. While P12 had planned to start slowly and expected to

make a profit in the third year of practice, they still found the inconsistent nature of the work puzzling. P12 eventually realised that this was an area of practice that relied on cycles within the migration system:

But I mean, you know, when you give, people initial advice, it takes them a couple of weeks to get back anyway, I mean, that's just the way it is. And there's just busy points, when you get lots of documents in and stuff and other times when it's quiet, I suppose. *Interview 2F. P12*

Eventually, P12 moved to a rural area with their partner and maintained a virtual office in the city, their client base continued to expand by word of mouth, and by the end of Protégé, P12 was working full time in the migration practice.

4.4.13 Protégé 13 (P13)

P13 was a first generation Australian. They were in their late 30s. They felt their life experience as a child of migrants provided a 'front-row seat' to witness the barriers and marginalisation that migrants experienced. P13 described their commitment and motivation to practice in migration as a "general sort of passion for social justice and equity". They had studied law and had worked for engineering firms and a range of government agencies before undertaking the Graduate Certificate. Throughout Protégé, P13 worked at a migrant resource centre, as well as volunteering with refugees. Their goal was to own a migration business and continue to work with refugees while specialising in student and family visas. Throughout Protégé, P13 continued to work part-time with refugees in a remote area of Australia as one of only two migration agents in the region. Despite reaching out to other migration agents in the area, they remained professionally isolated and found Protégé provided a level of support they had not been able to find within their region. Feedback, lack of isolation and the knowledge that they

could ‘reach out’ to other agents were the primary gains P13 had from their experience in Protégé:

I mean, on a few occasions I put up some issues myself. It was really wonderful to get the responses that I did. I mean there was one agent in particular who contacted me outside of the forum with an email address and a mobile number, because he had tribunal experience, with those sorts of cases and that was just fantastic. *Interview 3R. P13*

4.4.14 Protégé 14 (P14)

P14 was in their early 50s, married, and working closely with their partner’s education business. They had a varied professional background and explained that their experiences teaching overseas attracted them to working as an agent. While P14 identified as a migration agent, they did not like the name ‘agent’, insisting that it held negative connotations; instead, P14 preferred the term ‘consultant’:

The word “agent” seems to imply that you’re somewhere outside of the process. I mean you know, you’re never outside of the process cos you’re dealing with people and their, goals essentially, and you’re not outside of the process; you’re deeply involved with people, even be it for a short amount of time. *Interview 1R. P14*

P14 had a business background and established their practice in the CBD. Their primary goal was to be a ‘competent migration agent’. Though P14 had goals to employ staff and grow the business, they had a definitive concept of how big they wanted the business to be. At the end of Protégé, P14 was pleased with the growth in the business, describing their past week as “chaotic”. P14 employed part-time staff to assist with

migration advice and administrative work and credited part of their success to a disciplined approach to business. P14 credited both their health and growth in confidence to participating in Protégé, which they said improved not only their level of confidence but their “level of professionalism”. P14 intensely focused on their clients, and the impact their work had on the client’s life. P14 felt they had achieved the goals of being respected as a professional and described their work as a positive factor in their life, saying they “got out of bed each morning and could hardly wait to get to their office”. P14 continued to liaise with many of the protégés after the Protégé project ended.

4.4.15 Protégé 15 (P15)

P15 was a solicitor, in their early 60s working as the sole migration agent in a regional law firm. They had spent a lot of their working life outside of Australia and were committed to assisting migrants. P15 moved into studying migration law because they were concerned about the role politics was playing in migration and the impact it had on them. Their feelings about politics and their past work with a community group that assisted refugees, prompted them to find a way to use their law degree to help people. Nevertheless, P15 did not register as an agent through the legal provisions, which rested on holding a practicing certificate – instead, they undertook to complete the Graduate Certificate in recognition of the complexity of immigration law:

I mean administrative law for instance, it’s a very specialised and complicated area these days and, you know if you haven’t needed to do anything much in it, you don’t, you know... you don’t really understand a lot of the complexities and the way Australian laws developing you know, in relation to various things. *Interview 1R. P15*

Initially, P15's primary goal was to become competent in their work as a migration agent. However, circumstances changed when they bought their law firm with a dual focus on legal conveyancing and migration. P15 found they needed to focus on running a successful business and ensuring there was enough cash flow to maintain staff. P15 joined Protégé in early 2014 with the second intake of participants. At the end of the Protégé project, P15 described themselves as "virtually a sole practitioner" in a firm that was "not yet viable", focusing on partner visas. P15 felt that Protégé had taught them how to network, and they continued to rely on the networks formed when they needed assistance with client advice and practical matters. When asked about assistance provided from the Law Society, they were clear there was a difference in how they accessed advice, and the advice they received, from agents and lawyers:

I guess, ... I suppose the thing that I'd go to the Law society for would be your solicitors rules I suppose. No, my queries and discussions with my colleague are on very practical matters and handling clients matters. And they can be as simple as, 'I can't find 'x' on the online site'. You know, the kind of things that just bring you to a grinding halt when you first start. *Interview 3R. P15*

4.4.16 Protégé 16 (P16)

P16 was a child of migrants. They were in their late 30s and married with children. P16 worked as a solicitor and viewed migration law as an additional service, in the firm they owned with their partner:

The market went down with the Global Financial Crisis. So, lots of the areas of law that we were doing were getting eroded. So, we wanted

something else that could add on to what we were already doing.

Interview 1R. P16

P16 found they did not get any migration work in their first year of working as a registered agent and seriously considered the option of not re-registering. When they joined Protégé, they were working from a home office. Despite the ability to work as an agent without undertaking the Graduate Certificate qualification, they had done so because they considered they could not practice successfully unless they “knew how it worked”. P16 felt “excited about being a migration agent” and considered they would make a “good migration agent” with a good reputation. During their time in Protégé, their workload began to build, and migration remained a part of the broader legal work the firm did. Eventually, P16 ran a satellite office in another regional city, but also met with clients in their home. They continued to describe their professional identity as a duality of a solicitor and registered migration agent. P16 explained they were a “shy person socially”, who found it hard to market their skills. They credited their exposure to Protégé with an increase in their confidence and a lessening of professional isolation. However, despite enjoying migration work, P16 felt their expertise and role as a solicitor negatively impacted on their work as they effectively had priced themselves out of the market:

... look at any one time... I would only have one visa application going at a time. But virtually when one finishes another has been around the corner. I've sort of priced myself out of the market a bit because if I'm doing migration work, I'm doing it at a cost of not doing other types of work. You know, I'm a solicitor of almost 20 years now, so I can charge a bit for work as a solicitor, so I only get the hard ones and I don't get many people who are willing to pay me to do the work for them.

Interview 3R. P16

When Protégé ended, P16 joined the new group and found that it provided the safety net they had experienced in Protégé.

4.4.17 Protégé 17 (P17)

P17 was married, and in their early 70s, they had worked for government departments and tribunals, focusing on foreign affairs and refugee work. Their professional identity remained linked to providing legislative advice and working with refugees. The original goal for P17 was to focus on refugee work, building on experience, and to do this P17 worked in sole practice and as a contractor for a major firm acting for refugees in offshore detention. Changes to legislation and policy meant the opportunity to focus solely on refugees was no longer an option. This was a devastating event for P17, and they felt forced to move interstate, seeking lower living expenses and new opportunities:

Well suddenly overnight I lost most of what I was earning. *Interview 3R.*

P17

P17 worked from home and began to train as an education agent to build up a new side of the business. Despite personal struggles building up clientele, P17 became a source of valuable information to other protégés; recognising this, P17 reached out to others that needed assistance:

I think the connection, yeah, those ones were people who needed specific help that I was in a position to give...I mean, in general I'm one of the students, rather than a teacher. But having served on the tribunals for six years, you know, I do have some experience which sometimes is useful to people, and they know that. I've actually presented on the Tuesday

evening, I've presented two or three times, drawing on that experience, and I think those sessions seemed to have gone down well. *Interview R3.*

P17

P17 remained client-focused throughout the Protégé project. They described casework and individual clients in great detail. Despite constant setbacks and intermittent disillusionment, they pursued their work as a migration agent. By the end of the Protégé project their workload was steady, providing enough income to continue working. P17's commitment to both clients and fellow protégés remained when the Protégé site closed down, and several protégés commented on the assistance P17 continued to provide for them when they had difficult clients or casework.

4.4.18 Protégé 18 (P18)

P18 was in their early 50s and had migrated to Australia in 2009. They had been registered as an agent for one year when they joined Protégé. They held a Doctorate and had worked as an academic and for a variety of non-government organisations. P18 was confident that their own migrant experience would assist people in attempting to make the same transition:

I thought that having been... a migrant myself, I would be able to provide a service to people that would actually be a personal service as well...I saw a lot of people complaining that they were just a number and the agent never got back to them or they didn't understand. I thought I'd be somebody who would provide an understanding service that would actually have value because of that. *Interview IR. P18*

P18's goal was to work as an agent and have a small practice with regular clientele focusing or specialising in one visa area. Initially, they worked in a migration agency as a subcontractor but became concerned about some of the work practices of that agency. For P18, working as a sole practitioner meant they were responsible for their work, which provided them with the opportunity to ensure they could work ethically. P18's practice grew slowly; in the beginning of Protégé, they had very few clients. They were working directly from home and had experienced a financial loss in the first year of practice. P18 had considered not re-registering in their second year. However, by the end of Protégé, they were experiencing a steady stream of clients and worked with a range of visas. P18 credited the positive experiences they had in Protégé with their decision to re-register and keep trying.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the broadening of the inquiry space and boundaries of the VCoP. This provided a means by which to consider the impact researcher interviews, and the work protégés did outside of the VCoP, had upon their professional identity development. This concept is further developed in the following chapters. This chapter has included vignettes that brought statistical details of the protégés to life and contributed an insight into the lives and experiences of the people who took part in Protégé. Importantly, this unearthed their perceptions of their professional identity, prior to their engagement with Protégé and throughout the project. The 18 protégés who participated in this study represented over half a cohort of the broader Protégé project. They all contributed to the research through interviews, discussions with facilitators, and through their interactions in the online site. Protégés came from across Australia and abroad.

The vignettes brought to life the people who choose to be migration agents. The 18 proteges in this project remain demographically representative of the broader profession. They came from diverse employment backgrounds, they had a close connection to migration through their background, birth or work, and they had all purposefully chosen to enter a new career. For the majority of the protégés their initial drive to pursue this career did not change, and further chapters build on the narratives presented in the vignettes to describe how protégés navigated their early years of practice in order to achieve their goals. The research findings reveal how protégés considered their perception of their professional identity before, during and after they left the Protégé project.

Chapter 5 discusses the VCoP in detail and the following chapters expose how extending the boundaries of the inquiry space has revealed crucial influences on protégés' professional identity formation.

Chapter 5 Protégé as a Virtual Community of Practice

The approach of connecting professionals in virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP) is increasingly common and often successful (Cochrane & Narayan, 2017; Cochrane & Naryan, 2016; Dorner, 2012; Struminger et al., 2017). This thesis argues that there is a critical difference between Protégé and other VCoPs that goes beyond the use of technology. This difference lies in the purposeful design used to create the online environment for the target group of Australian migration agents in their first years of practice, and in the subsequent interactions' members experienced outside of the online environment.

As discussed in previous chapters, the concept of a CoP, particularly as it applies to a virtual community, has evolved at the same time as technology has. Rapid change has resulted in fast uptake of technology by communities, and in the technologies used by communities. This chapter investigates the concept of a VCoP, the various changes in definitions of a VCoP since Wenger's early consideration of virtual communities (2002b, 2009), and how these apply to the learnings from Protégé. This investigation also takes into account the changes in technology since the design of Protégé in 2013. It does so in order to address the research questions, and the expectation that claims regarding the differences between Protégé and other VCoP's take into account the evolution of VCoPs and research into this area.

It is not enough to assert that there is a difference between Protégé and other versions of VCoPs, particularly those that focus on professional practice. In order to understand the aspects of Protégé that are different from the broad range of VCoPs, it is essential to examine the way CoPs and VCoPs are perceived by those who research them.

There is a variety of definitions of a VCoP, from Wenger et al.'s (2002) initial tentative descriptions of a “distributed community” and “digital habitat” (2009), to Vollenbroek's (2019) definition of a VCoP as “a social network where people in an organisational context come together around a common topic, passion or interest and regularly interact on- and offline with a focus on knowledge management, innovation, learning, and social networking” (p. 26). Many CoPs that include virtual interaction as well as face to face connections, such as those identified by Vollenbroek (2019), are not defined as virtual communities. In a comprehensive study of 60 articles that used a definition of a CoP, Vollenbroek found that only nine incorporated the terminology ‘virtual’, ‘web’, or ‘online’ to describe them. His study of VCoPs focuses on the role an individual may play within an organisational VCoP, and his definition of a VCoP reflects this focus. Importantly, his definition differs from previous concepts of a VCoP in that he extends the definition to include offline interactions (p. 27), an approach this thesis has adopted. Nevertheless, his concept of a VCoP differs from the design of Protégé in that he conceives of a VCoP as a community that is “generally easy to enter and leave, [is] non-exclusive, and [has] a heterogeneous membership” (p. 26).

The primary research question requires a definitive conclusion regarding the nature of a VCoP and the applicability of that question to Protégé. Defining a VCoP is crucial to understanding the differences and similarities between a CoP and VCoP. These can be both striking and subtle. The need to purposefully design a VCoP is one of the fundamental differences between the two concepts. This purposeful design is crucial to the research question and integral to the findings.

As discussed in chapter 2, the literature defining and examining Communities of Practice (CoP) relies upon the initial and ongoing work of Wenger and his colleagues. Academics such as Rogers (2000, in Smith et al., 2017, p. 223) have added additional criteria to the familiar concept of a CoP as a site of mutual engagement, joint enterprise,

and shared repertoire, when assessing what constitutes a VCoP (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). However, the majority of research that considers the establishment or role of a VCoP focuses broadly on specific professions working together online, or on the specific technological requirements of establishing an online community (Barnett et al. 2012; Dubé, et al. 2006; Johnson, 2001; Volenbroek, 2019).

This chapter revisits the theory underpinning CoPs and moves on to consider research into VCoPs and Protégé as a VCoP. This thesis proposes a definition of a VCoP based on criteria advocated by previous research into VCoPs that has highlighted best practice in both design and assessment of the integrity and success of a VCoP. It extends current understandings of VCoPs through the presentation of additional criteria for a professional VCoP, based on the design of Protégé. This expands the parameters that Wenger (1998) Wenger et al., (2002) and E. Wenger-Trayner and B. Wenger-Trayner (2015) laid out as essential for the formation of a CoP and adds to the literature which considers the nature and impact of VCoP's (Henri & Pudelko, 2003).

It was noted in chapter 2 that Henri and Pudelko (2003) proposed members of a VCoP were already members of a “given community of practice”, regardless of whether they were aware it was so. The acknowledgement of a broader ‘unacknowledged, or unknown’ community such as a profession or trade that gave rise to a CoP, expanded consideration of what influenced or drove the formation of a CoP. This perception of influence rests on the proposal that in a designed community, the boundaries emerge from the design and the community itself (Henri & Pudelko, 2013). Vollenbroek (2019) also acknowledged that many VCoP's will reach ‘purposefully or organically beyond their own borders’ (2019, p.9).

This thesis argues that Protégé was specifically designed as a VCoP that included communication and interactions of community members that took place outside of the online environment, but did not involve face to face interaction, or interaction without the

use of technology. The design was a factor in ensuring that the development of the protégés professional identity was aligned with their professional role outside of their participation as members of the VCoP.

The experiences of facilitators and protégés within the VCoP are highlighted through direct quotes and descriptive memos, which demonstrate how the design impacted on the professional identity development and the growth of professional practice of all who took part in Protege. Finally, this chapter lays the basis for the claims made in the following chapter, namely that the design of Protégé as a VCoP allowed critical aspects of professional growth and identity development to occur through the provision of a virtual supportive workplace for early career practitioners.

5.1 Defining a Virtual Community of Practice.

The examination by Wenger et al. (2009) of digital habitats included technological platforms that are now used widely by communities engaged in social networking, such as CoPs and VCoPs. The email group of 2,500 Myeloproliferative Disorder (MPD) supporters and sufferers, examined by Wenger et al. (2009) and discussed in chapter 2, describes a community that is like many Facebook groups (p. 27). Today, there are multiple Facebook pages dedicated to connecting migration agents across Australia (Dickie, 2018). However, there is a danger in considering Facebook groups for practitioners as automatically meeting the criteria of a VCoP. A connection of hundreds or even thousands of participants, such as the one described by Wenger et al. (2009), can fail to meet the goals of a VCoP, which is explicitly established to enhance professional practice within a specific domain of knowledge. Instead, such groups are more likely to be considered a network, where practitioners interact together to exchange information about visa processes and develop professional contacts. A large group or network with undefined goals can result in mixed expectations and experiences within the

community. Without a tightly defined goal, the focus of a large group of members interacting within a virtual community, such as a Facebook group, can easily be contested, which would negate their usefulness as a substitute for supervised practice, a supportive workplace, or a learning environment.

Nevertheless, Wenger et al. (2009) have captured the way technology platforms like Facebook and Zoom have expanded the possibilities of what it means to be together. In a prescient statement, they observed that technology had resulted in a “profound effect on the behaviour of, and our notion of community” (p. 50). Indeed, technology is listed as the key difference between a VCoP and a CoP.

This research builds on the necessity for a purposeful design through the inclusion of a design aimed at replicating a workplace environment. This thesis is in agreement with Vollenbroek’s (2019) premise that interaction offline can be included within a VCoP. This rests on the premise that in a designed community, the boundaries emerge from the design and the community itself. Therefore, the VCoP called Protégé grew to include communication and interactions of community members that took place outside of the online environment. This thesis defines a VCoP as:

An intentionally designed, informally mediated community, where a group of individuals, separated by geography and time, can join together in conversation within a virtual locality to collaboratively create knowledge, reflect and learn individually and communally through sharing their practice experience about a specific domain of practice.

Essential to this definition are seven key components identified by researchers as critical elements of a successful VCoP:

1. Accessible technology (Barnett et al., 2012; Dorner & Kumar, 2017; Johnson, 2001; Smith et al., 2017; Vollenbroek, 2019).
2. The domain of practice (Bettiga et al., 2018; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mcdonald et al., 2008; Vollenbroek, 2019; E.Wenger-Trayner & B.Wenger-Trayner, 2015).
3. Goals (Ardichvili et al., 2005; Barnett et al., 2012; Henri & Pudelko, 2003; Watkins et al. 2017).
4. Consistent and reliable facilitators who promote collaboration (Barnett et al., 2012; Dorner, 2012; Probst & Borzillo, 2008).
5. Communication in a risk-free environment (Bettiga et al., 2018; Borzillo et al., 2011; Hibbert & Rich, 2006; Probst & Borzillo, 2008; Vollenbroek, 2019).
6. A specific community of practitioners (Barnett et al., 2012; Borzillo et al., 2011; Hibbert & Rich, 2006; Smith et al., 2017; Vollenbroek, 2019).
7. A Collaborative space (Bettiga et al., 2018; Dubé et al., 2006; Vollenbroek, 2019).

5.2 How Protégé as a VCoP meets the definition adopted in this thesis

Protégé was a project that ran from 2013 to 2014. The advances in digital technology since then, and the use of social media platforms to connect, have increased (McLoughlin et al., 2018). However, the fundamental aspects identified in recent studies (Vollenbroek, 2019) as essential for the creation and success of a VCoP existed within the design of Protégé. Using the seven key components identified above and incorporated into the definition of a VCoP used in this thesis, Protégé met the parameters outlined above. The ways in which it has done so are outlined below. This chapter explores how

Protégé went beyond the factors identified above as being critical to the success of a VCoP.

5.2.1 Accessible technology

Dorner & Kumar (2017) found that the ability to use technology within a VCoP is a crucial factor in the success of online collaborative mentoring. The Protégé VCoP site was designed to be a non-threatening and accessible site that looked familiar to all. The design of the site was deliberately based on a website that proved to be the most recognisable form of accessing a virtual space in 2013. The site was easily accessed through a specific login, and through sections based on wayfinding (Golledge et al., 2000; Dickie, & van Galen, 2016.) protocols that provided different spaces for interaction and that were intended to mimic the physical and psychological environment of the workplace. This included an ‘advisors office’, a ‘café’, and ‘meeting room’ (see Appendix G). Email alerts allowed participants to see and consider contributions to the site without logging in. Protégé interviews and discussions were conducted by telephone or teleconference depending on the needs of the individuals concerned. Interactions with facilitators and researchers outside of the virtual space were conducted by telephone at the convenience of the protégés, allowing them to intersect their daily work with engagement in the project.

5.2.2 Domain of practice

As noted in chapter 2, McDonald et al. (2008) include locality and a social and collegial space within their definition of a domain. The Protégé project parameters ensured that the domain of knowledge and practice was limited to the work migration agents were doing with their clients and the business issues migration agents faced working in sole practice. However, there were no temporal limitations on access or

participation during the process, and this asynchronous feature was a fundamental difference to the networking opportunities available to new agents at the time. Despite the focus of the VCoP on practice knowledge, the collegiality that evolved during the project was evident in the interactions between participants. While there appeared to be limited sharing of personal issues within the VCoP site, protégés freely discussed their experiences and problems with their clients, the department, and their businesses, thus allowing both the protégés and facilitators to expand on their struggles and successes.

Discussions with facilitators and researchers occurred outside of the VCoP site where protégés shared personal details, problems, and progress. One discussion between a facilitator and protégé briefly considered work and then focused predominately on a shared love of sailing. These discussions, along with the site interactions, provided evidence of a growth of trust and collegiality between protégés as a community. The connections they formed resulted from their ability to interact with each other as professional peers. This was evident in their decision to establish a private site for continued interaction following the closure of Protégé.

5.2.3 Goals

The Protégé project had specific goals for the research team as a site of academic inquiry. However, these were not necessarily the goals of the participants in the VCoP. The first intake of Protégés met once for a briefing day that established the research goals of the project, the roles facilitators would have, and the research outline. In addition to the briefing day, the participants received a written description of the project, and a consent form, which included the project objectives. The participant information sheet included the following information: “We are undertaking this project to investigate ways to support newly registered agents by assisting the development of their professional

identity and engagement within a professional community. Protégé will create an online environment that mimics the professional support found in an ideal office”.

Despite the briefing day and subsequent material, there initially remained a general sense of confusion amongst the protégés about the intent of the project. This included aspects of what it was meant to achieve, how it would proceed, what commitment it would entail, and the role protégés would play. Protégés asked how the project could help them in their practice, and queried if it would involve teaching or guided discussions:

...I don't really know. Initially, I thought it was like mentoring; in that ... it's like what we do with my friends, only with more experienced agents. Like...to work on a problem together and to just have that support. Now, I'm more inclined to think it's more ... they – the project leaders – putting forward the issues, rather than we have... each of us having our own issue and bringing it forward? *Interview 1 R. P6*

While this initial confusion appeared to reflect concerns that a VCoP must have specific goals, the conclusions of Barnett et al. (2012) that they are not necessary were confirmed. Protégés eventually overcame their confusion as they adapted to the functions in the site, and they established informal protocols surrounding the way they would interact with each other. Protégés also determined the parameters of their contributions to the project, and they determined the norms of behaviour, their means of interacting, and the acceptable level of legal discourse associated with their discussions of practice. This cohesion occurred so fast that some protégés lamented the initial impact the second intake of a new cohort of protégés seemed to have on the VCoP, as they felt they were returning to the beginning, watching the struggles the new cohort were experiencing in adjusting to the norms of behaviour.

The fact that members of a group may not all share the same goals is normal; however, Protégé demonstrates that it is essential in a professional VCoP that there be a commitment to an overarching goal. The goal protégés focused on was their need to ensure they progressed their practice knowledge, not that they could use the VCoP as a place to source a quick answer. This became clear when the second cohort of protégés was introduced into the group, and new members failed to interact in certain ‘unspoken ways’, which seemed to impact on the trust some protégés felt had previously existed. The interaction from newcomers that concerned the original group focused on some people who were seeking answers and advice without conducting the necessary research beforehand. This period of uncertainty did not appear to last, as protégés reinforced their agreed ways of behaving. As a result, the goal protégés set for themselves of gaining practice knowledge was easily maintained.

I would hate just to be told this is the answer and never be able to find it for myself, or never know why that was the answer. I feel like we’re getting exactly all the help we need as well as being given the leg up we need so later on we’ll know this for ourselves and we know where to find it. And we know why things are the way they are. It’s not just a simple answer we get a lot more out of it. *Interview 1 R P7*

5.2.4 Consistent and reliable facilitators

Facilitation in a VCoP is considered essential (Barnett et al., 2012; Dorner, 2012; Johnson, 2001). Johnson (2012) calls facilitation a “constructivist concept” (p. 49) and explains that literature has traditionally seen the facilitator as a “gentle guide” (p. 49). Overall, the critical task of facilitators is thought to be that of improving collaboration,

keeping discussions focused, and making sure rules of engagement are clear (Barnett et al., 2012; Dorner, 2012; Dorner & Kárpáti, 2010).

The role of facilitator in Protégé was modelled on the aspects of workplace learning identified by Eraut (2007); however, the implementation of that model was based on the findings of Dorner (2012; 2010), who studied the work and impact of mentors in an online community. Dorner (2012) found that the role of a mentor in an online environment was no longer viewed as an experienced person offering assistance and advice to a less experienced person (p. 158). Instead, mentoring in an online community was viewed as a reciprocal process whereby both newcomer and their mentor are the co-constructors of knowledge. She found that e-mentors changed the way they communicated depending on the task they were undertaking; for example, when focusing on discussions, they promoted a comfortable environment by purposefully adopting the tone of a friendly colleague. When they were undertaking a management role, they acted more assertively but ensured they put in place mechanisms to scaffold the learning experience (p. 166). She concluded that e-mentors establish the environment for learning by deliberately adopting the role of a “reflective practitioner and colleague”, scaffolding interactions, and providing the conditions for group collaboration (2012, p. 168). She called this “synergistic co-mentoring where the complementary relationship provides the basis for professional growth experienced by both the teacher participants and the “e-mentor” (p. 169).

The research team purposefully chose the term facilitator to describe the role of the practice knowledge expert within the project. This was to differentiate from the role a mentor would play within a professional relationship and to allow protégés to engage as a peer professional with the facilitators. In order to do this, the facilitators adopted a role that encompassed that of supervisors, mentors, and experienced peers, initiating and encouraging the production of learning artefacts, and ensuring that protégés understood

the norms of practice they were expected to learn and adhere to, through timely feedback and collaboration. The facilitators' descriptions of their work and experiences in Protégé reflect the way their role is outlined in previous research into facilitators and mentors in virtual and physical CoPs. Importantly, the data reveals aspects of co-mentoring, as discussed by Dorner (2012) and others (Deptula & Williams, 2017). Despite the title of facilitator that was used by Protégé, the data support the conclusion that Dorner's terminology of synergistic co-mentoring better describes the role they played.

5.2.5 Communication in a risk-free environment

A successful CoP requires a level of trust between participants (Baker & Beames, 2016; Vollenbroek, 2019). Johnson (2001) has argued that this is even more important in a VCoP where the written word remains visible and in a temporal stasis (p. 50). The need to trust colleagues was evident in the vulnerability protégés displayed interacting with each other, and the relationships they built over time. While some of the second cohort of protégés did not reach the same level of engagement, others in this second cohort did so very quickly. P10 lamented that the “tone of Protégé” had “changed when the new people came in”, saying that they no longer felt as “confident anymore in the confidentiality or the collegiality” the community had offered.

One facilitator noted in a memo that the introduction of a second cohort had once again increased the workload with regards to responding to things “they should know better than to ask”.

Nevertheless, the naivety of the second cohort made F1 realise “how far the protégés had come”:

The old protégés have come a long way and seem to have 'matured' in the process; the feedback is strongly supportive of the program, and they

all want to continue in some form. They have recognised benefits of re-assurance, being able to do more and take on things they wouldn't otherwise have been able to do, comfort, less stress, group knowledge. I am thinking that they have reached the stage of really becoming an "online community" and they are willing to "put back and share" that experience which is very interesting also. They seem to welcome the newbies and are pleased they can also benefit the way the existing Protégés have. F1 Memo 08/03/2014 titled: aargh new protégés s who thought of that?

However, P14 made a deliberate effort to welcome new members and provide a safe and helpful community for them. P14 commented that they recognised the new cohort “were asking the same questions we had all asked in our first few weeks” and expressed a desire to help them adapt quickly. For others, Protégé presented a safety net where they could run their ideas and research past their peers and receive a reliable response:

I think it was a very trusting space, and people ...including myself were confident that it was confidential, and, that people could be candid about the, issues that they were facing, and also the successes they were having, or, you know...the challenges that they were having. And I think that, that's very affirming, you know, that you think that, “Oh, I'm not the only one who bugged that up or didn't know what to do in that situation”, or what have you. And I think, it was structured well, in that regard, that people did have confidence that it was all sort of in camera.

Interview 1 R P7

5.2.6 A specific community of practitioners

The protégés who took part in the project were agents in their first 18 months of practice. There was an additional requirement that they had finalised at least one client file. These parameters were established to ensure that while practitioners would be at different stages in their experiences as migration agents, they would not be perceived by others as experts. However, some protégés quickly assumed roles as experts in specific areas of practice.

5.2.7 Collaborative space

The data confirmed that protégés actively sought to learn and create knowledge within the VCoP site. Protégés presented problems, sought and gave advice to each other, within the discussion forums. The engagement of more than one person within each thread, and the asynchronous nature of the discussions, ensured that advice could be built upon and influenced by other protégés and their experiences in practice. Protégés also determined that they had expertise in some areas that others did not, or that they could learn through teaching others about new areas of practice. They accomplished this through their recorded classes where protégés elected areas they may be interested in presenting, and they invited others to attend the class on a specific day (see Appendix H). Recordings were accessible in the online library for those who wished to access them in their own time.

5.3 Protégé: A VCoP and a virtual workplace

When the seven key components are considered, Protégé meets these elements of a viable VCoP. However, Protégé was much more than a viable VCoP. Protégé met the needs of a professional community, through a design based on the requirements set out by Eraut to be a supportive workplace, and through the architectural design requirements

outlined in chapter 2 that Wenger et al. (2002) claimed would open a dialogue between an inside and outside perspective and evoke a sense of “aliveness” (p. 51).

Therefore, the definition of a professional VCoP proposed by this thesis includes an additional criterion that is not specifically identified in the seven components previously discussed. The researcher defines a professional VCoP as:

An intentionally designed, informally mediated community, where a group of individuals, separated by geography and time, can join together in conversation within a virtual locality to collaboratively create knowledge, reflect and learn individually and communally through sharing their practice experience about a specific domain of practice.

The design ensured that there were several ways protégés and facilitators learned and worked with each other in the VCoP. The Protégé site intended to be more than an online facility or tool for people to share their experiences and learn from each other. The designer worked with the research team to incorporate architectural design features of Wayfinding (Golledge et al., 2000; Dickie & van Galen, 2016) to create the same spaces the ideal workplace may have. The researcher and educational designer had previously employed these techniques in developing an online post graduate course site (Dickie, & van Galen, 2016, p. 290), where physical spaces and activities were recreated. Through the utilisation of these design techniques, the site became a destination or workplace where protégés could work and learn.

The design focused on “strengthening the identity of groupings into clearly defined entry nodes” (Dickie & van Galen, 2016, p. 290) or destinations that were consistent in their shape, font, and means of access. These nodes included spaces where the new employee could informally discuss work or seek advice in the ‘staff cafe’, or with

a more experienced peer or superior in their office. It also included spaces that mimicked areas to hold formal staff meetings, along with more informal places for socialising. The design of the virtual office site featured:

- A private sign-in facility for all protégés.
- A landing page that provided access to the Protégé VCoP site rooms.
- Shared spaces for discussion conceived as ‘a café’ where peers might discuss problems or successes of their casework, without revealing client details of the case. It was also space where proteges could socialise.
- The facilitators ‘office’ intended to allow Protégés to discuss personal or problematic issues they did not want to share with their peers.
- Shared audio and video spaces as meeting rooms for continuing professional development or group meetings.
- A private chat forum for Protégés.
- A library with resources such as legislation and relevant case law.
- An events calendar for both social and formal announcements.
- Activities within the site triggered an email that alerted protégés to communications when they were not logged into the site.

These elements moved the Protégé site from a ‘digital habitat’ or technology tool for a community into a virtual workplace. The video and phone conferencing facilities were used by protégés and facilitators to conduct their discussions. The shared meeting rooms were used to prepare and present the professional development videos protégés produced. Access to those who worked or took part in Protégé, either through discussion boards, video conferencing or phone, was through the site - extending the virtual office locale into the workplace or home of each protégé.

There is no doubt that protégés identified with each other as a unique group of agents. However, their perception of themselves as professional migration agents was not limited to that of an agent within Protégé, nor did the identity of being a ‘protégé’ appear to be binding or lasting. Identifying as a member of the Protégé VCoP appeared to be a temporary facet of their broader identity as agents.

The experiences of those in Protégé highlights that practice is not only what happens between members in the VCoP, but it also relates to broader areas of practice in the discipline. While protégés developed ways of working together, including the production of artefacts, including the production of artefacts (professional development videos and guides), or what Wenger (2009) refers to as reifications, the primary gain from the VCoP site was an increase in their confidence in their ability to practice their profession. This increase in confidence arose through the recognition of aspects of self in their fellow protégés.

5.4 Learning to practice in Protégé

Crucial to learning to practice within the Protégé VCoP site was how knowledge within the VCoP was shared and developed. Eraut (2004a) argued that a CoP could not replace the essential experience of a supportive workplace. He claimed that those who advocate the benefits of a CoP fail to acknowledge the unequal nature of knowledge sharing within the CoP. He warned that there may be alternate or competing goals in sharing practice knowledge that either protect or harm individuals. This observation about power draws attention again to the design of the VCoP. There is a need to acknowledge the difference between working within a spontaneous CoP and one designed for a particular purpose. Johnson (2001, p. 45) observed that all VCoPs must, by their nature, be purpose-built, or they will not come into being however, he warned that merely building a site would not guarantee a sustainable community. Johnson’s analysis

predates this research by more than a decade; however, his specifications for a successful VCoP continue to provide a useful comparison to the design of Protégé.

The experience of protégés within the VCoP site supported Johnson's (2001) observation that the traditional notions of legitimate peripheral participation, which resulted in a movement from the periphery to the centre of participation, may not be relevant. The role described as 'the lurker' in online learning, was not examined in this thesis; however, the interviews and discussions with protégés indicated how their engagement within the VCoP site developed. Protégés described how they initially used the site to build up a database of knowledge that they could access at any given time. They would download and store discussions from the forums in case they needed the information in the future or use the interactions as a means of reflection and research for their practice. The act of downloading and storing discussions indicates they were participating and reflecting on their work 'out of sight':

It just exposes you to things that you're not exposed to when you're not getting a lot of work. You know, posts and things, even though you might not always post an answer on them. Often, you know I'll go to the legislation and look it up, and say to myself, "Okay, what would I have done?" and is that the same as the answers that came out for other people or what other people have done. Discussion F2 P16

The decision of protégés to further create and share knowledge through live recorded professional development classes, resulted in a democratic process whereby all knowledge and experiences were considered equal. There is no data recorded regarding attendance or viewing of sessions to establish if they were accessed by all protégés. However, the ability to do so was available to all protégés.

A protégé discussion that ranges over four days, from Monday at 4 pm to the following Thursday morning, reflects the impact of these sessions on camaraderie and practice knowledge (see Appendix I). In the discussion ‘Bridging visas – no work conditions’, P12 refers to an online Protégé CPD as an “excellent presentation” and clarifies that they wished they had asked the question they were about to ask during the presentation. However, the situation they were facing was new, so the question had not occurred to them. The responses from protégés pointed to “another discussion regarding a similar issue”. P12 did not hesitate to reveal their lack of knowledge of the visa implications; they reached back to a previous discussion in Protégé to demonstrate that they had applied the advice given at that time, but it did not seem to meet their situation. P12 was then reminded by others that the PowerPoint provided in the online video included a similar case, and they responded that the advice everyone had provided was “good news” for their client.

The democratic nature of sharing knowledge between all protégés of differing experience was in stark contrast to the continuing development opportunities available to new agents working outside of protégé. These remain strictly controlled by the OMARA. The format of an OMARA approved professional development activity can be a seminar, online or self-directed study, or attendance at a workshop or conference. While these can present networking opportunities, they do not extend across time or locality. The need to pass a test at the end of the session ensures that they do not present the possibility of building a trusting environment where one can expose a lack of knowledge. As a result, the exchanges between protégés and the online sessions they created acted as a means of defining the group as a separate entity working outside of the broader professional community.

5.5 Building confidence and competence in Protégé

Exposure to the VCoP provided protégés with experiences that were either unique or appeared to have occurred earlier in their career than they would have if protégés had not been involved in the project. These opportunities directly addressed many of the concerns they had expressed so eloquently in their interviews and discussions. Protégés were clear that their experience in the VCoP gave them access to a unique form of learning, recognition by their peers, validation of their ability, and a safe locale and trusting community. Although all protégés continued to grow their professional ability through practice outside of the VCoP, their experiences within the VCoP assisted them to tackle problematic issues and promoted self-confidence in their ability as agents, providing much-needed support during this crucial period of establishing their practice. When asked about their confidence and competence, all protégés linked the two concepts together, demonstrating that they believed their competence was directly related to how confident they felt about providing appropriate advice to their clients. Before joining the VCoP, protégés described how they were almost frozen with fear, researching and reading the legislation ‘over and over’ to ensure they were on the right path.

In the first private discussion with a facilitator, P4 described their lack of confidence when lodging their first application. The facilitator did not focus on their panic; instead, they focused on P4's capability, stressing the success of this milestone in practice by congratulating them on the application and providing advice on how the online submission system worked. P4 acknowledged that they did not know this part of the system and would check after their discussion but continued telling the facilitator that despite their constant checking they retained a real fear, almost a panic, that they had made a mistake, explaining that they continued to question their judgement and competence.

I suppose it will come with experience as well, because at the moment I'm checking Schedule 1 and checking Schedule 2 and last week or the week before I put in my first application....and then it came up with all the evidence and I am sitting there thinking "I am sure I have got it all", and of course I hadn't because of course there were additional things they want... That's what is panicking me cause it's like ...oh no...I just entered it and now they are going to come back to me ... *Discussion 1 F1 P4*

The response by the facilitator established that this was normal and that it could be considered a good habit to go through the legislation 'religiously', in order to be confident of your advice. P4 revealed in a subsequent discussion with the facilitator that they now had eleven clients. Despite this, they still felt they lacked confidence. The facilitator addressed their concerns by reminding them that they would be worried if their staff were too confident:

But I mean, not being over-confident is an asset rather than a liability, because then if you're overconfident, you just bowl ahead and whack in things, and don't bother to check them. I mean, by being cautious, you'll at least have a second look at it and think, "Well, I could be wrong, and I'll double-check it", or even talk to someone and check it somewhere else. *Discussion 2 F1 Response to P4*

Despite their concerns, P4 was extremely active within the VCoP site, taking on the role of organising the online professional development sessions and contributing to discussions. Their last interview took place several months after the project closed. At that time, they were cautious when discussing their confidence, telling the interviewer

that they still panicked and questioned themselves "about fifty thousand times", despite feeling that their practice ability had improved. An important understanding they gained from their time in Protégé was the knowledge that they were not alone in feeling inadequate, and others were experiencing the same issues. P4 explained that this knowledge made them feel "completely normal", something they thought was the most important lesson to learn:

And that's actually quite an important lesson because you're out there by yourself, and I'm a pretty confident person, I've got a bit of background, so I'm, I'm sort of semi-okay, and still I felt like I was like, "Oh my god." Which I, I did expect to a certain degree, because this is so left field for me, this is nowhere near my comfort zone, so ... I'm sitting there thinking, "It must be me because I'm outside my comfort zone ... but I found out it's not actually me, and I do know a little bit more, maybe on the business side than the law, than other people. *Interviewer R3. P4*

5.6 Recognising others in Protégé

All protégés in this research cohort echoed P4's feelings that they were not alone in seeking information and new knowledge. Many spoke of the comfort they gained from the knowledge that no one person held all the answers. The key for them was the knowledge that there was somewhere to go to find an answer even if this flowed from an extended discussion. P17 confirmed these feelings when asked by the facilitator to describe three good things about Protégé:

Well, I mean obviously the number one thing is learning. Learning in a technical sense. The other would be learning in the experiential sense. Just seeing other people's... or reading other people's experience does

two things. One is you learn about all the awkward situations that migration agents have to face and options for solutions, and at the same time also I think it gives you a bit more confidence. That when you face a difficult situation, you know that it goes with the territory. So, it's not going to intimidate you. The fact that you have got help well, "What on earth do I do with this?" You feel good because you have got a difficult problem. The truth is you are going to get them... the final one is being able to make a record of these threads means you have a resource to refer to. *Discussion F2. P17*

The knowledge that an individual is not alone in facing particular problems or issues is a form of both validation and recognition. P13 also felt that the connections they had made, and validation of their abilities, were essential aspects of Protégé. They explained to the facilitator that when they first started to practice, they had tried to set up a network of agents. Establishing such a network was crucially important to them because they were working in a small community with very few registered agents. Nonetheless, no one came forward, and they were left feeling isolated. P13 felt that Protégé had provided the opportunity to connect with the profession. However, on reflection, they revealed that their first interactions on the VCoP site had not been positive. Describing their reaction as a "professional anxiety attack", P13 went on to explain that reading the posts of protégés working as commercial agents had made them feel inadequate and unprepared. Eventually, P13 found that Protégé provided them with a sense of community and importantly, an understanding of the norms of practice the profession expected of them:

There was so much anxiety that I felt. Because I do not really know if I'm up to standard or not. I wanted to do a really good job, but you never

quite know. So Protégé has been really good in that sense of where the standards should be, and I guess to take that anxiety out ... it suddenly gives you a portal to throw that question out there. *Discussion F2 P13*

P13 described how the ability to raise the issues they were concerned about with their peers revealed that many of the problems facing agents were not necessarily something that could be resolved by looking at legislation and policy:

It's trickier than that, it's client management, it's ethics within your practice and professional standards, and a lot of that just comes from experience and learning from others. *Discussion F2 P13*

Validation of their ability can come through purposeful feedback or recognition that others are approaching a problem the same way, or even recognition that they would have reached the same conclusion when faced with a similar problem or situation. P18 noted that confidence arose not only from learning from the more experienced agents in Protégé but from the knowledge that others at the same level were experiencing the same issues:

...so that there was confidence that was a big thing for me; the confidence that I obtained from that, you know? And sort of a sort of validation that yes, my ideas were appropriate, and I was thinking along the right lines most of the time. *Interviewer R3 P18*

5.7 Facilitators – their experiences in Protégé

The seven components critical to a successful VCoP discussed above, included the need for consistent and reliable facilitators who promote collaboration. This can be done in a variety of ways (Barnett et al., 2012; Dorner, 2012; Probst & Borzillo, 2008).

Protégé took on this facet with a clear goal of replicating the aspects detailed by Eraut (2007) in his typology of workplace learning and with close attention to the findings of Dorner (2012). In order to replicate these aspects of workplace learning, facilitators adopted the role of an experienced peer who would provide timely feedback and advice and would model expected norms and professional behaviour of migration agents. The design and evolution of their role differentiates Protégé from other VCoP designs that aimed to facilitate learning, or sharing of corporate knowledge (Vollenbroek, 2019). It specifically offered a different form of professional interaction than that offered in the traditional networking and support opportunities that were available to new agents (Dickie, 2018). This section will revisit the work of the facilitators, explicitly address how their role was designed and consider the experience they had working in this way within the VCoP thus providing insight into a key factor in the design of this VCoP.

The purposeful design of Protégé as a supportive workplace, as discussed in chapter 2, included aspects identified by Eraut (2004a) that would facilitate workplace learning. These aspects included learning opportunities that could increase confidence, the support of colleagues in carrying out that work, and feedback from peers, juniors and managers who could facilitate learning (p. 271). Eraut's (2007) typology of workplace learning included learning processes that required interaction with those who had more knowledge than the early-career practitioner. He maintained that workplace learning could be a by-product of working with others, such as participation in groups, problem-solving and working alongside others. Other activities located within practice work included listening and observing, reflecting, asking questions, and giving and receiving feedback, as well as processes in the workplace such as being coached, supervised, mentored or shadowing others at work.

In order to replicate these aspects of workplace learning, facilitators adopted the role of an experienced peer who would provide timely feedback and advice and would

model expected norms and professional behaviour (Eraut, 2007). The design and evolution of their role differentiates Protégé from other VCoP designs and specifically from the networking and support opportunities that were available and are currently available to new agents (Dickie, 2018).

The facilitators were members of the research team and took part in the planning of their role. Because of this, they were familiar with concepts derived from the work of Vygotsky's concept of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In particular, the interpretation of the ZPD as "subjective" (Chaiklin, 2003, p. 10), or a level of development that relates to processes not yet matured, allowed them to deliberately adopt scaffolding techniques (Dorner, 2012) in their interactions with the protégés. This interpretation is different from those that imply the ZPD is a time when a person can learn new skills. Instead, the role that the facilitators adopted recognised that the ZPD is a time when a process or skill is understood by the individual, but they are not able perform or apply it without guidance until the skill is fully developed (Vygotsky, 1934/1987, p. 210, in Chaiklin, 2003, p. 9).

Two facilitators worked with the protégés during the year of the project. They were interviewed twice during the project and encouraged to keep memos and participate in research meetings. However, only one facilitator submitted memos. During research meetings, they both reported on the issues and progress of the protégés. The fate of the protégés after the project became an issue of grave concern for both facilitators. This was eventually resolved by the protégés when they established their own virtual community site. Analysis of memos, the two exit interviews, and the discussions both facilitators held with the protégés, highlight the emotional and intellectual investment the facilitators brought to their role.

The first facilitator (F1) found the experience of working in Protégé to be 'interesting and worthwhile'. F1 described the role as ever-changing, from an initial role

as one of a catalyst ‘sparking’ the beginning of the VCoP discussions, providing assistance and answers to specific legal and practice questions, to one that was predominantly a support role, as the protégés began to engage and use their practice expertise to answer each other’s questions. F1 kept memos to document their thoughts during the project. These thirteen memos provided insight into the temporal aspects of the project, and the perceptions of ‘the other’ as part of the development of protégés’ confidence and competence. The memos revealed that F1 was surprised by the depth of engagement they had with protégés. The memos demonstrated their ability to step back and consider what was happening, and they revealed their:

- concerns regarding activity and membership of the VCoP,
- awareness of the impact of their personal history,
- involvement in the VCoP,
- deep emotional investment in the protégés as new agents, and
- identification with the members of the VCoP.

In a memo that captured the level of unanticipated emotional investment, F1 considered how they would feel when the Protégé project ended:

However, in defining that Protégé would end in May I was interested that I also felt a sense of loss at the impending end of the observation part of the project! It is interesting how one becomes attached to the community and with a feeling of care for their future. *F1 Memo 10/02/2014*

The second facilitator (F2) found the role to be “beyond expectations,” but one that carried a “huge learning curve”. Despite previous experience teaching online, the new role of facilitator required different skills they had not previously considered, including communicating with the protégés as peers instead of students, correcting problematic posts and answers in a way that was non-offensive, and allowing protégés to

learn how to find the knowledge they were seeking. Echoing the findings of Dorner (2012) that e-mentors would change the way they communicated, depending on the task at hand, both of the facilitators eventually adopted the role of a “reflective practitioner and colleague” (p. 168). In support of Dorner’s findings, there was no evidence in the data that the facilitators deliberately adopted the role of a peer at a specific time; instead this appears to have evolved into a role reminiscent of Dorners synergistic co-mentoring. F1 revealed this role in a Memo, reflecting on the difference between teaching at the university and acting as a peer facilitator in Protégé.

During the teaching weekend, it was interesting to reflect on the "teaching perspectives" of Protégé, as although as participants we are not "teaching" in a sense, we are teaching the protégés to work in a CoP cooperatively and congenially for the mutual benefit of the group and each other. It parallels the teaching paradigm of small groups, expert and individual, sampling and experiencing in real world situations, guiding and stimulating, mentoring and monitoring all wrapped up together. There is an element of teaching, as teaching is guiding, encouraging, motivating and, above all, engaging others in a pursuit of gaining knowledge and experience for altruistic or practical purposes, and this can be seen in Protégé where at times the facilitator is the teacher and at other times the protégé is the teacher. An interesting coexistence is created with symbiotic benefits. *MEMO Facilitator 1*

Consistent with these observations, F2 described how they gained knowledge of migration law from the protégés across areas where they did not practice.

I have learnt a thing or two about migration law and migration practice. Someone would post a question and someone else would answer it; it was about an area I did not practice in. To pick up knowledge like that was a benefit to me. *F2 Interview with Researcher 01/08/2014*

Interacting with the protégés, either within the VCoP site or in private discussions, provided opportunities for purposeful learning as well as tacit learning by both protégés and facilitators. Gaining knowledge from areas where one does not practice is more than simply transmitting instructions on what may be necessary to complete a task. The transfer of explicit knowledge requires a complex understanding of the context in which it applies, which has been identified as a form of tacit knowledge that underlies the ability to transfer and apply the learnt knowledge to new situations (Polanyi, 1958; Pyrko et al., 2017; Eraut, 2002).

There is no doubt that F2 approached the role differently to F1, yet they also reached a point where they considered themselves to be a peer mentor, describing the role as a “mentor, coach and a shoulder to cry on” - evidenced by the emotional support F2 provided, and the method of using experiential confirmation that F2 employed in their discussions with the protégés. During the professional development discussions, F2 repeatedly affirmed what protégés were going through and shared professional experiences to illustrate the advice provided. This acknowledgment was not that evident in the professional development discussions F1 held with the protégés, but it came through strongly in their site posts.

It worked well; F1 and I complemented each other. We swapped interviews and I could hear in the interviews how F1 discussed business and was helpful in that way. Whereas I ...and it was not intentional...mine were lengthy and I found myself giving experiential

hints and suggestions. I could relate to their experience, so we acted as different mentors and gave different information and had very different personalities. *F2 Interview with Researcher 01/08/2014*

The ability to work with the protégés in a “safe environment” was seen by facilitators as one of the most important aspects for learning and interaction. Despite different learning styles amongst the protégés, the safe, closed site provided opportunities to engage in different methods of learning:

There was never a situation that I felt or perceived the protégés to feel uncomfortable. They were very open with each other. *F2 Interview with Researcher 01/08/2014*

Interacting with the protégés, either within the VCoP site or in private discussions, provided opportunities for purposeful learning as well as tacit learning by both protégés and facilitators. While the examination of tacit knowledge as an entity has not been the focus of this thesis, the transfer of various forms of knowledge has been revealed by the data to be central to the development of practice skills and professional identity. Gaining knowledge from areas where one does not practice is more than simply transmitting instructions on what may be necessary to complete a task. The transfer of explicit knowledge requires a complex understanding of the context in which it applies, which has been identified as a form of tacit knowledge that underlies the ability to transfer and apply learnt knowledge to new situations (Polanyi, 1958; Pyrko et al., 2017; Eraut, 2002).

5.8 Facilitator's time in Protégé

Their role took more time than either facilitator had expected. They both agreed that the initial input was more than two hours per day. Work as a facilitator included monitoring the site, creating and encouraging interaction, and checking the legislation to ensure they, or the protégés, were providing correct guidance and answers. The facilitators purposefully kept the protégés engaged in the early stages of the project by posting case scenarios they could answer, sharing their practice conundrums, and talking to each other on the site. Both facilitators described a period of “tapering off” or “stepping back” over time as the protégés began to interact more consistently, and importantly, began to answer each other. They described the need to answer each question as the first task they needed to “step back on”. The move to less support occurred when protégés became more confident in their practice knowledge and began to answer each other. The facilitators then moved on to the role of checking the answers protégés gave each other, and gently prompting to finalise the discussion, or intervene where there was the potential for legally incorrect or inaccurate information to be provided.

Analysis of discussions between the facilitators and protégés support the perception the facilitators had regarding their role. The data analysis of the professional development discussions they held with each protégé revealed five key strategies both facilitators used when interacting with protégés:

1. Acknowledging the experience of the protégés.
2. Reassuring protégés their experiences and feelings are valid.
3. Advising on professional development and practice.
4. Imparting practice knowledge.
5. Sharing their own experiences, problems and feelings of their work in practice.

One of the strongest elements of problem-based learning techniques is to provide students with a problem that has no clear answer but may present the opportunity for multiple solutions (Jonassen & Hung, 2008). This technique was initially used by F1 to prompt engagement in the VCoP site and continued throughout the project. F1 posted problems faced in practice and acted on the same level as the protégés, namely as a peer in the problem-solving exercise. F1 did this by admitting that they did not know the answer but were looking for a perspective that may reveal one. This technique encouraged protégés to consider and act upon their client problems in different ways. Over time it became common for protégés to encourage each other to see a problem differently and to seek answers differently, often challenging each other on the method or reasoning they had used.

Overwhelmingly, protégés used their offsite professional development discussions with facilitators to seek advice and reinforcement of what they were doing. During these discussions, they revealed their insecurities, sought reassurance, and solicited business advice, detailing the burden of their workload, the expense of establishing their business, and the stress of dealing with clients and the department. Both facilitators actively listened to the problems and fears that protégés revealed. This included issues such as the inability to take holidays, not knowing how to market or run their business, and communication issues with clients. They often shared their own experiences with the protégés to gain a common ground. As a sole practitioner, F2 shared more practice experience and provided successful solutions. This tactic established a rapport with the protégés and drew them out, increasing their understanding and allowing them to acknowledge that their experiences were not isolated.

In a final interview with a researcher, F1 noted that they felt it had taken approximately six months to develop group cohesiveness, nine months to take on a role

of “looking after each other”, and about eleven months for the community to become self-sustaining:

It’s been really interesting to see the evolution of the group, from asking questions and expecting the facilitator to answer, through to various phases where they became more responsive to each other, to a point where they took over to a degree, with the various roles of providing expert advice to each other. To very recently when they had a mature approach where they became essentially almost self-sufficient and I think could be self-sufficient if the facilitators were taken out. *F1 Interview with Researcher 01/08/2014*

Both facilitators had years of practice experience and were clear that there were areas of migration law they had not practiced regularly or had not worked with for several years. At all times, they were at great pains to ensure protégés understood that certain areas were outside of their expertise. By revealing their lack of experience, the facilitators had provided a guide to protégés on how a professional should react when confronted with an area of migration law that was unfamiliar. Their work reinforced the professional requirement under the Code of Conduct, that all migration agents must recognise their limitations in their knowledge and skills and must seek supervision and advice, or refer their work to more knowledgeable and experienced agents. This reinforcement of the professional norms again reinforced the social context of their practice, and the responsibilities migration agents have within both the legal and social context of the profession.

5.9 Protégé as a safe working environment

Crucial to the practice knowledge protégés gained was the understanding that they were a member of a safe community. P18 explained that they had learned how safe their new community was when they posted a question anonymously and other members encouraged them to put their name on the question so that they could help. P18 recalled how no one told them, “you’re an idiot”. They explained that some people had similar questions, and some were “even more stupid than your question might seem to you”. The knowledge that they could ask a question without fear of ridicule increased their sense of safety and trust within the VCoP:

Yeah, it’s really great that we’ve sort of built up a community where we can talk quite freely, knowing that we are relatively novice in some of the aspects without it being ridiculed or in the public arena. *Interview R2.*

P18

Feedback was essential in establishing a feeling of safety. The feedback provided to protégés arose in several ways. One was purposeful feedback by facilitators within the VCoP site, when they acknowledged the issues raised, or provided guidance and commentary on the problems protégés experienced and solutions protégés devised. The other was during the discussions protégés had with facilitators, where they raised their concerns or achievements privately. The third was feedback protégés provided to each other through their comments on the VCoP site, and the advice they provided or sought from each other. Moreover, protégés gained incidental feedback through observation of the way their peers approached and solved practice problems.

5.10 Chapter summary

The constant variations and definitions of a CoP, as presented by Wenger across almost three decades, have resulted in academics seeking to pin down aspects of communities, both virtual and face to face, that would enable them to claim the status of a VCoP. This chapter has developed an understanding of a VCoP. The literature discussed in chapter 2 was reconsidered in order to define and discuss aspects of design that related explicitly to a VCoP. A definition of a VCoP that included experiences within a specific online site, and those between members interacting offline, was proposed. The seven components of a VCoP were considered against Protégé's design to demonstrate how it met the proposed definition of a VCoP.

Protégé fulfilled the fundamental requirements for a CoP set out by Wenger (1998), of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (p. 73), as well as his later definitions, which specified the three elements of the domain, practice, and community (2015, p. 2). Protégé also met many of the requirements developed by academics focusing on VCoPs. The chapter has demonstrated how the design of Protégé ensured it exceeded prior literature definitions of a VCoP by encompassing elements of a supportive workplace. Factoring in design elements that mimicked the physical environment of a workplace, and the role of the facilitators in promoting and supporting learning, allowed the protégés to learn their professional practice in ways that exceeded the usual value of a VCoP.

Consideration of the role of the facilitator, and importantly, the evolution of their role over time to become what Dorner (2012) referred to as a "synergistic co-mentor" (p.166), was crucial to capturing the elements of support they provided to those working in sole practice. Their role, and the way protégés interacted with them, was one of the factors that set the design of Protégé apart from the traditional concept of a VCoP as a place to build knowledge about a specific domain.

Protégés worked in sole practice. They were not exposed to either the physical environment of a shared workplace or the social and professional engagement a workplace offers. The design of Protégé provided unique ways for protégés to access the support they could not find working as sole practitioners. Protégés learnt and contributed to knowledge production in synchronous and asynchronous communications within the VCoP. Working with others and discussing their work allowed protégés to recognise the experiences of others as similar to their own, while increasing confidence in their ability to continue with their work. The brief descriptions of the ways protégés learnt to practice, of the impact the VCoP had on their confidence, and of their sense of belonging to a profession in this chapter have set the scene for chapters 6 and 7, which detail how the VCoP developed their confidence in their practice ability and influenced their professional identity.

The next chapter explores this further with a strong focus on the work of Eraut and how a supportive workplace can assist practitioners in developing their practice and professional identity.

Chapter 6 Findings from Protégé.

This thesis proposes that Protégés did not learn to talk the language of those in the VCoP; instead, they recognised the language others were speaking as their own. Consequently, the findings discussed in this chapter add to Wenger's theories of identity development within a CoP and challenge the conclusion of Lave and Wenger that newcomers must learn to "talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 109). This chapter, therefore, addresses the primary research question, and discusses the findings and theoretical concepts in relation to that question, through an analysis of how the VCoP influenced the individual identity narrative and through the exposure of individual experiences within a VCoP.

Findings 1 and 2 are linked. They both speak to the VCoP, its design, and their effects upon the protégés and the formation of their professional identity.

Finding 1: the development of the protégés professional identity was not directly influenced by how protégés perceived their own or others' competence and confidence, but by how they learnt to practice in the VCoP.

Finding 2: the deliberate design of a VCoP was able to mimic the role a supportive workplace would play in developing a professional identity through exposure to peers and different ways of practice, and that this exposure and the subsequent recognition of aspects of self in others, enhanced and assisted the development of a professional identity.

The discussion of these two findings focuses on research into professional identity formation within the workplace and on key aspects Eraut identified as necessary for developing a professional identity. The chapter considers how Wenger, Levin, Eraut and others view practice and workplace learning, and their role in professional identity development. While the work of Wenger is a prominent influence on this thesis, this

chapter will focus mainly on the work of Eraut and his concept of professional identity formation through workplace learning. This discussion takes the advice of Charmaz (2014) into account by undertaking a final literature review that fits the purpose of the findings of the research (p. 307).

Wenger's social learning theory has been critiqued (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004) for removing the focus on the individual from workplace learning. This is because of Wenger's emphasis on the formation and transformation of individual identity through "participation in social practices", such as learning experiences, shared discourse, and the creation of artefacts within a domain of practice (p. 4). While Wenger acknowledged multiple communities existed in an individual's life, he was explicit about examining the role of social learning within specific CoPs and the individual's identification with that community. Further academic considerations of both CoPs and VCoPs have also focused on group identity when examining the success of CoPs in achieving specific goals and outcomes (Henri & Pudelko, 2003; Pyrko et al., 2017; Johnson, 2001; Vollenbroek, 2019).

The findings of this thesis return the focus of learning in a VCoP or social setting to the individual, meeting the challenge Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) addressed in their critique of CoPs, when they adopted a Bourdieusian perspective to address Lave and Wenger's initial treatment of the concept of a CoP and their focus on learning within the CoP.

As discussed in chapter 2, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) used Bourdieu's concepts of a field, social and political capital, and habitus, in relation to the notion of a CoP and workplace learning, to emphasise the role of individuals within the community. They concluded that their claim, that "people are part of a structure and the structure is a part of them" (p. 9), provided a perspective that allowed them to consider the individual as "inherently social" (p. 2), "a part of a communities of practice (if relevant) and of

learning fields which are also a part of them, and of whom they are a part” (p. 10). They felt this was vastly different to the view espoused by Lave and Wenger.

This thesis agrees with the analysis of Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) and Eraut, that the individual and the way they are impacted by, or interact with, their environment should be the focus of any examination of workplace learning and consequently of the development of an identity associated with the workplace such as a professional identity. It also places a heavy emphasis on the individual’s interactions with the social aspects of the workplace, which includes opportunities for interaction, learning and growth.

Therefore, this chapter explores the unique and unexpected ways of learning that the deliberate design of the VCoP provided, and how they related to increased competence and confidence of protégés. It does so through a focus on Eraut’s epistemology of practice as a fundamental driver of identity development within the VCoP. For Eraut, a form of learning will always be present when one works in practice or practices a profession. When considering the role of a CoP, or a group, and the learning that can take place in that setting, Eraut (2002) questioned the difference between learning as a group and learning as an individual within a group (p. 6). He argued that a group has no agency (p. 6) and therefore may not be a valid site or focus of learning. However, Eraut did acknowledge that learning could take place in a CoP if one considers how the CoP is defined. For Eraut, the definition of a CoP that treats the learner and the community as separate, yet connected entities, allows for both the community and learner to learn (p. 6).

The findings presented in this thesis support Eraut’s view of learning within a CoP. The data presented in this and the following chapters uphold the premise that the individual is primarily responsible for their own learning within a social setting such as a

VCoP or workplace. It is the individual that negotiates how they learn and ultimately how the knowledge they gain impacts on their professional identity.

Finally, the chapter addresses researcher's preconceptions and provides an explanation of how the data did not uphold these.

6.1 Addressing the primary research question

This thesis presents three findings and four theoretical concepts that arise from the data analysis using CGT methods. Chapter 7 expands on the findings and discusses the theoretical concepts. These four theoretical concepts speak to the formation of identity; however, they did not arise from a consideration of the primary research question. As discussed in chapter 3, the research questions were purposefully put aside during the data analysis. While all of the findings speak to the research question and sub-questions, the realisation that there was a finding that addressed the primary research question came late in the process. Charmaz (2014) calls the process of theorising and coding "theoretical playfulness" (p. 245), which is her terminology for the need to be open to new possibilities arising from data. She explains that a researcher studying a major event such as "becoming a member of a profession" must look to actions and processes that surround that event (p.245).

The primary research question - 'How and to what extent can a Virtual Community of Practice, designed as a 'supportive workplace', enhance the professional identity of migration agents in sole practice, as determined by their 'own' and 'others' perceived competence and confidence?' - seeks to explore how the protégés' experiences in the VCoP enhanced or influenced their perception and development of their professional identity. It also requires an understanding of the roles confidence and competence play in professional identity formation.

The primary research question required a return to the literature that influenced the design of Protégé. This consideration revealed there was a need to understand more about how the design of Protégé allowed the protégés to recognise aspects of themselves in their fellow protégés. The answer arose from the practice work protégés do, and how learning to practice in the VCoP affected their view of their confidence and competence.

6.2 Developing confidence and competence

Competence in professional practice is often considered a measurement of the quality of performance. For Eraut, it means the ability to perform professional tasks at a certain cognitive level (2002 p. 126). For Wenger the measurement of an individual's competence is limited to their behaviour within the CoP (2015, p. 2; 2009, p. 8). Recognition of an individual within the CoP by fellow members is a commentary on their competence to practice within the specific environment of the CoP (Mercieca, 2017). Wenger (2009) argued that this provided legitimacy for their membership. "Every learning move is a claim to competence, which may or may not function, i.e. be considered legitimate by the community or change the criteria for competence that the community has developed" (p. 8).

Chapter 7 discusses how the terms confidence and competence were captured in the initial coding and eventually absorbed into other codes such as '*Co-Creating knowledge*'. The inclusion of data that referred to confidence and competence across multiple codes arose from the nature of the descriptions protégés provided of the different ways they learned to practice in the VCoP. The experiences of protégés within the VCoP did not uphold Wenger's consideration of competence as a measure of membership within the community. Instead, protégés linked their perception of their competence with their external practice experience. Descriptions by protégés of how participation in the VCoP assisted them in learning to practice were linked to confidence, not competence.

They echoed those described by Eraut (2007) as essential to workplace learning, and they included participation in specific activities and discussions, observations of the ways other people participated, and the timely or incidental feedback they received:

So, I think it is the feedback that gives you the confidence, so then you know that you are able to do something, and you are able to think through that correctly and do that correctly. And I think that's really, that's what really works for me as a confidence builder. *Interview R3 P8*

Protégés were clear in their testimony that they felt comfortable in asking questions within the VCoP. In a description of tacit learning or understanding, P15 explained that the participants in the VCoP had developed an almost intuitive way of interacting. They found there was no need to be explicit because they all understood where each of them was coming from and where they needed help with specific issues:

On the other hand, you can speak to somebody who doesn't have a commitment to the network, and, in a way, it has to be explicit, you know unless they are a good friend that you intuitively know that you help each other or whatever. *P15 Interview R3*

The responses they received from protégés and facilitators let them know that they were on the right track in their thinking; or that this was an issue that very few knew the answer too. The acknowledgement they received built up their confidence in their ability. Some of the protégés explained that they felt comfortable asking questions because it meant they were contributing as a whole to the knowledge of the group and in a way that was like “giving something back”, while others explained how they learned from each other and stored the knowledge away for later. All of the protégés equated their competence with their confidence, and in turn, linked both with learning:

When I started off, I knew nothing, I have to put it as, sort of nothing. [Laughs] compared to what I know now. I'd be a bit more confident to try and find the information myself, whereas if I hadn't had Protégé to get me from swimming [inaudible] it would have been hard, it would've been scary, a bit too scary possibly to re-register. *P6 Interview R3*

Overall, the experience of the VCoP and their time in practice provided them with the confidence to believe in their ability and deal with their clients.

And it has sort of got to the point where we no longer ...we have got to the point where we really genuinely value what we do. *P14 Interview R3*

This meant learning how to practice as a migration agent, both within the VCoP and in their day-to-day business. P12 described this growth in confidence as “growing in tandem together”, while P16 explained that Protégé and their work had confirmed something they had known all along:

I feel like I'm a lot more confident because, probably because of Protégé and because I'm doing more work as well and... I... because... I guess I always knew that I was probably competent but didn't have the confidence. *P16 Interview R2*

I have the confidence now to say to somebody there's something I'll check for you, I'll get back to you later. You know. *P18 Interview R2*

Despite acknowledgement by protégés that their increased feelings of competence and confidence came from a combination of their time in Protégé and their work in practice, understanding how they learnt to practice and why this increased their confidence and feelings of competence, can only be viewed through the prism of the

VCoP. An examination of Eraut's vision of practice within a supportive workplace, reveals how the design of Protégé was able to increase the confidence and competence of the migration agents.

6.3 An epistemology of practice

The work of Eraut (2004a, 2007, 2010, 2011) and his theories of work-based learning, Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of a Community of Practice, and Wenger's (1998; 2009) social learning theory has been essential to this thesis. Wenger's concept of a CoP was a starting point for the research project; however, the actual design of the VCoP was not based on his work. Despite Eraut's (2004a) conviction that a CoP could never replace the experience of a supportive workplace, Protégé was explicitly designed to do this. As such, the design included the elements of a workplace Eraut identified as those that supported the learning and professional identity formation of employees engaged in a practice environment (Eraut, 2004a, 2007).

While Eraut (2004a, 2007, 2011), included formal learning processes in his various typologies of workplace learning his focus on informal learning as the key to changes in identity formation was critical to the design of Protégé. The explicit design of Protégé has been discussed in previous chapters and the site structure outlined in chapter 5. The inclusion of architectural wayfinding (Golledge et al., 2000; Dickie & van Galen, 2016) features, and zones such as formal and informal meeting spaces, chat rooms and social spaces, within the online site, along with the opportunity for two long personal discussions with the facilitators, were deliberate facets of the design, which sought to encourage informal workplace learning, which Eraut (1994) and others (Lin & Bound, 2011; McNally, 2006) have stressed is essential for the development of a professional identity.

As discussed in chapter 5, a supportive environment needed to be risk-free, in order to provide such an environment, Protégés were provided with a stand-alone site where they could interact with a relatively small group of peers. A bounded space allowed them to make mistakes, discuss problems that did not have ready solutions, and interact with peers and reliable facilitators who provided timely feedback. While the design of Protégé appears to make it similar to some social media groups, it is the way the design enabled protégés to learn their practice within the VCoP, and the effect this had on their identity, that remains the distinctive difference between networking in social media platforms and the design of Protégé.

As noted in chapter 2 and chapter 5, Protégé as a VCoP was broader than an online site where migration agents could gain information through a question and answer forum. Such forums exist today as the profession has built new forms of peer to peer engagement and mentoring (Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 2019, p. 3.46). Some of these social media platforms, provided by formal bodies such as the Migration Institute of Australia (MIA), are carefully mediated (Dickie, 2018, para. 3.78). Others are less formal and are made up of agents from various professional bodies or backgrounds who are seeking support from one another. Despite the passage of time and the increase in the use of social media to connect professionals, the design of Protégé as a VCoP remains different from the forms of social media currently available to migration agents. This is because the specific elements of a supportive workplace that Eraut proposed are not automatically activated in groups of professionals who interact through today's social media platforms.

Previous chapters have emphasised how working with clients is central to the work of a migration agent and how this has led to two of the theoretical concepts underpinning this thesis. The protégés descriptions of practice in chapters 4, 5 and 7 draw attention to the differing definitions of practice used by Wenger and Eraut, as highlighted

in the literature discussed in chapter 2. As migration agents are practitioners who work directly with clients, consideration of practice and its role in identity development was essential to identify if and how the VCoP was able to fulfil the original goal of mimicking a supportive workplace.

The final analysis requires a careful and thoughtful examination of the way Wenger (2015) uses the term “practice” in his application of social learning theory, and how this contrasts with Eraut’s (2007) interpretation of the term. Shining a spotlight on the definition of practice demonstrates again the complexity of the social learning theory Wenger has developed. Wenger’s work both highlights and muddies the influence of a CoP on the formation of a professional identity. He appears to have simultaneously restricted and broadened the influence of CoPs by expanding his definitions and concepts over time. Consalvo, Schallert and Elias (2015) warn that conflating practice as a verb and a noun lay behind some of the confusion underlying the model of social learning that Wenger proposes. Practice as a verb is “both a repeated action” and a “way of acting in the world”, practice as a noun is a “field of endeavour and expertise that is situated in historical and living contexts” (p. 3). Both Wenger (Borzillo et al., 2011; Mahon et al., 2017, p. 6; Trede & McEwen, 2012) and Eraut (2007) view the concept of practice with an epistemological focus: that is, the understanding that practice (taken as both a verb or noun) resides in the same social context where learning takes place. It is the consideration of the social context, and what it entails, that differentiates their view of practice.

As discussed in chapter 2, Wenger (2015) used the term “practice” to describe a domain of knowledge that social learning within a specific community of practice generated, and as such considered practice to be both an outcome and an action that occurs within that community. Wenger (2017, 2012, 2014) has acknowledged the myriad of practices people learn from, describing them as “landscapes of practice” (2014, p. 25). He has further discussed the multiple ways people could engage in differing practice and

has used the term “boundary” (2017) to account for the complexity of relations and the multiple areas of work people may engage in in their professional life. However, his focus has remained on social learning within the CoP, describing identity as “personalised reflections of the landscape of practice” (Wenger, 2009, p. 6). Wenger (2009) also considers that learning involves more than gaining knowledge, but again, has focused on the impact individual learning has on the individual’s identity and standing within the CoP; “it is about becoming a certain person; a knower in a context where what it means to know is negotiated with respect to the regime of competence of a community” (p. 2). Østerlund and Carlile (2005) have confirmed this view of Wenger’s social learning theory as one that has moved the focus of learning from the individual to sets of characteristics that define a group. Placing the consideration of practice firmly within the professional context moves the focus away from Wenger’s concept of practice within a CoP and back onto the concept of a VCoP as a workplace, providing for the use of Eraut’s lens or epistemology of practice.

6.3.1 The factors an individual brings to their professional practice

Eraut’s (2007) epistemology of practice is broader than Wenger’s. He embraced both sociocultural and individual theories of learning to explain the social and cultural formations of knowledge as well as the personal knowledge an individual “brings to situations that enables them to think, interact and perform” (p. 406), which are essential elements to learning. Personal knowledge includes “self-knowledge, attitudes and emotions” (p. 406).

Within his epistemology of practice, Eraut (2007) returned to the site of practice, or the performance of practice, when he defined the four distinct but connected elements of practice, as outlined in chapter 2:

1. Assessing clients and/or situations and monitoring their condition (sometimes briefly, sometimes involving a long process of investigation) and continuing to monitor them.
2. Deciding what, if any, action to take, both immediately and over a long period (either individually, or as a leader or member of a team).
3. Pursuing an agreed course of action, modifying, consulting and reassessing as and when necessary.
4. Metacognitive monitoring of oneself, people needing attention and the general process of the case, problem project or situation. (Eraut, 2007, p. 406).

Neary and Van Der Laan (2016), echo Eraut's idea that practice extends beyond the social situation and involves the personal qualities one will bring to the act of practice. They explicitly define professional practice as a separate concept to the act of practicing (p. 8). They consider practice to incorporate the elements espoused by Eraut, and they have expanded this further to acknowledge the accumulation of knowledge gained both in the workplace and in other areas of life (2016, p. 6). Köpsén, and Nyström (2015), define professional practice as "practice" that has its own arrangements, language, actions and relations between individuals linked together by specific norms (para. 33). Trede & Mcewen (2012) have explained that professional practice is "after all a socially situated and contextualised practice that is conducted by and for and with people" (p. 28).

These views of practice are upheld by this thesis. Eraut's (2007), description of the key elements of practice capture succinctly the work of a migration agent. Additionally, the descriptions of practice proposed by Neary and Van Der Laan (2016), Köpsén and Nyström (2015) also encapsulate the experience of protégés within the VCoP.

When consideration of practice is restricted to their interactions within Protégé the protégés experiences still capture many of the aspects Eraut built into his epistemology of practice and his typologies of workplace learning (2004a, p. 267, 2007, p. 408, 409). Eraut's (2007) epistemology of practice captures the essential elements of learning to practice, and the way they influence the development of a professional identity. Identifying how these elements were enabled within the VCoP links the four theoretical concepts underpinning identity formation to this finding.

Consideration of Eraut's (2007) three dimensions of practice, as outlined in chapter 2, provides insight into the way the VCoP enhanced the development of the protégés' professional identity. Eraut's epistemology (2007, p. 405) embraces a heuristic device adopted in this thesis. When considering workplace learning, he focused on three dimensions: the locality of learning, the social aspects of learning, and the temporal qualities learning occupies.

As outlined in chapter 2, Eraut's (2007) three dimensions of practice include:

1. The four elements of practice.
2. The effect of time on the modes of cognition a professional engages to address their practice.
3. The social context of their practice.

Eraut (2007; Eraut & Hirsh, 2007) presented a somewhat complex way of viewing practice as he broke down the elements he was interested in. He explored the four elements of practice through the lens of all three dimensions of locale, temporality and sociality. In their private businesses, each protégé was actively engaging in Eraut's four elements of practice. Using the heuristic device of locale temporality and sociality requires each aspect of practice to be considered holistically. Viewing the three dimensions of practice as a whole allowed for consideration of how the protégés' practice

within their own work environment overlapped with their engagement in all aspects of Protégé as a VCoP.

6.4 Going beyond the traditional notion of a Virtual Community

The aspects of the design of Protégé that go beyond the traditional notion of an online or digital VCoP provided the protégés with formal and informal learning opportunities that engaged with Eraut's (2007) three dimensions of practice:

1. the opportunity to engage in practice activities (the first dimension and third dimension);
2. the ability to receive timely feedback (the second dimension and third);
3. access to incidental feedback through observation and discussions (the first, second dimension and third);
4. reflection triggered through professional discussions with facilitators and interviews with researchers (the second and third dimensions); and
5. legitimate peripheral participation (the first and third dimension).

6.4.1 Practice activity within Protégé

An epistemology of practice, as proposed by both Wenger and Eraut, relies upon the social nature and context of practice. Eraut (2007) was clear that this third dimension of practice was essential to the formation of professional identity, and the ability to learn and build upon competence in practice. He acknowledged that much of the informal learning he highlighted in his typology relied upon tacit knowledge. Therefore, he proposed that observing and listening to others at work was the way professionals “learn new practices, become aware of different kinds of knowledge and expertise and gain some sense of others tacit knowledge” (p. 409). However, Eraut went further than proposing observing and listening as a means of learning; indeed, he considered these

processes could be so important that they could result in a shift in professional identity (p. 409). As a result, the critical processes within Eraut's typology of workplace learning included consultation with and working alongside others.

Eraut's (2007, 2011) typology exposed how informal advice and feedback from peers could play a more significant role in professional learning in the workplace than formally supported learning structures such as mentoring (p. 408; p. 9). Levin (2009, 2011), and others (Foley et al. 2011) have supported the finding that interaction with peers would impact positively on the ability to learn to practice.

The findings of this thesis support Eraut's theory that practice which involves opportunities to observe the work of peers, can result in an internal identity transformation. These findings also support the work of Levin (2009) which was instrumental to the decision to begin a study of how migration agents formed their professional identity and the role a CoP may play with that development. Levin (2009) placed less emphasis on how migration lawyers *learnt in the workplace* and more on *how they considered* they had learnt aspects of practice. The four approaches to learning that Levin identified were:

1. The guided approach
2. The scholars' approach
3. The see one, do one approach
4. The sink or swim approach (Levin 2009, p.425).

Importantly Levin noted that all approaches were supplemented by what she called "unsolicited advice" (p. 425). Receiving unsolicited advice, is reminiscent of Eraut's (2004a) consideration of feedback from those who do not play a direct role in supervising or working with a professional and relates directly to the concept of informal feedback and the impact it had on protégés.

In Levin's subsequent work (2011), she addressed her presumption that the AILA as a professional body may be a form of a CoP. Levin found that membership of the AILA was not the primary reason immigration lawyers formed a community of practice. Once again, Levin (2011) reinforced the "significant commonalities among members of the New York City immigration bar" (p. 199), such as their immigrant background, their motivation to work in this area, their work in sole practice, and the implications of working in an area of law that is non-adversarial. She found that these commonalities provided an entry point for lawyers to practice in the area of immigration law and to take up membership of the AILA.

She also concluded that the parameters of immigration practice contributed to the importance of AILA to its members. These parameters are outlined as follows:

1. The fact that immigration lawyers do not litigate or negotiate against one another, but instead share a common opponent and, as a result, their practice provides conditions conducive to cooperation within that bar.
2. The constant changes to the law make information sharing with other lawyers important and foster reliance on the information flow generated by the AILA.
3. Their perceptions that they work in a harsh – and even unfair – legal system causes them to reach out to one another for professional and emotional support. (Levin, 2011, p. 221).

Levin's (2011) consideration of the AILA reveals the commonalities between practice that immigration lawyers in the US experience and that of migration agents in Australia. Some aspects of the AILA work in a similar way as they do in professional organisations in Australia. The AILA also strives to promote the norms of practice through formal structures and frameworks designed to assist practitioners with ethics, honesty, fraud, and conflicts of interest. Despite these frameworks, Levin found that each

immigration lawyer personally determined how they would implement the practices and norms espoused by the AILA (p. 219), and this finding seemed to indicate that despite membership of the AILA, the immigration lawyers built their professional identity upon parameters outside of their membership of that professional organisation.

Instead it was the recognition that they shared the same work experiences, needs, and problems appeared to be the crucial factor in fostering the growth of a common identity amongst Levin's immigration lawyers. Levin's findings drew attention to the similarities, shared by the immigration lawyers in her study, as prominent factors in forming both a CoP and their professional identity and subsequently lend weight to the findings of this thesis.

6.4.2 The effect of time on practice within Protégé

As discussed briefly in chapter 2, Smith, Hayes and Shea (2017) have commented on the lack of research that focuses on the effect of time on the growth of a novice to a professional within a CoP, or how time contributes to the functioning CoP or the development of participants identifying with the CoP (p. 221). Consideration of how protégés learnt to practice in the VCoP revealed the impact of time on the ways they learnt and the depth of knowledge they gained.

Eraut (2007) considered that the four elements of practice “take different forms according to the speed, context and type of technical and personal expertise deployed” (p. 406). This is where his dimensions of practice are directly applicable to the Protégé VCoP. Eraut concluded that his second dimension of time affected the metacognition of professionals. In other words, the response to a practice issue depends upon the amount of time one has to attend to it. The variability of time means that a decision can be instant and intuitive, or deliberative and analytical. Instant reflexive reactions provide little time for consideration of a problem. If time is permitted, the professional can step back and

allow a considered diagnosis of the problem after a review or a discussion with more knowledgeable peers. Actions could become routine or planned, and metacognition could be dependent on aspects such as situational awareness, short reactive reflection, or conscious reflection that allow for learning from the past and others (p. 407).

The VCoP provided the protégés with an opportunity to bring aspects of their external practice (which included Eraut's four elements of practice (2007, p. 406) into a specific social and bounded space. The asynchronous nature of the VCoP acted to slow time down; to the extent that all four elements of practice, as identified by Eraut (2007, p. 406), could occur in a deliberate, analytical and reflective way. Importantly, this included the slowing down of decision making and consideration of problems that were brought to the VCoP. The fact that multiple actors engaged with the consideration of complex problems within the VCoP, in a way that was visible to all, resulted in multiple ways of learning and observing practice. Facilitator 1 captured this perfectly in their first discussion with a protégé summing up how they felt the interactions were working between all the participants.

So, in a discussion sometimes you can move right round from “Hey, I thought I knew what the answer was”, but wow ...there is a left field thing that's come in and prompted me to go in a different direction and to think about it from a different angle. *F1 Discussion P 2*

As the time within the VCoP progressed, and the ability of protégés to understand the practice environment they were working in developed; answers were provided in a manner that both assisted them quickly and built up their confidence to practice. These answers came from experience; while the queries were not all legally based, the type of problem could be one that revealed their inexperience in practice

matters. Reaching out to colleagues provided feedback and the support they needed to consider their problems and provide timely advice to their clients:

For example, yesterday I had a quick question. I just couldn't find the information. I said to somebody I'll get back to you, I put the question up on Protégé and it was answered in double quick time by a couple of people, pointed me to where to find the piece of information. So, you know that was a good experience yesterday. P12 Discussion F1

6.4.3 The experience of feedback on practice in Protégé

Eraut (2007) concluded that feedback in the workplace could take more than one form, such as deliberate and formal feedback provided by a supervisor or mentor, or feedback as a by-product of working alongside a colleague or peer. This thesis acknowledges and agrees with his concept of feedback as a by-product and proposes that the use of the term incidental feedback best describes the feedback that results from an unplanned activity or learning processes, such as observing a colleague at work, which is essential to learning tacit knowledge.

While Eraut focused on purposeful feedback as an element of a supportive workplace (Eraut, 2004a,2007,2009), the data revealed that the recognition and validation provided by incidental feedback proved to be just as powerful for the protégés. In addition to the active way facilitators provided feedback to the protégés within the VCoP site and in their private discussions, the slowing down of decision making and consideration of practice problems within the VCoP did more than create new knowledge. It provided a means of incidental feedback to protégés through the insight they gained into the decision-making process and the working habits of their peers:

And then if I'm on the right track. It clearly gives me the right confidence that I thought of it correctly even if it's something I've never done before or heard before. So, when there's another person there, that kind of keeps you more confident because sometimes you may not necessarily know that you're correct in something. *P7 Interview R3*

Gaining knowledge through incidental feedback and observation included both technical aspects of practice and the intangible processes that are involved in working as a professional. The Polanyian epistemology, espoused by Pyrko et al. (2017, p. 406), is complex and, despite the initial consideration in chapter 2 of the role tacit knowledge may play in forming a professional identity, it has not been considered in full in this thesis.

However, the explanation of Pyrko et al. (2017, p. 375) and Eraut (2000), that the sharing of tacit knowledge relies on an understanding by both the inquirer and the respondent of the practice environment, demonstrates how the protégés assigned meaning to site interactions that may have been beyond their technical remit. Pyrko (p. 390) describes this as “indirectly sharing tacit knowledge” whereby a person develops their own tacit knowledge based on an experience of a “mutual performance”, where each person extends “their identities into the same knowledge area” (p. 394).

Writing down how a person approaches or considers a problem and exploring that process is fundamentally different to watching a person silently go through the process. The discussions of practice problems by the protégés, and the subsequent resolution of those problems, laid bare the tacit knowledge of practice underpinning the decision making. Nevertheless, the ability for practitioners to observe and learn from an interaction required them to understand more than the content presented in that

interaction. They needed to understand the context in which the interaction took place and transfer the knowledge to their practice.

Eraut (2007) considered these shared experiences crucial to an understanding of professional identity and emphasised how small interactions could be so profound that they promoted an “identity shift” (Eraut,2007,p. 409). When discussing workplace learning, Eraut provided an example of an accountant who experienced an identity shift after observing the way her colleague approached his work, when she realised she was “not just an employee, but part of a team” (Eraut, 2007, p. 409). Her observation was not just a means of learning how her colleague worked; it was feedback on how she could approach the job. “I thought I can do that, I can say 'I did that last job [before], do you want me to go and do it?' and it's just so much better than saying I have got nothing to do. I think that was when it changed, because I started thinking I can do things for myself” (Eraut, 2007, p. 409).

Observation of colleagues’ practice that results in incidental feedback is directly tied to the concept of reflection. The VCoP provided a repository of practice examples that allowed them to consider their own practice work in line with others and gain confidence through an understanding that they were “on the right track”, as well as an opportunity to reflect on their current and future practice.

I suppose what I learned is looking at other people’s problems and thinking ‘oh yes, what would I do if that was me’, or remembering when something came up that somebody else had that issue and going back and trying to find out what the answer was, what they did. *P6 Interview R3*

6.4.4 The opportunities for reflection in Protégé

While Eraut (2004b) agreed that reflection was an integral factor in practice, he expressed “unease” at the “appropriation by professional educators” (p.48) of Schon’s (1983) theories of reflection because they fail to consider the context of where reflective activities may take place. He warned that reflection which arose as a result of interactions with others required an engagement with the imagination, and possible links to the listener’s experiences; therefore, he felt the brief accounts of incidents a group may share within the workplace would fail to encourage reflection amongst participants (p. 50). Furthermore, while he remained a strong proponent of a supportive and friendly workplace, he warned this might not be enough to sustain the type of reflective activities that encourage professional development:

Even a friendly workplace can fail to provide an appropriate climate for reflection because it is quite normal for discussions about work to develop mutual affinity and even some mutual emotional support, without showing any inclination to discuss practice in sufficient detail for anyone to appear less than perfect. In spite of the obvious benefits of sharing practices, there is still a personal and social risk to be overcome by every participant. (2004b, p. 49)

His analysis of risks in reflection through shared discussion of work activities is important. It reveals the need for a safe, restricted environment within the VCoP. Protégé provided this support, and within a very short time protégés overcame any perception of personal or social risk their contributions may hold, and they began to regularly interact in ways that revealed their lack of subject knowledge and experience to their peers. Interaction between protégés took place within the discussion forums, the online

professional development classes, in the private chat rooms, and within the café site where protégés met for informal chats.

The opportunities for reflection that the discussions with facilitators and the interviews with researchers provided protégés stands outside the plethora of academic recommendations of deliberate, reflective practice for professionals (Bhandari et al., 2002; Fruehwald, 2015; Schon, 1987, Schon & DeSanctis 2011). The mode of reflection undertaken by the protégés was vastly different to that espoused by Schon's (1983) concepts of 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action' and more in line with Fruehwald's (2015) ideas relating to the development of a professional identity through metacognition and "self-authoring" (2016, p. 59), and Eraut's (2000) concept of "non-formal reactive learning" (p. 116). These reflective opportunities provided a means for each protégé to exercise their self-efficacy.

When the protégés discussed the issues they faced with the facilitators and the research team, they were often able to clarify specific issues or problems and subsequently recognise a course of action that would allow them to move forward. The act of participating in an interview creates a relationship that can transform the participants (Russell & Kelly, 2002). Importantly, the process of interviewing, which by its nature follows a pattern of discussion and questioning, forced the protégés to stop and reflect on why events happened and how they reacted to these events. While the research team were not working directly with protégés within the VCoP, they were all migration agents. The protégés knew this, and the interviews were conducted in a free-flowing unstructured manner reminiscent of a conversation between peers. This form of reflection is more closely related to the concept of peer reflection, as espoused by Trede and Jackson (2019), who advocate the benefit for students who have experienced work integrated learning to undertake critical discussions with their peers that explore "together how to act otherwise in similar situations" (2019, p. 5).

It has already been noted in previous chapters that there was a marked difference in the way protégés discussed their clients and their work within the forum and the discussions they had with facilitators. The facilitator discussions provided what Fruehwald (2016) refers to as reflective activities, which allowed them to “draw from previous experience” in order to apply this to “new and unfamiliar situations” (p. 12). This is a form of reflection that many professionals may “intuitively and tacitly engage in” (Leering, 2017, p. 70). By contrast, the reflective opportunities protégés experienced with researchers arose from the need to address specific questions or explore areas of their practice and their decision making

The demand to include reflection as a key skill for professionals is a consistent one for those teaching law and legal practice (Alexander, 2011; Collins et al., 2007; Fruehwald, 2015). However, the methods or suggestions for teaching reflection rarely go beyond the need to keep a journal of activities and actions in order to self-assess progress (Madison & Natt Gantt, 2015, p. 383), or the need to ensure educators create opportunities for student reflection to occur (Alexander, 2011; Hamilton, 2017, p. 8; Leering, 2017; Trede et al., 2012).

In a call that acknowledged Eraut’s (2004b) concerns regarding the need to keep context at the forefront when discussing reflection, Fruehwald (2016) has suggested law schools should provide a coach/professor as well as a curriculum that included ethics and professionalism. He argues that a student will not be able to reflect properly on their professional role if they have no knowledge to base their reflections on (p. 20). Leering (2017) has described law schools as playing a “critical role” in “setting the stage for professional learning and identity formation” and calls for a “pedagogy of reflection” (p.54) to influence the curriculum. She proposes two conceptual frameworks to assist law schools to achieve this goal and suggests practical solutions such as meditation, reflective journals, and capstone assessments.

Protégés were not students, and their educational qualifications would not have provided many opportunities for reflection beyond capstone assessments they may have undertaken in their coursework. Nevertheless, as early-career professionals, they practiced in the authentic environment Fruehwald proposed for his students. Furthermore, the facilitators within the VCoP sought to provide the support a coach, mentor, or supportive employer would provide to new employees. Despite Fruehwald's (2016) concerns that providing a coach "is not enough to fully develop a professional identity" (p. 19), the informal reflective activities protégés engaged in with their facilitators and with the researchers became a crucial factor in the process of developing their identity. These discussions were not based on the professional development plans provided for the protégés in their library. They focused instead on the issues facing protégés at that point in time.

Each form of reflection involves a different cognitive engagement that is arguably different to that which an individual would employ if they explicitly set aside time to self-analyse and reflect on their practice and their place in the profession. This was evidenced in the response of P9 to a researcher's question regarding their perception of their professional identity. The response "Um I wasn't asked this question before..." indicates that not only had they never been asked that question before, they had also never considered it.

This thesis maintains that the use of interviews as a major source of data in CGT means that the role the interview plays or the effect it has upon the participants must be acknowledged. Whether this is to highlight bias, or to situate the data into a context. The inclusion of discussions and interviews within the parameter of the VCoP situates the data into the appropriate context by extending the concept of a VCoP. It expands Protégé as a VCoP to include not only the site interactions and the outside practice issues proteges but to the VCoP, but the activities surrounding the project of Protégé and the very act of

participating in these activities. The concept of reflection as an integral factor for a professional VCoP adds a fourth dimension for those who use Wenger's (1998) definition of a CoP as a basis for establishing a professional VCoP. This then means the design of the professional VCoP (which by its nature is based in technology) is built on four descriptive factors. It now includes a group of people who share mutual engagement, joint enterprise, a shared repertoire, and opportunity for reflection. Professional VCoPs will benefit from reflective activities such as those described above. Requiring a form of professional engagement, through safe and informal one-on-one discussions with a peer or more experienced professional, provides opportunities for reflection and growth that may not be found in a traditionally designed social VCoP.

6.4.5 Participation in Protégé...consideration of legitimacy

Thus, participation in the cultural practice in which any knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning. The social structure of this practice, its power relations and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning (i.e., for legitimate peripheral participation).

(Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98)

There have been many critiques of Lave and Wenger's construct of legitimate peripheral participation (Consalvo et al., 2015; Fuller et al., 2005; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004), and many examples of how the construct can be applied to the practice of participants in differing CoPs (Cochrane & Narayan, 2017; Cochrane & Narayan, 2016). This chapter does not revisit the concept in detail nor the critiques. However, participation within the VCoP is considered a fundamental aspect of a CoP and speaks to how protégés learnt to practice within the VCoP. Focusing on participation in general, instead of Lave and Wenger's construct of legitimate peripheral participation, is

not new. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) questioned the construct as one that restricts belonging to a process requiring movement from the edge to the centre, “the end product of legitimate peripheral participation is the achievement of full membership” (p. 9).

Consalvo et al. (2015) have reviewed 20 years of research into the construct and critique the concept as one that restricts learning to an apprentice type relationship, where the newcomer begins on the periphery. They briefly raise the work of Gee and Hayes (2011) who developed a concept of affinity spaces, where individuals participate in virtual communities in which their recognition is reliant on a shared endeavour. “All participants are welcomed as makers and producers not just as consumers and listeners, leadership shifts, and teaching and learning relationships are flexible; knowledge resources are distributed amongst participants” (Consalvo et al., 2015, p. 4).

Stone et al. (2017) also refer to Gee’s work on semiotic spaces as an alternative to the usual concepts of a CoP, namely as one that relies on a move from newcomer to centre. These alternative concepts of a CoP where all participants, regardless of their actual participation, are welcomed to interact on an equal footing fits the experience of those in the Protégé VCoP.

The nature of the research project created the protégés’ legitimacy in terms of belonging. The call for participants, the selection, and the choice to join the project created a shared endeavour. They immediately moved this shared endeavour to one of shared practice. The introduction of a second cohort did not interrupt this feeling of belonging for the majority of the protégés. Despite the initial concerns raised, by two of the protégés, of the new cohort (see chapter 5), the second cohort quickly slipped into the rhythm of contribution and interaction. Within three months of this new cohort entering the VCoP, the Facilitator had noted that all the protégés had moved to a “high level of determination” (F1 memo) and by June 2014 they were answering each other’s questions and discussions in a “very relevant and considered way without any intervention by

facilitators”. The levels of interaction were so notable the facilitator queried if this reflected a timeline that would be useful for the profession:

Is this time frame relevant - is 10 months to a year the “right” time frame for recent graduates/registrants to become a self-supporting mature community of practice? Does this represent an online internship time frame suitable for this industry? Is this appropriate as a time frame for new practitioners to be inducted into the profession? *Facilitator 1 MEMO 24/07/2014 titled: Have wings will fly.*

In this memo, the focus of the facilitator was on the levels of engagement they could see occurring within the VCoP site, including posts and attendance to the virtual professional development sessions given by the protégés. However, the data indicated that regular contributions to the site were not the only indication of the impact of the VCoP or protégés’ engagement. Reading and observing the interactions of others appeared to be as powerful as the act of contributing.

Jawitz (2009) acknowledged theories of academic identity construction, which claim that active participation and knowledge distribution throughout a community of practice is how members are recognised by each other, and that this recognition is what ultimately changes and develops their identity. However, he also argued that the constant renegotiation of identity through social interaction can result in, but is not dependent on, active participation in a social setting, which recognises the role the individual’s agency plays in identity construction and the roles individuals take up within the social setting. This is supported by Wenger’s (1998) observations that participation is inevitably a decision by the individual (p.167). Therefore, non-participation may be a deliberate choice “that reflects our power as individuals and communities to define our relations with the rest of the world” (Jawitz, 2009, p. 4).

This acknowledgement that individuals make a choice to participate contrasts with Wenger's focus on participation as "legitimate". For Wenger (1991), the choice to participate as an observer, though a legitimate form of participation, would result in restricted membership of the CoP. Ultimately, this would impact on the ability to align and engage the individual's identity with the broader CoP. Vollenbroek (2019) disagrees with this limiting view of learning as an observer. He points out that the nature of working online means it is "easier to observe" (p. 48) than make contributions, claiming that research supports findings that only a minimal number of individuals actively contribute and create new content within a VCoP (p. 48). At the same time, he acknowledges the benefits passive users can provide to a VCoP and includes observation (which he terms consumption (p. 49)) as an essential social activity within his research.

While obtaining incidental feedback, and knowledge through observation, may not directly contribute to the co-creation of knowledge itself, the effect this co-creation of knowledge has upon the observer can be profound and extend beyond the life of the VCoP. The knowledge gained through observation may push members to begin to interact more frequently; or it may result in knowledge they can use in their practice outside of the confines of the VCoP (Borzillo et al., 2011). This, as Eraut (2007) noted, can result in changes to professional identity through the adoption of a new perspective on practice. The deliberate choice to remain silent within a social setting is therefore not an indication that learning, which can lead to a transformation of identity, cannot take place:

I actually appreciate listening in on, shall we say listening in on other people's topics? I try and have a quick read of most of what gets posted. Because I find it to be you know, useful and a good learning experience, and ... I was even thinking to myself yesterday, "Wow I wonder with all

these threads, if I could have access to these in six months' time when it's over. *Interview F1 P12*

The effective design of Protégé created an environment that enabled practice activity to occur in a way that provided opportunities for reflection and meaningful participation. The elements of Erauts epistemology of practice were achieved by the effective design which contradicted directly with his view that an effective CoP could not be held in the online environment. The keys of time, feedback and reflection allowed proteges to recognise and understand how their peers worked and in turn to recognise the same qualities they held within themselves and as a result had a direct impact on their professional identity.

6.5 Addressing expectations

The data exposed the role incidental learning, through observation and reflection, had upon the development of the protégés' professional identity and practice. The effect of these unknown aspects provided unexpected answers to the research question by revealing how the design of a VCoP could unintentionally trigger learning events that have the power to enhance the individual process of forming an identity.

They also exposed the differences between the final results and the preconceptions held in entering the project. Charmaz (2006) was clear that CGT methods assumed that the data and the analysis was co-created through a shared relationship between the experiences of all participants, including the researcher. Charmaz concluded that constructivists must acknowledge that their final analysis will always rely upon the researcher's point of view. This stance requires them to be "aware of their presuppositions and to grapple with how they affect the research. They realise that grounded theorists can ironically import preconceived ideas into their work when they remain unaware of their starting assumptions" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131).

Chapter 1 outlined four preconceptions or expectations the researcher held about the experience's participants would have within Protégé. The first was that early-career (newly registered) migration agents would not have a solid sense of their professional identity until they had successfully established and managed their practice for some time. Importantly, I had presumed that the adoption of a professional identity would rely upon the recognition of their professional ability by others such as clients, peers and stakeholders. This preconception derives from the context in which the emerging profession of migration agent is situated.

Protégés came from a broad range of backgrounds and a range of professions. Of the four protégés who initially did not identify solely as migration agents, two claimed they had a dual identity consisting of both a lawyer and a migration agent. The remaining two held on to a different perception of their professional identity throughout the project. One remained secure in their chosen identity as a businessperson, and the other was clear that changing identities was an obstacle, which they found difficult to address. The findings expose how the recognition of aspects of the self, and subsequent recognition of aspects of self in others, play a crucial role in an ongoing personal and professional narrative, which directly opposes the assumption that the success of adopting a professional identity would rely primarily upon the acknowledgement of others.

The second preconception was that early-career migration agents would place their primary focus on learning business skills and strategies that assisted the management of their sole practice as a business entity. While protégés did make a few inquiries within the VCoP site about business processes and structures, only two specifically requested business advice. The serious concerns raised by protégés were not related to the practicalities of running a small business. They were the result of constant changes to migration policy or law. These changes affected the intended or actual client base of the protégés, which then impacted on the viability of their business model, and it

presented a need for proteges to take steps to address any problems that arose. Once again, the consistency of concerns amongst protégés provided a touchstone of shared experiences.

The third preconception was that early-career migration agents who held law degrees would be more confident than those who had different employment backgrounds. In particular, they would demonstrate confidence in their ability to interpret and apply the law and would dominate some of the discussions on the VCoP site. Khan (2017) draws attention to what she calls the hierarchical structure of legitimacy within this emerging profession. While she acknowledges the perspectives of migration agents, i.e. that they have a legitimate status within the profession, she concludes that practicing lawyers and migration agents with a law degree hold a higher position on the hierarchy of legitimacy than those without these qualifications. Her analysis rests on the assertions by lawyers that their legitimacy comes not from practice but “by virtue of their training and knowledge obtained through their qualifications along with their membership of the LCA, which not only provides support for professional development but is in a stronger position to petition government in comparison to associations of non-lawyer agents” (Khan, 2017, p. 73).

Although one-third of the protégés held a law degree (n=6) (27.78%), there appeared to be no discernible difference in the confidence and interactions of these protégés on the VCoP site, nor in their interviews and discussions with researchers and facilitators, when compared to those without legal qualifications. Also, the preconception that a law degree would have provided protégés with a greater understanding of the complexity of migration law, and intersections with other areas such as international or employment law, was not upheld. To the contrary, two protégés indicated that their law degree resulted in greater insecurity in their ability to practice. For others, the data did not

reveal that a law degree had any discernible impact on their initial confidence in practice or in interacting within the VCoP site.

The final preconception, that the impact of Protégé would be noticeably different for those who had practised as lawyers, held a law degree or worked in small or medium firms, when compared to new agents working in sole practice, did not arise in the data analysis. Instead, the impact of Protégé on the confidence and competence of protégés was not affected by their employment as lawyers or migration agents in small to medium firms. In part, this could be because the employment particulars of the protégés changed across the time they were in the project. At the beginning of the project, 77.78% worked as sole practitioners (n=14), 11% worked in small law firms smaller than four (n=2), and 11% worked in a law firm as the only migration agent (n=2). By the end of Protégé, eleven of the eighteen protégés described themselves as self-employed.

6.6 Chapter summary

The expectation of designing a VCoP in line with Eraut's concept of a supportive workplace was that these specific design aspects would provide the support needed to learn the practice elements of migration work. However, the final analysis has demonstrated that the impact of the design was not merely the creation of specific structural elements that allowed individuals to learn their trade or communicate with each other. Activity within the VCoP, and the reflective opportunities gained through engagement with researchers and facilitators in private discussions, ensured that protégés engaged with the key elements of practice, identified by Eraut as those present in a supportive workplace that provided supportive workplace relationships, positive and timely feedback, and the ability to build confidence through challenging and meaningful work.

Protégés were engaging in meaningful work that presented challenges and opportunities. The VCoP provided a supportive workplace environment where they were able to receive feedback on their work. This feedback was sometimes direct and came from peers who were more or less knowledgeable on the subject matter, or from facilitators who could provide guidance either within the chat rooms of the VCoP site or during their private discussion. Protégés also received incidental feedback through observations of others' interactions and problem-solving.

The adoption of an epistemological view of practice that places learning and transformation at the centre has allowed for a consideration of the ways the specific design elements of Protégé enhanced the professional identity of the migration agents involved in this research. Adopting a view of a VCoP that extends to interactions outside of the online or digital site (Vollenbroek, 2019) allowed for aspects such as discussions and interviews to be considered as part of the VCoP. The findings have exposed the role incidental feedback, through observation and reflection, had upon confidence, the competence of protégés, and the final development of their professional identity.

Returning to the literature has provided an opportunity to consider how the findings related to previous research. Overall, the findings have added to the work of Wenger et al. and Eraut by providing a different perspective on identity development within a CoP and by demonstrating the transferability of Eraut's concepts on workplace learning to a VCoP. Importantly a return to the literature has supported the findings from the data that reflection is an additional criterion for a professional VCoP. As a result, the design of a professional VCoP should include four crucial descriptive factors: a group of people who share mutual engagement, joint enterprise, a shared repertoire, and opportunity for reflection.

Preconceptions of the researcher before entering the project were considered and found to be unsubstantiated. Addressing these preconceptions further has highlighted the

commonality of experiences protégés had as early career migration agents, including the unpredictability of the practice environment and the nature of working as sole practitioners.

Presenting the analysis of findings has required consideration of the research sample. The data in this research included interviews and site interactions of protégés within a larger cohort. This thesis relied upon the contribution of the participants who completed interviews with the researchers and discussions with facilitators. The sample was chosen to ensure that the interviews across time could be used for coding. It can therefore be presumed that those who took part in the three interviews, and in the two facilitator discussions as required, were more active participants than the twelve remaining protégés who did not make themselves available for any or all of these. As a result, the experiences and perceptions of the protégés not included in this sample have not been represented.

Chapter 7 will continue to focus on the individual and the workplace. It will discuss and detail the four theoretical concepts that underpin the three findings and demonstrate how they speak to the adoption of a professional identity and encapsulate the stages of learning to practice by the protégés.

Chapter 7 Forming an individual professional identity

Chapter 6 detailed how this thesis focuses on the individual within a VCoP. Focusing on the individual means narrative is at the centre of the development of the protégés professional identity. Because it is only through a personal accounting of their experience that we can establish how the design, the social interaction and the ability to learn from peers, influenced their professional identity (Virta et al., 2019). While chapter 6 discussed the design of the VCoP in relation to Eraut's epistemology of practice, this chapter will consider the experiences of protégés from the moment they decided to become migration agents and the development of their professional identity from that time to the end of Protégé. It will do so by returning to the findings and the theoretical concepts that underpin the findings and explaining how they reveal the process of professional identity formation.

Three findings arise from this research. This chapter continues the discussion of the second finding and introduces the third finding. It describes how they are underpinned by four theoretical concepts that provide meaning and context to the processes involved in forming an identity as a professional migration agent. The two findings discussed in this chapter suggest that the identity of a professional migration agent does not come solely from approval of others; it requires recognition by the individual themselves that they belong to the profession because they imagine that they share the specific personal traits and similar experiences as others in the profession.

Chapter 6 discussed Finding 2: That the deliberate design of a VCoP was able to mimic the role a supportive workplace would play in developing professional identity through exposure to peers and different ways of practice, and that this exposure, and the subsequent recognition of aspects of self in others, enhanced and assisted the development of a professional identity.

Along with the final Finding 3: That the adoption of a professional identity occurs through a personal identification and recognition of aspects of the self that allow an individual to imagine they can undertake the role. These findings will underpin the discussion in this chapter.

The chapter presents four theoretical concepts that underlie the findings, and in doing so addresses the first sub-question “What process may be involved in forming an identity as a professional migration agent?” and provides some insight into the second sub-question. The theoretical concepts reveal that the identity formation of a professional migration agent is an active, deliberate and ongoing process. The chapter also considers the role of narrative in maintaining a coherent professional identity and how the findings relate to the work of Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) and Nyström (2009a;2009b), as well as Wenger’s (Farnsworth et al., 2016) modes of identification. In addressing the sub-questions, the chapter considers Wenger’s concept of identity formation within a CoP and proposes a process for forming a professional identity that incorporates the experiences of protégés within the VCoP. It further explains how the theoretical concepts relate to this proposed process and to the findings.

7.1 Adding to current theories of professional identity formation

The findings focus on the individual and as such recognise the role a personal narrative (Clandinin, 2006, p. 6; Edwards, 2010, Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, Kahan, 2004) plays in developing a professional identity, and extend current theories of professional identity formation within a VCoP (Collin, 2009; Evetts, 2003; Fruehwald, 2015; Hall et al., 2010; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Levin, 2009; Miscenko & Day, 2016; Nyström, 2009).

These findings are consistent with previous research. Hall et al. (2010) identified the impact self-concept has on the formation of identity, concluding that “identity is

understood to include the constellation of beliefs, values and motives by which people define themselves in their professional role” (p. 33). Similarly, Collin (2009) has acknowledged that identity relies upon how “people understand and define themselves in relation to themselves, their social environment and their culture” (p. 24), and Edwards (2010) who suggested that “identity is an organising principle for action” (p.10), that enables the individual to act in line with interests that matter to them. These definitions are crucial to understanding the findings. Defining the self, arises from recognitions of qualities that the individual believes they hold and can see in others; be it the imagined community of others, a role others’ take on, or a group of people they are seeking to connect with.

The findings are also broadly compatible with the work of Trede (2012) who drew upon the work of Giddens, Habermas and Bauman to classify three theoretical concepts of identity, the first of which is supported by the findings in this research (p.161). Trede (2012) calls this theoretical concept the “conscious self at the centre of professional identity development” (p.161). As she explains: “*The once self* from the past is constantly evolving towards the *future self* without exactly predicting where it is heading. The conscious self is fluid and constantly transforming based on critically learning from experiences.” (p. 161). Trede and McEwen (2012) have proposed that a critical identity would help “novice professionals become part of a community where the “other” is also or could be themselves...” (p. 38). This concept of a professional identity is in line with the findings and theoretical concepts detailed in this chapter.

As with Trede’s (2012) concept of a ‘conscious self’ (p.161.), the majority of the protégés did not appear to differentiate between who they were before they began to study, or before they began to practice as migration agents, and whom they would become. Instead, they drew upon their narrative to indicate why they had specific qualities that would enable them to fulfil the role. This is in sharp contrast to Nyström’s

(2009) study of early practitioners and students, where she identified that the majority of students in her study felt they held two or more distinct spheres of self they needed to integrate with their professional identity. Regardless of the difference between the experiences they had as students and the very different world of practice, the notion of “juggling identities”, in the manner Nyström (2009a) identifies, was only evident in one of the protégés’ (P9) accounts of their experiences.

Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) have emphasised the critical role coherent narrative plays in identity construction when an individual is transitioning from one work role to another. With the introduction of the term “narrative identity work” (p. 136), Ibarra and Barbulescu proposed a process model for the identity narrative associated with work role transitions. These transitions include changing a role within a stable workplace, losing a job or taking on new employment. Their process model focused on the evolution of a narrative ‘repertoire’ (p. 137) that they claim begins “long before” an actual role change occurs and... “extends significantly beyond it” (p. 137). This process requires a long period of self-narration as an individual verbalises the reasons for the role transition they are experiencing. Ibarra and Barbulescu have proposed that the narrative repertoires consist of previously told stories, adapted continuously to provide a self-narrative that depicts the career as a series of unfolding events and makes sense sequentially. The role of the narrative is to establish the agency of the protagonist, which explains the work role transition and provides legitimacy that embeds the individual’s story into the broader cultural discourse (p. 141).

According to Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010), the need for a coherent narrative exposes a period of insecurity as a person transitions from one role to another. They claim that that period of coherent self-narration is maintained through a transition bridge, which crosses gaps that become exposed when an individual begins to cross between past and present roles (p. 138). Interactions with others provide feedback that legitimises the

role: “stories help people articulate provisional selves, link the past and the future into a harmonious continuous sense of self and enlist others to lend social reality to the desired changes.” (p. 138). They suggest that this transition bridge assists with the uncertainty of transition, which will end when a person can resolve any conflict or contradiction they may be experiencing in their narrative repertoire. Importantly, they conclude that a self-narrative that aligns closely with a person’s perception of who they are is more likely to succeed as an ongoing narrative (p. 145). However, they maintain that self-narratives that achieve validation by others are “more likely” to be added to a person’s narrative repertoire than those that do not, as people test out their narrative to suit the cultural or social situation (p. 147).

While Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) acknowledge the need for a self-narrative to align with the individual’s self-perception of who they are, their work remains focused on the ways an individual will adapt and change this narrative, testing it out on others to see if it resonates and provides them with a coherent legitimacy for belonging in their new role. As a result, their work does not acknowledge that an individual’s realisation of a shared experience, values and professional practice may play a crucial part in forming a professional identity.

The findings and theoretical concepts proposed here also focus on the identity narrative individuals employ when changing their professional identity. They highlight the experiences the protégés observed, how they reacted to them, and the impact they had on their professional identity development. The focus does not move from the individual but remains on their recognition of their own qualities and values, and how they perceived these to be reflected in others. The theoretical concepts capture the elements of transition and uncertainty that Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) have identified. The protégés’ identity narrative was not static or limited to their original decision to become a migration agent, nor was it divided or conflicted in the ways Nyström (2009a) has

described. This chapter details how the protégés initially maintained their identity narrative by reaching back into their past, and by consistently aligning their present professional identity with their past experiences and values.

7.2 The process of forming a professional identity

Wenger's consideration of individual identity formation within a CoP is useful to consider in the light of the findings. Wenger proposed that individual identity work within a CoP occurs in stages (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 150). His three modes, or identification - imagination, alignment and engagement (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 150) - as discussed in chapter 2, link identity with group participation. He proposed that the first phase of adoption of social identity is an imagining, which he illustrated with an almost whimsical example of a young girl watching the movie *Free Willy*, who imagines she could become a marine biologist. A stage of alignment follows as she determines what she must do to ensure she can achieve her goal to practice marine biology. Finally, there is a stage of engagement during which she "engages with certain practices" to achieve her dream (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 150). While Wenger was referring back to an academic paper he had discussed earlier (Williams et al, 2009 in Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 150), which referenced a young girl choosing to become a marine mammologist (Williams et al., 2009, p. 9), the reference he used was a general example of how he felt individuals built their identities within what he termed "a regime of competence" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Wenger concluded that identity formation was a "kind of ongoing work rather than a thing" (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 149), which means that individual identity relies on a series of experiences that occur over time. Under Wenger's model, the individual 'constructs' an image an environment and imagines themselves occupying the identity they want to adopt or pursue. As they begin this process their identity is then realigned (2009, p. 2), or moulded as a response to the knowledge they gained by

pursuing their goal or when actively taking part within a learning or professional community linked to their identity goal.

While aspects of Wenger's modes of identity formation are applicable to a consideration of the formation and enhancement of protégés' professional identity, his theory remains focused upon the "regime of competence associated within a given community of practice" (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 150). As well as the interactions and identity an individual will develop as a result of their learning within a specific social framework:

The focus on identity also adds a human dimension to the notion of practice. It is not just about techniques. When learning is becoming, when knowledge and knower are not separated, then the practice is also about enabling such becoming...Gaining a competence entails becoming someone for whom the competence is a meaningful way of living in the world. (Wenger, 2009, p. 3)

Williams et al., (2009, p. 14), upon who Wenger rests his example, examined the young girl's choice to study mathematics at university in order to become a marine mammologist, and speculated that her positive disposition towards mathematics was the key to sustaining her imagined future career. Despite presenting the example of an identity narrative that begins when this young girl is eight years old, neither Williams nor Wenger delve into the reasons why a person would make what is often a bold assumption that they can fulfil a particular professional role.

Because Wenger's (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p.150) three modes of identification miss the crucial step, of considering why a person may imagine they can fulfill a role, they fail to adequately capture the way protégés approached their identity narrative as migration agents. Protégés did not construct a self-image or an 'imagined environment'

of migration agents (Wenger 2009, p.2), they kept their identity narrative consistent, by identifying aspects of the self that met their identity goal and adapting their behavior through deliberate decisions they made to change the stimulus they needed to respond to. This meant that when circumstances changed within their practice landscape, they adapted in ways that did not involve changing their internal perceptions of themselves. Despite the stressful period of learning how to practice as a migration agent, protégés held onto the key personal traits they believed enabled them to do the work. However, they also experienced a significant shift in their professional identity when they recognised aspects of their own experiences, and expectations in their peers.

A similar model to Wenger's (Farnsworth et al., 2016) modes of identification with a CoP is proposed to highlight the role self-perception plays in the formation of a professional or work-based identity. This thesis postulates that the protégés passed through overlapping phases in developing their professional identity. The first stage was similar to that Wenger has proposed. It involved imagining one could fulfil a role. However, the findings of this thesis propose that the imagining that Wenger identified was broader than he envisaged. Consequently, the phases proposed by the findings of this thesis are:

1. Imagined: The individual recognises or identifies past and present aspects of their self-identity that suit the imagined role and projects these onto the role, bringing past aspects of their identity narrative and projecting them into the future.
2. Maintained: A maintenance stage of the imagined identity that involves striving to learn all aspects of the role one has adopted and adapting to external events that threaten the identity one has adopted.
3. Actualised: The imagined identity becomes real when the individual realises their experiences and professional qualities are shared by others.

Protégés' descriptions of their choices and work as agents reflect the ongoing process of reframing and maintaining the personal narrative that had initially enabled them to take up the role. Protégés in this study were able to reflect on and reframe notions about their professional identity, their work and the impact of Protégé on their development. Constant reframing of their identity from their migrant background, their experiences as a 'student', their identification as a 'newbie' agent to a 'confident professional', was used to build on their adopted identity of a professional migration agent.

Finding 3 that the adoption of a professional identity occurs through a personal identification and recognition of aspects of the self that allow an individual to imagine they can undertake the role, provides additional insight into the process that Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) and Wenger (Farnsworth et al., 2016) have proposed.

7.3 Recognising self in others

The finding that a defining moment for the protégés in the VCoP was when they recognised aspects of 'self in others' is conceptually different from Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of belonging to communities of practice, where one learns "to talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation" (p.108). This recognition did not arise from personal discussions within the VCoP between protégés that revealed their migrant backgrounds, family life or previous employment. As with Levin's (2009, 2011) lawyers these factors only provided an entry pathway to the profession. However, recognising the self in others, protégés came from the realisation of the following three aspects:

First the protégés, as migration agents recognised other protégés were seeking the same things, such as a good outcome for their client and an increase in their knowledge of practical aspects of the work:

So, it has kind of made me think that we're not competitors and we're all in this together. And we are all trying to help people. Even if everyone wants to be successful financially or whatever, their thoughts are around that. I suppose in a way it made me realise that we are able to share things. We don't have to keep things to ourselves or to our chest... It was things that people were posting. "This is what happened", "just be aware of this", sort of things or "this is a good thing". Whatever it might be. It just made you realise you all want the same things. And we all work together. So, it was almost like a team. Working together. *Interview R3 P8*

Secondly the protégés recognised their peers and their facilitators had similar experiences with their clients, the Immigration Department, and changes to legislation:

The advantage was, what happened with Protégé was it gave me a really in-depth exposure to the kinds of issues that arise when you get away from asylum-seekers, um, and the problems that people can have, problems that agents can have as well as problems the clients can have. *Interview R3 P17*

And finally, the protégés, regardless of their experience, recognised they were all able to contribute to knowledge that would assist each other:

And that's why Protégé was for me, because it was, you know you had that safety net that people were sort of keeping an eye on what's going on and could comment when you thought it was appropriate, but when you didn't think it was appropriate, you know, there was nothing wrong with not commenting either, so that was a much better forum for me.

And you know, you knew, you felt comfortable to ask questions because you know, you knew you were contributing to the answers as well so, it wasn't just one-sided. *Interview R3 P16*

The interactions protégés had within the VCoP provided further validation of their experiences in practice and the professional identity they had chosen. Taking part in Protégé enhanced, but did not override, the protégés' professional identity as migration agents. The transition to a new professional identity began long before protégés entered the Protégé project. Protégés had begun to identify as migration agents from the moment they decided to take steps towards formal qualifications needed to register as an agent. However, in the same way that Levin's (2009) immigration lawyers learnt through their connections with peers that they shared the same work experiences, the experience in Protégé allowed the participants to see they also faced the same problems and goals and values as others working as migration agents.

Recognising a shared identity or commonality is not restricted to work practices. Foley et al. (2012) agreed with Eraut's (2007) conclusion that "self-knowledge, attitudes and emotions" (p. 406) were also crucial to workplace learning and professional identity. Foley et al. (2012) found that the professional identity development of new lawyers, working in firms, relied heavily on their ability to work in an environment that provided a "comfortable accommodation between one's own values and those modelled and practiced by colleagues" (p. 2). Their finding focused heavily on the ethical stance of the firm and the way both clients and colleagues were treated. They concluded that there was a direct link between the way participants practised, and the values they brought to their practice. Moreover, while they emphasised that their data was from a small cohort of new lawyers, their findings confirmed the important role that recognising aspects of self can play when entering a professional community.

Foley et al. (2011) described an ethical workplace culture as one that encouraged its employees to move beyond egoistic self-interest, concluding that an environment that applauds competitiveness and suspicion is not conducive to mental health. In much the same way as Levin's (2009, 2011) immigration lawyers did not compete with each other, the work of the protégés was not adversarial. The very nature of their work in sole or small practice ensured that the elements identified by Foley et al. (2011) were rare in their experience. For many of the protégés, the move to a career dominated by sole practice was a deliberate choice to find a way of working that fitted their lifestyle. Nevertheless, their professional identity required linkage with the profession, and this is where the "comfortable accommodation between one's values" (p. 3) and those of colleagues becomes important. The private discussions with facilitators, and the ability to raise complex practice issues at any time within the VCoP site, provided a crucial insight for protégés into their professional practice and how they could relate to the profession and the broader community

7.4 Theoretical concepts

Four theoretical concepts arise from the data. A concept is an abstract way of describing and understanding a phenomenon (Shoemaker et al., 2003, p. 2). Charmaz (2014,) argues that the grounded theory method begins with the situation of participants, which is inclusive of their narrative as well as the researcher's observations and inductive analysis of their situation (p.243). For example, grounded theory can include macro- and micro-analysis. She explains how different theorists can analyse the same phenomenon, such as job loss from different perspectives, moving from macro- to micro-analysis or vice versa. She recommends "defining and conceptualising relationships between experiences and events" in order to "define the major phases and concentrate on the relationships between them" (p. 245). The concepts presented here meet this

recommendation through a detailed description of events, phases and processes the protégés underwent during their time in the VCoP, and through a focus on the relationships between these events.

Each theoretical concept rests on underlying categories that reach back to the data and reveal how the theoretical concepts build and relate to the findings. As discussed in chapter 3, the four theoretical concepts underlie the narrative processes of building a professional identity as a migration agent. They expose the temporal and social aspects of when protégés passed through these phases of forming their professional identity, and the importance of the locale, where they experienced meaning-making that enabled them to move through these phases. The four concepts are:

1. Building a bridge between past and present
2. Focusing on a client-centered practice
3. Navigating the unpredictable
4. Co-creating knowledge

These theoretical concepts address "the how" questions that arise from the data and reveal the processes underlying the characteristics that are common to the protégés. Characteristics such as a link to a migrant past, a diverse employment background, and the desire to work in an area that meets their lifestyle needs were all drivers for the motivation to become a migration agent, and they speak to the aspects of self that protégés determined were essential to the adoption of their new profession.

The four theoretical concepts illustrate the three phases the protégés passed through when forming their professional identity. However, they also present no temporal boundary and continue to apply to the ongoing identity of migration agent that the protégés embody. The first phase of imagining was captured within the theoretical concepts of *Building a bridge between past and present*. The descriptions of these theoretical concepts provide an insight into how the protégés imagined their personal

qualities and experiences would enable them to undertake the role of agent. The second phase of maintaining an identity includes all four theoretical concepts, as protégés maintain the identity they have imagined and begin to inhabit the role. The concepts *Focusing on client centered practice* and *Navigating the unpredictable* involve practice activity and deliberate thoughts and actions. The third phase of actualisation includes the theoretical concept of *Co-construction of knowledge*, the concept that encapsulates learning in practice. This concept rests within the VCoP, and as such, it has a boundary that restricts consideration applying to any experiences the agent may have outside of the VCoP.

7.5 Building a bridge between past and present

The first theoretical concept, *Building a bridge between past and present*, is a narrative device used by protégés to describe their decisions, choices and experiences and create stability in their identity narrative (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). From the moment the protégés decided to embark on a new career to the end of the project, they perceived essential aspects of their identity and personal story, which played a role in determining how they navigated the landscape of their new profession and practice.

The theoretical concept *Building a bridge between the past and present* describes the process of imagining, becoming, and integrating the professional identity of a migration agent and living the role of a migration agent. It describes how the individual protégés incorporate their professional identity into a coherent narrative of self. It encompasses the belonging within a specific community that is associated with a professional and the embodiment of the profession's norms and practices.

The heuristic device of temporality, sociality and locale highlights the ongoing process of creating a narrative of self. *Building a bridge between past and present* is the adoption and integration of an imagined self that incorporates the past, present and future

imaginings of professional practice. An 'identity of self' requires the individual to be aware of the narrative they are building of themselves and to be reflective in that awareness (Giddens, 1991, p. 53). This reflective awareness allows the individual to build and maintain a narrative of self across time. Recognising aspects of self that suit the role is essential to the beginning narrative of a professional identity. One cannot become the hero of the story without the adoption, through recognition of personal qualities, that would allow the role to be assumed. This is why the act of imagining is crucial to Wenger's theory of social learning and central to the adoption and successful integration of a professional identity. Through the projection of self into an imagined role, the protégés began to build a picture of themselves as migration agents long before they qualified for practice.

There is, therefore, no end point to the imagined self. Post qualification the act of imagining continued for the protégés as they entered a new career. For many of the protégés, the move into practice involved complex choices and each came at an emotional cost. Creating a narrative structure allowed the protégés to maintain a stable 'self as agent' while they described the often chaotic and challenging experiences they were encountering (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

Ezzy (2017), maintains that this fluid, historically grounded, but fictional narrative of self, is constructed in interaction and dialogue with others (p. 250). While the protégés may not have actively engaged in reflection about their work choices before their involvement in the Protégé project, the activity of undergoing interviews forced them to reflect and explain these choices. Describing why they embarked on a new career offered the protégés a unique opportunity to gain some understanding and insight into their life choices, and it became the first revelation in their narrative.

The initial interviews with researchers and facilitators revealed three factors for career choice that linked the Protégés with the past:

1. Migrant and migration background,
2. Diverse employment background, and
3. The desire to enter a profession that meets their individual circumstances.

Linking their choice to become a migration agent with their past and personal traits enabled protégés to explain the drivers that led them to work in this field; to justify decisions about their new and ongoing role; and to maintain a link with their perception of their past professional and personal identity.

Just as a personal identity is built upon past experiences (Ezzy, 2017, p. 243; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006), a new professional identity incorporates elements of past, professional and social experiences. This is a process that requires mediation between past and present self, and an imagining of a future self (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Trede, 2012). The unity of the self, however transient and changing, is a temporal unity, that locates past and present and future self in the present through the act of role-taking (Ezzy, 2017, p. 243). As a result, it stands in contrast to a description of ‘becoming a migration agent’. Instead, the formation of identity can be seen as an ongoing process of ‘being a migration agent’. As a theoretical concept, *Building a bridge between the past and present* captures this process as one that occurs over time and has no definitive endpoint. It highlights the ways that the concept of ‘self as an agent’ is ongoing from the first imagining and develops as migration agents move into and experience practice.

7.5.1 Building a bridge - Migrant and migration background

When discussing their motivation to become a migration agent, 61 per cent of the protégés described their connection with immigration, either as a migrant, a partner of a migrant, or a child of migrants. Wenger has said that building an identity is a constant “negotiation of meaning of membership in social communities” (1998, p. 145).

Negotiation is part of making a membership claim, a means of saying why an individual's claim to membership of this particular community is valid. In linking their career choices with their personal history, protégés began to negotiate their membership into their new profession, building on their past to prove the validity of their claims. In doing so, they by-passed the credential of their recent formal qualifications and looked back onto highly personal aspects of their identity as building blocks for their new profession. Importantly, they then linked their migration background to their future role. For some protégés, their identity as a migrant brought an expectation that their experiences would provide them with a professional advantage:

So, yes it was more because I thought that I would suit the job and I thought that having been a migrant myself, I would be able to provide a service to people that would actually be a personal service as well. ... I saw a lot of people complaining that they were just a number and the agent never got back to them or they didn't understand. I thought I would be somebody who would provide an understanding service that would actually have value because of that. *Interview R1. P18*

This connection to a migrant background amongst protégés reflects the findings of Levin's original 2009 study. Levin (2009) discussed a 1966 study by Jerome Carlin that concluded, "socioeconomic backgrounds and personal characteristics" affected the types of law schools, lawyers would attend as well as the area they would practice (p. 402). Levin found that 54 per cent of those included in her study were "foreign-born or had a parent who was foreign-born" (p. 406). Those who were not immigrants or were children of immigrants reported a "strong connection with the immigrant experience" (p. 406). She considered the demographic so striking that she suggested that any study of a

community of practice of lawyers must include the consideration of both the participant's background and learning experiences (p. 403).

Despite the apparent link between the US and Australia as nations founded on immigration, the similarity between Levin's (2009, 2011) findings and the background of protégés is striking. The link between a migrant background and practice as a migration agent was a sensitising concept for this research. Charmaz (2014) refers to sensitising concepts as concepts that may spark the way you think about a topic or provide a guide, but not a command for inquiry (p. 30). The shared link between the work of Levin studies of US immigration lawyers, and the background of the protégés in this thesis, may also be specific to a profession where migration provides an obvious link to the work involved. US immigration lawyers play a specific role for migrants needing legal assistance in their quest for residency. The similarities between Levin's findings and protégés are due to the rich history of encouraging migration that Australia and the US share.

While the majority of Australians share their backgrounds with the protégés (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), it is the use, by the protégés, of their migrant background as a means of framing their choices, that stands out in the data, and that makes it clear that this was the way protégés were making sense of their decision to study migration law and embark on a new career. The data revealed how protégés had begun to project meaning unto their new role as an agent when they made the choice to study for a new career. The act of imaging the self as an agent and projecting the self into a role was evident in the protégés' descriptions of their links to migration, external events, and internal qualities they felt led them to the role:

... My mum migrated out from Poland well before my time obviously,
and my husband's mother did as well. So, we have lots of relatives

overseas. So that was sort of what drew me to that area as opposed to other areas which I could have branched into. *Interview R1.P16*

For others it was a combination of their exposure to the work of migration agents and their perception of their own skills and personal traits that led them to the choice of becoming a migration agent.

7.5.2 Building a bridge -The role of a diverse employment background

A migrant background was not the only commonality amongst the protégés. Many protégés portrayed leaping into the unknown as a logical extension of their working life. While three of the protégés in this study held a law degree and two had worked with the Department of Immigration before becoming a migration agent, there seemed to be no clear career pathway that led the majority of the protégés to migration law. Their qualifications and job descriptions included Doctorates in Science, IT professionals, and buyers for large grocery chains. Overall, their employment history was one of constant change, and the protégés were able to list a diverse range of employment they had undertaken in their past:

I had a student visa of course, I got married along the way, so I did a partner visa as well. And then I was actually working back in education full time in Western Australia in a regional area, so came across a lot of people on 457s and started hearing about that stuff and permanent visas and trade visas and skill assessments... what I liked when I looked at what migration agents do, it ... does two things for me. It allows me to apply certain skills and knowledge and interact to fix the problem; and I've always, even when I was running business and finance, it's always been about solving problems. *Interview R1. P14*

When building their coherent narrative to explain what they were doing and why, protégés sifted their history to find the relevant steppingstones of explanation that proved their credibility and validity and allowed them to demonstrate why they imagined they were suitable for this work. Sometimes this was an overt act, and at other times a subconscious framing mechanism used to build the narrative. When asked to describe their employment background before they became a migration agent, P14 replied: “Okay, I’ll run through the full story in brief moments and concentrate on the relevant stuff”. For P14, the relevance lay in their educational qualifications, which had led to their own migrant experience when they began teaching overseas. They then related these experiences to their work as a migration agent.

The narrative that links the past to the present may appear to be linear, but the protégés moved back and forward across their personal narrative, choosing moments that had meaning for the present and created a stable link to the past. This unconscious action by protégés meant that they were sometimes oblivious to the moment when they had crossed over to a new frame of reference. As such, it became an essential means of maintaining stability in a period of transition that allowed them to retain their past identity and integrate past knowledge with their new professional persona. Despite their initial thoughts that their background as a migrant would assist in their role as an agent, P4 initially found their migration work to be challenging:

It is totally out of my comfort zone. I mean it’s so far removed from Psychology...or teaching...you know it’s completely And that’s fine it’s a challenge! [laughs]. *Interview 1R. P4*

Regardless of the belief that they were “out of the comfort zone”, and had chosen a vastly different career, P4 quickly adapted their experience, knowledge and skills to the new role of agent.

I think we've become pretty competent, with what we deal with... so that is an advantage for me. And also, as I said, I often have counselling sessions, you know, so if I have a consultation here, I might have a client in for a couple of hours, sort of pouring their heart out to me, and they feel better for it. *Interview 3R. P4*

Not all protégés had experience with clients, business or working in sole practice. For some, past employment provided them with a reasonable expectation of what they faced, while for others this was a new experience they needed to manage. Nevertheless, protégés were definitive in what they envisaged a successful practice would be and why they may be able to handle the work.

Unlike the majority of the protégés, P17 came from a background working in the migration sphere; however, they had, like most of the protégés, never run a small business or worked in sole practice. Their decision to become an agent drew on previous work history that informed their business model. P17 intended to work with asylum seekers under the Government Immigration Advice and Application Assistance Scheme (IAAAS). The scheme provided funding to migration agents to enable them to provide asylum seekers with free advice and assistance with the preparation of their applications, both in Australia and in offshore detention. They saw this as a natural progression from work they had been doing in the past.

P17 drew upon their past expertise with refugee and humanitarian visas and rested their practice model on this Departmental system. The work was complex, stressful and fast-paced, yet they brought to it compassion and depth of knowledge that gave them both a business edge and a means of empathising with their clients while providing effective and efficient assistance. With over 30,000 new asylum seekers in Australia, they felt comfortable that this work would underwrite their practice and allow them to

gradually build their expertise in other areas of migration law. They described themselves as a hybrid, working in sole practice and undertaking contract work with a larger firm.

P10 also built their business on their past work with refugees. P10 described the feeling of working for refugees in the past as a defining moment in their career:

I suppose the other side of the coin is when you do have a win for a very deserving client on a case, it can be a ... highlight... You know, I think one of the, the best times of my sort of working life has been working with a refugee lawyer in the past. *Discussion F1. P10*

In an effort to embrace their past identity and bring it into the present, P10 built their practice on assisting former refugees with their efforts to reunite with their family, as well as helping asylum seekers with their protection claims. However, political circumstances impacted on P10's and P17's business models as migration agents causing them to make new choices.

7.5.3 Building a bridge – A profession that meets their individual circumstances

While some of the protégés viewed change as a natural progression in their career, regardless of their diverse employment background, others viewed change as an opportunity to improve their work-life balance, and to restore a level of autonomy. P8 looked back to their migrant past and described how working in their home country was different from working in Australia. The work flexibility they were seeking led to the choice to study a role that offered a work-life balance:

When I was working back in XXXX where I'm from ... we had very much flexibility and the workdays are shorter and everything. So, I was kind of used to a little bit more flexibility in my life? And it was a little

bit of a culture shock actually, coming here and realising that you know, you actually have to be present even though, you know, you can do the same thing from home or you could do it maybe later, or something like that. So... the flexibility wasn't there so therefore, definitely the work-life balance was you know the biggest factor. *Interview R1.P8*

Others saw the new qualification as an addition to their current area of work. The act of acknowledging and verbalising choices during an interview often provided crucial reflective moments for protégés. For P4, the gamble was serious; their professional goal included owning a firm their partner could continue to work in if they died. P4 explained this in detail, describing that the most important aspects driving career choice was their family and their ability to buy a house and continue on. P4 felt autonomy was vital because it would allow them to pursue their goals in what was an insecure future:

I'm very excited about owning my own business and my own sort of baby. I'm just hoping that I'll do a good job. You know I said to my partner, "This is the last career I'm having." [Laughs.] You know, so I've got to make it good and I don't know ...I just have to wait and see.

Interview R1. P4

7.6 Focusing on client-centered practice

The second theoretical concept, '*Focusing on client-centered practice*', explains the way protégés worked, viewed their role, and presented themselves to others. It includes the work protégés do in facilitating change for their clients by navigating a path through legislation, and ensuring their business remains viable in order to service their clients. The emphasis on the client is a defining aspect of professional practice (Eraut, 2007, p. 406). This is where professional traits such as ethical obligations to clients, the

ability to communicate and interact with clients, and a sense of loyalty are embodied, and actioned (Alexander, 2011; Fruehwald, 2015; James, 2017; Silver et al., 2011).

The focus on the client and their vulnerability have been a regular symbol of the profession since the first legislation regulating the behaviour of migration agents was passed in 1989. Unlike lawyers, migration agents technically have no duty to the court, nor do they interact with opposing counsel (Fruehwald, 2015, p. 24) or work representing the government. Unless they have a legal practicing certificate and are working in a legal role outside that of a migration agent, their role is limited to interpreting legislation, navigating around external agencies and policies, negotiating with stakeholders such as industry, employers, state governments and the immigration department, solely for the outcome of a visa being granted for their client.

The transition protégés experienced through practice as a “burden of responsibility towards to client” to a “client centered” profession, is captured within the theoretical concepts of *Client-centered practice* and *Navigating the unpredictable*. These concepts speak to the transition period that was essential to their professional identity. While protégés initially linked their personal traits, such as a migrant past, with the client, the period of time they were in Protégé was when an identity shift occurred, and they identified with other protégés as a cohort of competent migration agents.

7.6.1 Focusing on client-centered practice - Client as identity

For protégés, their work with clients held a deeper meaning that went beyond their work. The protégés often hid their lack of practice experience behind long descriptions of work, describing their typical day and their interactions with clients. These descriptions of their typical day initially began with bravado, speaking of clients, emails and marketing. In subsequent interviews, when they were again asked to describe

their typical day, many revealed that they initially actually had very few clients or real experience and inquiries had not resulted in ongoing casework.

Look, the first year I was a migration agent I didn't get any work, at all. I think I got an inquiry that led to something the last week before I was due to re-register. I was going to re-register anyway, um, and the next year I think I got one matter. *Interview 2R. P16.*

They pondered the exact number of clients they would consider optimum to have a viable business and throughout the project used the numbers of clients as a measure of success and defining moment in being an agent.

Last weekend delivered my first two clients a straightforward partner 820/801 and an invite on an EOI for a 189 for another client. I think I landed another client yesterday, so it is all systems go!! *P12 Forum Post October 2013*

Focusing on the client was a way for protégés to assert their identity as active agents. Protégés used descriptions of the client and their casework to illustrate their role, and they created a client narrative that demonstrated how they belonged in the profession. Each client story became a means of reflecting on their ability as agents. They acknowledged the personal impact client work had on their confidence and their perceptions of their competence. Their reflections on their clients revealed the stress they were under when they first began to practice as agents.

7.6.2 Focusing on client-centered practice - Client as a burden

The first focused code developed that encapsulated protégés description of practice was 'burden of practice' (see chapter 3). This eventually led to the theoretical

concept of ‘client-centered practice’. This theoretical concept included protégés’ identification with their clients, their interactions with their clients and importantly, the responsibility protégés felt towards their clients. The theoretical concept of client-centered practice reflects data that demonstrated that protégés felt that practice involved a heavy burden of responsibility towards the client. The feeling of responsibility was evident from their first days of practice and directed the way protégés approached their work and accomplished their tasks. Protégés discussed their practice in terms of being a “good agent”, having people’s “lives in their hands”, and “wanting to achieve a standard of practice” that was either acceptable or exceptional

In the first year of practice, P10 found they were providing asylum seekers with advice at a reduced price. They were clear that this was an area of work that they found worthwhile but emphasised the level of stress and emotional commitment to the client it involved. In order to address their concerns about burnout, and to ensure the viability of their practice, P10 began to incrementally increase their fees until they felt the income compensated for the emotional stress involved in the work.

And look I suppose, you know, it’s a stressful area of work to work in, and I think you need to be adequately remunerated for it, so you don’t have to take on too much work to make a reasonable income from it, you know, and so I started off being quite cheap, and slowly increasing the prices. I realised that each time you increase the prices there’s a certain percentage of the potential clients that drop off, but it’s better to do less work and do it at a higher per file income, rather than just have to have a huge volume of work, just to make a reasonable living. *Discussion F1.*

P10

P14 explained how a lack of research about issues facing one of their clients led to a learning experience and true understanding of the level of responsibility that came with the role. P14 acknowledged that they “only had themselves to blame” and it was “one hundred per cent my fault”; they were most distressed that they had let their clients down, describing the outcome as getting burnt, and they explained the impact of this on both their client and themselves:

That’s the sort of stuff that was really concerning, that we end up having caused somebody a problem that they didn’t have when they walked in your office... intellectually, emotionally and purely physically in the amount of time you put into it, but this, the rollercoaster, the emotional sort of trauma you put yourself through when you get a horrible letter back from the department. *Discussion F2. P14*

For P7, the need to learn on the job compounded their struggle to work as an agent. They explained how the need to learn all aspects of practice was a lonely and stressful venture. Despite their initial experience working for an agent in another firm, they lacked confidence in their abilities. P7 explained that this was because the agency they had previously worked for provided little guidance and feedback:

P7: Then I went into a firm, it was very much “go and find the answers yourself” and if you fall over then we’ll, we’ll figure it out then.

(Researcher: Yeah, and if you fell over were, they good to you at all?)

P7: sometimes yes, and sometimes no. If it was something that they found, was like in...in that firm’s opinion was a very obvious mistake, they weren’t so good about it...you know it really depended on whether

or not that agent who was looking it over felt that it was something that I should've known, because I've done the course. *Interview IR. P7*

Before joining, P7 had established their own business, and worked closely with a business mentor, and this provided them with the perception that they had an edge on the other members of Protégé. However, they continued to lack confidence in dealing directly with clients, and they linked this with a lack of knowledge of the legislation. P7 repeatedly spoke of their inability to make “sense of the legislation”, and their struggle with the “complexity” of the law. Yet, they finally revealed that it was the burden of clients' dreams and hopes that weighed most heavily on their mind, because of the genuine prospects of making a mistake or receiving a refusal from the Department:

... you know it's a little bit dangerous learning yourself and just learning from your mistakes when you're talking about people's lives and their visas... *Interview IR. P7*

In reality, P7's experiences in this area were not unique. Despite the requirement to have active files as a means of selecting potential protégés, many of the protégés who were selected had minimal experience with clients. P7 revealed that their confidence was directly linked to exposing their lack of experience regarding visa categories to their clients:

I guess anything I haven't lodged before. I always felt quite uncertain talking to clients about what they expect. So recently I give them really vague answers. *Interview IR. P7*

This response was a common reaction to the emotional aspect of working with clients. The casework protégés described was at times complicated and emotionally

draining for both client and migration agent. The knowledge that taking on particular kinds of client work also involved the very real risk of absorbing the distress and emotional investment of the client, was shared by protégés and came as an unexpected aspect of the practice. P10 described the experience of practice as a “rollercoaster, and an emotional sort of trauma you put yourself through”:

I think by osmosis you can, you know, absorb some of their, ah distress,
I think I’m reasonably inured to that now, but it’s a bit of a fine line.
You don’t want to become so inured to it that you don’t care, but you
don’t want to become so responsive to it that you’re debilitated.

Interview 3R. P10

P7 grew more confident as the Protégé project continued. They found they became more goal-oriented and organised in their work, describing themselves as a “taking on responsibilities like a real adult.” However, they remained concerned throughout the project with how distressing dealing with disappointed clients could be. This was a factor of practice they had not expected or considered when they imagined they could fulfil the role of a migration agent. P7 was particularly concerned that their study had not prepared them for the reality of working with people in distress or emotional environments:

These situations are emotional, and can shake a client’s confidence, and all sorts of things happen, and I think the only reason I am comfortable dealing with this is probably because I’ve grown up as a person over the last few years, but, you know, new agents, wouldn’t, I never thought about how I was going to handle these sorts of things when I started out.

Interview 3R. P7

7.6.3 Focusing on client-centered practice - Client as casework in the VCoP

There was a marked difference in the way protégés discussed their work with clients in the VCoP. The concept of client remained a central motif, but the focus changed. Within the VCoP, the client was reduced to an aspect of broader visa work. The reframing of the client from an individual who was sometimes seen as an emotional burden or source of stress, to a casework problem that could be solved, provided a means for the protégés to externalise the stress caused by the human aspects of client work.

Reframing was particularly evident in the way protégés used the client narrative in their interactions within the VCoP site. During the facilitator discussions and researcher interviews, protégés were encouraged to discuss openly how they felt about their work. In contrast, the VCoP site interactions were more business-like:

Apologies for this question (if it is too lame). Client who is dependent
457 visa holder and has been two years with company can/not be
sponsored for TRTS (186) I tend to think not. Your thoughts? *Forum
discussion "457 Dependent for TRTS" 26/09/2013. P5*

While emotional aspects of work were raised, occasionally the majority of interactions that discussed clients were about the administrative aspects of visas and processes. This meant the social mores of maintaining client confidentiality within the VCoP site were observed and protégés discussed their clients as casework, in ways that did not identify their clients, or reveal their own emotional response to their work:

After the legitimate success last week with the protection visa, my BVE
client referred me to another person who came in to see me with 3 DIAC
Visa entitlement notifications, showing that he has been here on
legitimate student visas since 2009; however, his VEVO status is 'no

visa entitlements please ring compliance’. After a lengthy discussion with compliance, we believe that the client may have been subject to a fraudulent MA ...I have sorted it out for him to go to compliance and hope that they can do something for him but at the moment it looks grim.

Forum discussion “Oh, what a tangled web we weave.....” 18/10/2013.

P18

Working through client issues in this way provided a new perspective when working with clients that allowed protégés to become analytical about the actual process of case work, which then removed the emotional impact of the case.

7.7 Navigating the unpredictable

The third theoretical concept, *Navigating the unpredictable*, captures the unpredictable nature of working as a migration agent. The work of a professional in practice rests upon a common set of disciplinary rules and a base academic knowledge. Presumably, the disciplinary knowledge behind practice will remain relatively static, as expertise and skill grow through practice. However, despite the stability of disciplinary knowledge, professional practice is often steeped in complexity and unpredictability. Migration agents face constant changes in legislation and policy, as well as changes to structural and administrative processes for advising and lodging visas and representing their clients. A simple policy or legislative change can undo months of preparation for a skilled visa or remove pathways to permanent residency or employment. Similarly, substantial increases in application fees can render clients unable to pay bills or progress their application. These changes are often in response to political and policy needs, legal challenges, and court decisions. One protégé captured the impact of constant change eloquently when they said:

And it doesn't matter who you are, you can never have dealt with the infinite number of variables of the time and situation and legislation and policy and the holes that all fall in between. *Discussion F2. P14*

7.7.1 Navigating legislative change

During their time in the Protégé project, each protégé experienced moments whereby they needed to make clear and definitive choices as a result of an unpredicted aspect of practice. Some needed to change the focus of their work, or the way they dealt with clients, others relocated across Australia to find new opportunities. In order to do so, each protégé reframed their views of self, identity and practice in a way that allowed them a continuing narrative of self as agent.

In March 2014, the Government changed its policy and ceased providing funding for legal assistance to asylum seekers who had arrived by boat. The cancellation of the Immigration Advice and Application Assistance Scheme (IAAAS) impacted so strongly on P17 that they considered not renewing their registration. Instead, they made the decision to cut down on living expenses by relocating interstate:

Well, it's really been interrupted. Because as far as I'm personally concerned the change of government has been a total disaster for the work I was doing. Because so much of the work I was doing revolved around asylum seekers. ... Well that particular leg of ... well two legs or three legs of that strategy collapsed in October. One week before the election, when the coalition announced they were cutting all support for asylum seekers. And that's one of the reasons I'm now in (location removed). I just had to find somewhere that's cheaper to live. *Discussion F1.P17*

In order to move forward, P17 was forced to go further back into their past and find new ways to link with their choices to focus on different area of migration advice:

I've started to get private clients through various contacts but it's going to be a slow and laborious business building it back up again. *Discussion F1.P17*

In a similar response to changes to legislation, P9 found that their business practice needed to move from family migration to skilled migration, when legislative changes capped visas and extended processing times beyond a reasonable waiting period, which affected their ability to attract clients. This made P9 contemplate if they had entered the profession "at the wrong time":

I think, because our legislation changes all the time, as you know, the family streams have been cut a lot, so that affect my business as well, because, actually I got a lot... a few people coming and asking for carer visa and remaining relative and, you know, parents and things like that, and now they all gone, so it's a big chunk of activities all gone, so I, now I have to concentrate on the skilled, but that area I'm not quite strong, so I still need to improve.... So, maybe, I, came in the wrong time, I don't know, but yes, they didn't change the legislation as often, you know what I mean? *Interview R2 P9*

7.7.2 Navigating practice in an unpredictable landscape

Regardless of the unpredictable and unintended outcomes of migration law, changes to the way protégés practiced were not all driven by changes to legislation or policy. Unless they have a business background, new migration agent must learn about

financial and business structures that are specific to running a migration advice business, and like other small businesses, many of these aspects remained stable once implemented. Protégés needed to build their practice in the tangible sense of the location of premises or offices, and business skills, as well as build their client base. All the protégés had a clear vision of their preferred business model and future. They outlined their goals expecting very little to change with their practice across the time they would be in the project. The majority intended to work from home and then move on to securing an office and finding staff who could assist in relieving their administrative burden. However, they found the viability of their new profession rested upon several factors that were unique to migration practice and would remain complex and unpredictable.

P15 faced a new direction in their career when presented with the opportunity to take over an established business. They found it a challenge to convince those close to them that they had the skills to manage a law firm in a small town. When they sought advice from the facilitator, P15 reflected on the reasons why they felt compelled to take up the opportunity, despite the financial risks associated with it and their families concerns regarding their ability to manage a new business:

And because I am the kind of person I am, they don't think that I've got the skills. X said that this afternoon they didn't think I had the skills for this, or I know you haven't or one or the others, but the point is, it's something you've got to develop... and if you don't develop... I guess you sink. So, it would be a huge challenge. But to be quite honest, in my earlier existence I was a teacher and also in my career, in my later years, I've also had to teach things in the context of whatever work environment I've been in, and it's such a rewarding thing to do.

Interview R2. P15

For P15, their past careers provided a means to bridge the gap and overcome potential problems. By reframing their challenges as skills, they could develop, P15 was able to envisage a successful move to practice:

This is a town that all my family are from. I spent a lot of my life outside Australia and it's really good to be back here and be able to be part of the community. And these days, because of this kind of conversation that you and I are having, between XXX and regional XXX, you aren't constrained by where you are really, to a large extent. So, I don't see the business limiting me in terms of my ambitions for the practice; I see it more as being a place where I can call my home and my base.

Interview R2. P15

7.7.3 Navigating the unpredictable within the VCoP

The VCoP site provided crucial support for those navigating casework and change. Site interactions demonstrated how protégés found their work as migration agents fraught with uncertainty. At times, they complained that there appeared to be no set way to approach a task. The client, interactions with the Department, the methodology of lodging visas, law and policy, were all seen as complex and unpredictable. One clear benefit they welcomed from the VCoP site was the realisation that their experiences were ones that others shared:

...it was a very trusting space, and people, including myself were confident that it was confidential, and, that people could be candid about the, issues that they were facing, and also the successes they were having, or, you know, the challenges that they were having, and I think

that, that's very affirming, you know, that you think that, "Oh, I'm not the only one who buggered that up or didn't know what to do in that situation", or what have you. *Interview 3R. P10*

Discovering what they did not know was especially important for the protégés. Understanding and finding the law was a complex exercise, but it was the small things that could derail their work. For example, knowing where to apply for Australian Federal Police checks, how to organise a health examination, where to lodge a change of address form, were all areas that agents could only learn from the experience of others. The ability to contact others, and to create new knowledge about the specifics and often tacit aspects of practice, provided a crucial lifeline for protégés, which offered immediate and considered advice and expertise:

And you could talk about things, but there's nobody in immigration that I could do that with so that was invaluable to me, I don't know how I would approach ... without it particularly, the first couple of visas that I did. And I was asking stupid questions like 'what do I do with medical health examination' and you know those types of things. Or 'how do I find, you know this form that they're talking about that's not part of the, you know the forms um, you know those sorts of things that I'd looked for, and I couldn't find so ... It was really good for me. *Interview 3R.*

P16

7.8 Co-creating knowledge

The fourth theoretical concept, '*Co-creating knowledge*', arose from the data within the VCoP site. It captures the way protégés moved from self-directed learning as new practitioners to learning together through the co-creation of knowledge within the

VCoP site. Although it arises within the VCoP site, it overlaps with *Navigating the unpredictable*, in that the solutions to unexpected problems are solved through the creation of new knowledge by the VCoP.

Co-creating knowledge is a central component of Protégé as a VCoP, an element that was essential to building trust within the community of practice and protégés' confidence in their work as agents. Protégés built on their professional identity through a shared knowledge of what they do, and through the process of creating new knowledge together. This includes forging pathways together through references to the legislated Code of Conduct as a touchstone for ethical and practice behaviour, and the way protégés sought advice from their peers in the VCoP and found solutions, within policy and legislation, and expert guidance from facilitators and others when complex problems arose.

The process of creating new knowledge together became a vital factor in how protégés progressed their professional identity through a shared knowledge of what they do, what they needed to know, and the ways they practiced. When describing their experiences as a facilitator in Protégé, F1 explained the difference between learning technical knowledge and building new knowledge:

The experience is they find an issue as they go along, and they find how to address those issues, so these are real practical exercises they work on together. So, one person may have a problem on their client account and the group talks about it, so they use their base knowledge to find a creative answer. So that is a different form of learning altogether. This is where the knowledge had meaning – they are building a deep understanding of it. They use the knowledge they have creatively. *Final*

Interview F1

The construction of knowledge by the protégés occurred in layers, as experience, curiosity, and sharing came together to build a new perspective of legal or practice issues they faced. The virtual workplace of the VCoP site allowed protégés to cross time and location through asynchronous discussions. While asynchronous communication did not halt the passage of real-time, it allowed the protégés to receive answers in a timely yet considered manner. Some posts were engaged with immediately, and others consistently over days and weeks:

We are now seeing some great examples of issues being resolved or developed through collaboration on the site. It is a wonderful tool in harnessing the knowledge and experience of a number of people in a network and drawing that knowledge together to focus on specifics. Generally, an answer comes to the surface. The Japanese call it "Kensan" to continue to sharpen an idea, to never give up on improving and refining it, to not accept that the first thought or answer is the right one! Even comments from "left field" or further questions can assist the process. *Memo Facilitator 1*

A clear example of this is a relatively long conversation protégés had regarding how to charge fees for service (see Appendix J). As sole practitioners and early career agents, the issue of charging a reasonable rate for advice was one many approached with caution. Initial interviews indicated some of the protégés might have been providing free advice to clients as a professional compensation for their lack of in-depth knowledge. The VCoP site allowed protégés to discuss openly how they structured their fees and why they did so in a particular way. During this discussion, protégés referred back to the Migration Agents Registration Authority guidelines on fees, as a baseline for where they felt fee charges should begin. One protégé, who was a lawyer, provided a clear

description of how she distinguished between the fees she charged for legal work and the work she did as a new agent:

However, I will not charge the client for any work due to my inexperience as an agent. For example, I will charge a client for any research done for Researching the Act Regs or PAM, because no matter how many times that I do a visa application I will always go back to that source information. However, I will not charge the client if I have to work out how they apply for an e-medical appointment. As this is something that I believe an experienced agent ought to know and if there were changes a good agent would have done research on those changes and not charged a client. *Forum Post: Professional Fees am I charging too much? 03/09/2013*

This is a clear example of an exchange of tacit knowledge. The answer provides a means for others to understand the process the protégé used when thinking about how they may charge their clients. They demonstrate how they make a division between their task of researching legislative requirements that often change and must be checked constantly and tasks that are associated with practical aspects of practice. This also shows them the areas where their more experienced peer is placing value on their own work and why.

Other protégés indicated they varied their fees in accordance with their experience. At the heart of this conversation is the need for all new agents to become viable in their practice. The discussion provided the protégés with examples of how others approach this vital area of business and enabled them to benchmark their practice against each other. It is interesting to note that the facilitators' contribution was one that supported protégés and reminded them not to undersell their knowledge and skills.

Similarly, a lengthy discussion in August 2013 focused on what P4 called “excess bits”. These were aspects of business such as accounting packages, advertising, client files, software packages, working from home, and payment structures. Classifying themselves as a “newbie”, P4 asked for opinions on “what others thought and what worked for them”. Their closing line of “I just wanted everyone thoughts or if I am on my own on this one?” provided a means for others to offer advice as both peers and experts. Responses varied from short one-word answers to comprehensive advice from P16, who had run a business as a solicitor. Others also contributed to this post and identified they also felt they were newbies. One protégé explicitly commented that it was nice to participate in the discussion, as it made them feel they were not alone. Both facilitators advised protégés to pay attention to their own personal preference and accordingly design a business structure and plan that suited them.

7.8.1 Gaining confidence through the co-creation of knowledge

The creation of knowledge between protégés and facilitators involved a complex range of actions. Not only did protégés and facilitators present and answer questions, they operated within a specific context of practice. These interactions provided an insight into ways of practice that may not have been available unless they could be observed, and that resulted in an increase in confidence amongst the protégés. Before joining the VCoP site, the protégés had indicated a reluctance to trouble more experienced agents with questions. For them, the ability to ask for advice in an environment where questions were expected and welcomed was a unique and valuable experience. As discussed earlier in this chapter, equating the level of their confidence as a practitioner with their knowledge of specific visa requirements was common amongst all protégés. They described how they only felt confident in providing advice to a client if they had researched the area of law prior to seeing their client, or if they had already handled a visa of the same kind.

When researchers explored how protégés learnt about a particular visas requirement in their first months of practice, they described reading the law and policy over and over until they felt they had an in-depth understanding. Once they had joined the VCoP site, there was a change in how protégés found, learnt, and confirmed the knowledge they needed. Protégé provided a safety net of people they could reach out to for verification of both complex and straightforward matters concerning their practice:

I was sort of out here swimming and not being a very good swimmer.

Interview 3R. P6

When P8 began to practice, they outlined their personal and professional goals as two distinct objectives. Professionally, P8 wanted to be able to have a business that “ran smoothly”, providing a good service to clients, with a steady workload. They were also seeking a way to build up a “knowledge bank” so they could feel comfortable in what they were doing. Describing themselves as “unsure all the time”, they outlined how a lack of relevant practical and theoretical knowledge could make them feel inadequate, vulnerable, and insecure. Protégé provided them with a means of sharing both experiences and knowledge. P8 played an active role on the VCoP site and described their experiences as “working in a team”:

Because people were just there, so if I’m explaining it to someone...it’s a group of people, like-minded people who wanted to do well in their job and are interested in doing well. And help other people. So, this group of people are able to assist you and guide with their experience. And then me as a graduate, I’m able to help other people who have similar questions with what I’ve been going through, or similar quotes about visas or whatever that might be. So, it’s a support group with each

individual is helping everyone because all of us have different experiences and different knowledge on things. *Interview 3R. P8*

The process of co-creating knowledge allowed all those working in the VCoP to maintain their currency as practitioners. This is essential in a practice environment that is fast-moving and where even the most experienced practitioner can fall behind. A post that was discussing the intricacies of a Subclass 186 and 187 Direct Entry Stream visa, (see Appendix K) demonstrates how different experiences and aspects of knowledge are built up across two days. P8 posts an inquiry about skills assessment. They cannot find the answer and blame their lack of knowledge for their brain being in “sleep mode”. However, the subsequent responses reveal the complexity of the visa category P8 is dealing with, and the options available. P8 confirms that they were thinking this way and their confidence is boosted by the confirmation that they were not on the wrong track. Further posts reveal that the advice provided by the facilitator is also advice that could be incorrect in certain instances; instead, another protégé offers the correct answer, once again revealing further complexity. Together they create a new way of looking at the problem and discover new solutions.

Eraut (2000) found that informal support from those who were not designated mentors, supervisors or coaches was a consistent and critical factor in workplace learning.

The first thing that struck us in our interviews with both novices and experienced workers in mid-career was the overwhelming importance of confidence. Much learning at work occurs through doing things and being proactive in seeking learning opportunities, this requires confidence. Moreover, we noted that confidence arose from successfully meeting challenges in one’s work, while the confidence to take on such

challenges depended on the extent to which learners felt supported in that endeavour. Thus, there is a triangular relationship between challenge, support and confidence. (Eraut et al. 2000, in Eraut, 2004a).

P8's experience confirmed that the feedback from peers, as well as facilitators, was key to their increased confidence and competence. The feedback confirmed they were on the right track and allowed them to continue their work. During Protégé P8 had struggled with work, study and family. Their engagement on the VCoP site focused on their immediate work needs, and as such, P8 felt they were more of a "learner than someone who contributed a lot". However, they insisted that if there was something they did not know about, they would always contribute to the site or ask for clarification:

I would assume that my competence has, you know, developed as well.
Um, one thing that I've noticed, for example, with the, the protégé program is that I'm able to more confidently give the advice to the clients so, not just basically... If I read it from the legislation and I give the advice based on that, it is a little bit different then from getting the information first from within the group um, [R: Yes.] because then, it gives me confidence that "yeah, I'm reading it right" and I'm understanding it right, therefore I'm giving the right advice, if that makes sense? *Interview 22. P8*

The legal background of P16 meant they felt well-equipped to interpret legislation, write submissions and advocate for their clients. P16 explained that the gaps in their knowledge were practical and based on issues they had not confronted or work they had done once but forgotten. P16 described this as "relearning and rediscovering" aspects of practice they once knew and had put aside, or new areas they had never

considered. For P16 the discussions within the VCoP site provided a repository, a place where people could keep an eye on what was going on and comment when they thought it appropriate. The ability to decide when one needed to comment made it a comfortable learning space that removed the obligation to demonstrate their learning. Initially reluctant to contribute to the site in areas outside of their legal practice knowledge, P16 eventually explained that they viewed the act of asking questions as a contribution to others' learning, as each question led to answers and discussion that all could see:

And you know, you knew, you felt comfortable to ask questions because you know, you knew you were contributing to the answers as well so, it wasn't just a one-sided you know. I don't really like just asking people and not being able to give something back in return, I guess. *Interview 3R. P16*

The recognition that the VCoP was not a "one sided show" demonstrates the connection protégés felt with each other and the work they did. In recognising the same qualities and experiences in other protégés, through the co-creation of knowledge, they had not only increased their confidence in their own abilities, but they had moved the concept of their professional identity from one that identified with the client through a migrant past, to one that identified with their fellow protégés as practitioners.

7.9 Exceptions within the cohort of protégés

Throughout the data analyses, the responses and actions of two of the protégés stood out as exceptions. It is important to include their experiences to highlight the differences and at the same time demonstrate an overall coherence with the final analysis (Phoenix & Orr, 2017). The importance of recognising self in others as a crucial element of forming a professional identity was evidenced in protégés who did not feel the benefits

of belonging to the VCoP. Although they shared the same characteristics of other protégés, such as a migration background, a varied employment history, and a desire to move into employment that met their personal needs, there remained one key difference in the way P9 and P2 considered their new career. Both actively resisted identifying as a migration agent, albeit in different ways. As a result, they appeared to find it challenging to maintain a coherent narrative about their professional identity and to move through the three stages to actualisation.

For P2 and P9, the connection to Protégé did not exist in the same way it had for the majority of the protégés. This lack of connection was reflected in their perception of how they fitted within the profession more broadly. Understanding why one does not fit within a community such as a workplace is a form of metacognitive reflection. P2 did not appear to need their strong sense of their own professional identity to be acknowledged by others in the VCoP, nor did they note any similarities between their practice and that of other protégés. Their strong sense of self allowed them to remain on the periphery and to offer help only where they felt they had expertise. They appeared to deliberately weave non-participation in the VCoP into their identity narrative, establishing that they were secure in their practice and did not require feedback or support. At the same time, they actively engaged with protégés who sought to continue a VCoP when the project was finalised, which may have been a demonstration of their identification with the VCoP that remained separate to their self-perception of their professional identity as managers of a professional business.

P2 had been registered as a migration agent for 18 months when they joined the project. They initially began with a clear need to define themselves as a businessperson first and foremost, declaring their identity was “not agent, but businessman”. Unlike other

protégés, P2 did not discuss the emotional aspects of work with clients. Their focus on business was to remain consistent throughout their time in the project:

... your offering value to a client because at the end of the day there is a job, they don't care about the visa at the end of the day they want to know is there a job for me? The visa is a kind of a hurdle in the way.

Discussion F2. P2

P2 explained that they had become a migration agent after their personal experience recruiting people for a large firm. Describing their professional identity as a project manager, they viewed the role as a “service that I share with friends”. P2 was clear that significant changes would have to take place, such as moving into this role on a full-time basis, before they would consider a “corporate identity” of a migration agent. Despite a subsequent move into the field as a sole practitioner operating within a specialist area, P2 made it clear they did not recognise any aspects of their self-identity that others shared and continued to describe their identity as a businessman, expressing surprise that others may see them as a professional migration agent:

Ah, I don't see myself any differently, I still see myself in the same kind of, just a part-time kind of position. Ah, but externally I think they see me, definitely see me as a full-time slash professional. Which I guess is all relative. *Interview 2R. P2*

P2 described their interactions within the VCoP site as “an observer status rather than a participant”, telling the facilitator that they considered they were “on the periphery”. They admitted to turning off the email alerts relating to posts as they found that five or six emails a day from Protégé were distracting. While their contributions to the VCoP site increased slightly towards the end of the project, their participation

remained minimal. P2 explained their work was highly specialised and remained focused on specific visa categories and achieving results for clients. As a result, they felt that their area of work excluded them from many of the discussions and activities or meant that these had little relevance. Despite some of P2's descriptions of work, which demonstrated that they appeared to be actively striving to enhance the reputation of the migration agent profession, they continued to resist accepting this as their professional identity, saying that migration agency as a profession was not viable, as "you would need another profession like law or something else to help you across the line":

So, ah, yes, ah, I'm just trying to keep the business focused. I'm not here to be the best migration agent, I'm here to, ah, be the best businessperson, hopefully, and, ah, offer services that I know I do well, and that's it. *Interview R3. P2*

Nevertheless, P2 actively championed and established the private VCoP site that protégés joined when the project was completed but remained in the background as the "technical support", explaining that the focus of the group was on Australian visas, so their areas of migration practice knowledge would not be useful to others in the VCoP.

P9 came from a migrant and a diverse employment background. They had worked as a scientist, researcher, tutor, a manager and in a law firm. Despite their initial enthusiasm and belief that their background and expertise in languages would result in regular clientele, P9 struggled with their professional identity as an agent. When asked how they perceived their professional identity, they acknowledged that they had not been asked the question before. While they had linked their identity as a migrant to the choice to become a migration agent, they had not considered that the move to a new profession could result in a new professional identity. Their answer implied that each stage of their

professional identity involved a struggle for them before they became comfortable both accepting the role and becoming the role:

Um, I wasn't asked this question before, but as you say, I've been exposed to different areas as well. I was a scientist before; I was working for a big company in the business area; I was in the research area and I was involved in law firm and now I'm just like... this is another stone for me, another hurdle for me that I'd like to overcome. *Interview 1R. P9*

P9 presented a positive attitude towards their choice to become a migration agent when talking to the researchers and facilitators during interviews and discussions; however, they described their story as “not a successful story anyway”. They found it challenging to gain clients, saying their first year was busy because they were setting up a business, but the second year found them “sitting in the office just waiting for people to ring”. When discussing their work, P9 was positive about the actual role migrations agents played, but their focus remained on establishing a viable business, explaining that their desire to help people came second as “business was the first priority.” Nevertheless, P9 found they were giving free advice to clients and spending inordinate amounts of time researching, which reduced the viability of their business:

I am still reading a lot of like the legislation and things like that just to refresh myself. Just to make sure that if someone calls up suddenly, I can respond; otherwise I will look silly if I don't know what is happening.

Discussion F2. P9

P9 did not actively participate in the VCoP site. They explained that their lack of practice experience made them feel they could not contribute adequately to the conversations on the site. However, they maintained that they read posts and used them

as research. The failure to interact resulted in a lack of connection with other protégés and instead, P9 continued to connect with and identify with agents outside of Protégé who they described as “like me”, because they are still struggling and cannot make money”. Eventually, P9 concluded they could not financially continue to act as a migration agent and actively considered taking on other employment. Unfortunately, P9 was not available for a final interview with the researcher:

I got an offer from someone I knew a few years back and he is a business owner and recently he sort of, approached me ...because he knew my background and he has offered me a job. I might consider this a bit harder because that is so tempting, you know what I mean, you get more money. *Discussion2, F2. P9.*

These exceptions to the findings provide an added insight into how protégés maintained their identity narrative and built a bridge between their prior perceptions of self with the present or future self they were seeking. For P9 and P2 the end result was very different, and they had both recognised aspects of their identity that linked them to their clients in order to take up the role as agent, but failed to identify with their fellow protégés as migration agents. As a result, they maintained their prior views of self as a businessperson working in a restricted area of migration advice and as a manager seeking a financially rewarding working life.

7.10 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a third finding and further discussion of finding 2, which was initially discuss in chapter 6. The three findings are underpinned by four theoretical concepts that arose from the data. Quotes from participants were included in the chapter to accurately represent the experiences of participants. These included the

experiences of two protégés who could be considered exceptions within the research. The findings were considered in light of the work of Wenger and his theory of identity formation within a CoP. A three-stage process of identity formation was put forward to explain the process that the data revealed.

The stages of identity formation proposed in this chapter were crucial in the consideration of the effect the VCoP had upon the professional identity of protégés. Actualisation describes how the link that protégés initially made between themselves and their work as a migration agent was no longer confined to their perceptions of how their personal experiences of migration would allow them to understand their clients and therefore make them “good migration agents”. The VCoP exposed them to the work and experiences of other protégés and broadened out the aspects of self they recognised as essential to their professional identity as migration agents.

The four theoretical concepts - Building a bridge between past and present, Focusing on a client-centered practice, Navigating the unpredictable, and Co-creating knowledge - expand the extant knowledge of how professional identity is formed. They provided an insight into the experiences of protégés as they progressed along their career path, capturing the imagining essential to become a migration agent, the struggles to maintain that identity narrative, and the impact that working together in a VCoP had upon the protégés’ professional identity. These theoretical concepts presented in this chapter reveal how protégés approached their work as migration agents. Importantly they expose a difference between how protégés presented and discussed their practice within the VCoP site and how they discussed practice privately with the facilitators and researchers. This discrepancy demonstrates the changes in professional identity for the protégés, from migration agents who identified strongly with their potential clients, to migration agents who focused on their client-centered practice.

The second finding included the conclusion that the deliberate design of a VCoP was able to mimic the role a supportive workplace would play in developing professional identity. The design included architectural considerations identified by Wenger et al. (2002) as methods of providing a sense of “aliveness” (p. 51) in organisational CoPs. This included the use of wayfinding to “reinvent the physical space activities into a virtual world” (Dickie & van Galen, 2016, p. 290), such as a facilitator’s office for private discussions, a café for informal discussion, and meeting rooms for video conferencing. The inclusion of Eraut’s (2007) aspects of a supportive workplace were crucial, and included the fostering of quality work relationships within a safe environment, where protégés could take risks and reveal their vulnerabilities, such as lack of expertise when seeking knowledge and the ability to receive deliberate and incidental feedback through discussions, within the site, with facilitators and during interviews, which added to the design. These unique features moved the VCoP from a one stop site, where interaction was restricted to a discussion forum, to a virtual workplace that provided the protégés with an exposure to their peers, support for their work and different ways of practice, all of which increased their confidence and their commitment to their profession. This exposure enabled learning opportunities that led to the recognition of aspects of the protégés’ self in others, which enhanced and assisted the development of their individual professional identity.

Chapter 8 summarises each chapter in this thesis. It further presents recommendations that arise from the findings and address the USQ learning objectives designed to assist in addressing the Professional Doctorate.

Chapter 8 Conclusion: Improved understanding of professional identity formation in a VCoP

This thesis represents the only doctoral study specifically focused on Australian migration agents and the effect a VCoP can have on the development of their professional identity. The study considered the experience of a cohort of early-career migration agents who had taken part in a project called Protégé. The research aimed to examine the effect a purposefully built VCoP would have on the professional identity of new agents, particularly those working in sole practice. Using constructivist grounded theory methods, the final analysis presents insights and experiences from the perspective of newly registered migration agents participating in the Protégé VCoP.

The critical driver for the original Protégé research project were the consistent calls from stakeholders for a period of supervised practice for all newly registered migration agents. At the time of the Protégé project in 2013/2014, there was significant concern about the fact that 40% of agents worked in sole practice, and at least 40% worked as the only migration agent in small to medium firms (Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority Annual Report 2012- 2013, p.7). In 2019, the Department of Home Affairs listed the number of agents working in sole practice as 40% (Office of the Migration Agent Registration Authority, 2019). In 2019 number of agents working as the only migration agent within a business was not recorded.

The findings have established that the experiences protégés had within the online locality were crucial to the development and actualisation of their professional identity. They have also shown the importance of the VCoP, extending beyond the boundaries of the online locality to include the discussions protégés had with facilitators, and the interviews they had with the researchers. Charmaz (1999) acknowledged the power that research interviews can have in creating a personal narrative, reminding us that the “researcher and respondent more or less co-construct interviews from which a

respondent's story emerges" (p. 376). These discussions and interviews provided more than an opportunity for the researcher to see "an inner view of our respondents and how they see their worlds" (Lofland & Lofland in Charmaz, 1999, p. 376). They inadvertently provided protégés with a form of reflection that allowed them to build on and maintain their identity narrative, and in doing so, played a crucial role in the development and maintenance of protégés' professional identity.

This thesis adds to existing studies on workplace learning, professional identity formation, CoPs and VCoPs. It connects and develops a range of concepts that relate to these studies and provides an original contribution to current literature. The findings suggest that recent literature examining the effect of CoPs on workplace learning and professional identity development have failed to take into account the role of individual values, traits and goals in adopting and developing a professional identity. They expose the role a supportive workplace, which includes opportunities for reflection and incidental learning, can play in professional identity formation and importantly, the ability to build these factors into a VCoP.

The thesis has used Constructivist Grounded Theory methods to analyse data from participants within a VCoP. The data analysis was undertaken to consider the participants' experiences and in particular, to gain an insight into what was happening as each participant undertook their journey as an early career migration agent. In accordance with Constructivist Grounded Theory methods the main research question: "*How and to what extent can a Virtual Community of Practice, designed as a 'supportive workplace', enhance the professional identity of migration agents in sole practice, as determined by their 'own' and 'others' perceived competence and confidence?*" did not drive the data analysis, nor did the two sub-questions:

1. What process may be involved in forming an identity as a migration agent? and

2. How have the experiences in Protégé enhanced/influenced participant perception and development of their professional identity?

Instead, the findings arose from the data to reveal the role an individual identity narrative plays in forming a professional identity. The findings rest upon four theoretical concepts that reveal the strategies protégés unconsciously employed to reinforce their professional identity narrative, and to build and enhance their identity as migration agents. These concepts led to findings that demonstrated the role the VCoP had in building the protégés' confidence and competence as agents, as well as their professional identity.

The four theoretical concepts that were addressed in chapter 7 - Building a bridge between past and present, Focusing on client-centered practice, Navigating the unpredictable and Co-creating knowledge - provide an insight into the process of professional identity formation, as protégés moved from student to early career professionals. They captured the identity work protégés undertook to maintain and develop the narrative of their professional identity in their private practice and within the VCoP. These concepts are not linear; they interrelate and overlap and reflect the social, temporal and locale of the protégés' experience.

Together the findings and the theoretical concepts reveal that the protégés' professional identity and the perception of their confidence and competence was influenced by how they learnt to practice within the VCoP, and importantly, how the design features of Protégé aided their progress through the process of forming a coherent professional identity.

The findings explain that the process of adopting a professional identity begins with the individual, through a personal identification and recognition of aspects of the role that allow the individual to imagine they can undertake it. The theoretical concepts provide insight into how the individual is called to the profession, and how they maintain

that identification until they actualise their goal. They demonstrate the important role narrative and reflection play in the process of professional identity formation. The findings verify and support previous research into professional identity formation, such as the work of Trede (2012), Foley et al. (2011, 2015), Hall (2010) and Collins (2016), in that they acknowledge the role of individual values and self-image in forming a professional identity. However, they go further in that they add new knowledge by shining a spotlight on the importance of recognising these qualities in others as a crucial factor in imagining, maintaining and actualising a professional identity.

8.1 Arriving at these findings

This chapter summarises the thesis as a whole and briefly addresses each chapter. The chapter draws conclusions from the interpretations presented in chapters 6 and 7. These conclusions include a recommendation for organisations working with migration agents and detail how they may apply to other emerging professions. The chapter also considers the limitations of the research and finishes with a brief autobiographical reflection.

Chapter 1 positioned the thesis within the legislative and practice background of the emerging profession of migration agents. Due to the nature of the practice work migration agents undertake, a range of literature was considered in chapter 2. This included the education of legal practitioners within Australia and overseas, the development of legal professional identity, and literature that examined professional identity more broadly. The unique place of migration agents in Australia's professional landscape was raised in order to expose the emerging nature of this profession, and stakeholders' concerns regarding the professional pathway of new agents. Literature on the theories of workplace learning, CoPs and importantly, VCoPs was also examined and discussed in chapter 2 and chapter 5.

Chapter 3 provided the detail of how the research was conducted, its methods and methodology used for this thesis, as well as the linkages between the original Protégé project and the current thesis.

Chapter 4 introduced the narrative heuristic device, used by Eraut (2007), of locale, temporality, and sociality. This is similar to that used by narrative (Clandinin, 2006) and constructivist grounded theorists (Charmaz, 2014). The heuristic device was used to examine the inquiry space of Protégé through a three-dimensional lens of locale, temporality, and sociality. This heuristic device brought individual circumstances and experiences of protégés to life. The use of such a device was not visible to the reader but presented the data in a manner that honored the protégés' narratives. It allowed the past, present, and future of the protégés to be presented in vignettes or short stories that described their goals, their struggles with practice, their concept of their own identity and work. These demonstrated that the development of a professional identity was an ongoing process, as they adopted, adapted, and actively created their professional lives.

Chapter 5 examined Protégé as a VCoP. Literature focusing on the structure and viability of VCoPs was considered against the structure and design of Protégé. A new definition of a VCoP for professionals was created:

An intentionally designed, informally mediated community, where a group of individuals, separated by geography and time, can join together in conversation and in a virtual locality to collaboratively create knowledge, reflect and learn individually and communally through sharing their practice experience about a specific domain of practice.

The design features of Protégé were detailed to demonstrate how they mimicked a workplace to assist protégés to build their practice knowledge and professional identity

in a safe environment. This included a discussion of the role of the facilitators and how they perceived their role as it evolved from one of more knowledgeable practitioners to peers.

Chapter 6 and chapter 7 presented the findings drawn from the data and addressed the research questions; they further integrated the findings with the relevant literature and revealed unexpected outcomes of the design based upon Eraut's theories of workplace learning. An iterative literature review allowed the researcher to discover new insights, thus extending knowledge concerning the research questions with which this thesis engaged. These included experiences of protégés as new migration agents and as members of a VCoP. Their experiences highlighted critical aspects of early practice, including the cautious and often self-imposed restricted practice that characterises early-career migration agents' work during their initial years in the profession.

Chapter 6 presented two of the findings and addressed the primary research question. The chapter explored Eraut's (2007) epistemology of practice and described how the Protégé was able to meet the parameters he had established. It explained the importance of the finding of recognising self in others, the role of Protégé and the way the design elements of the VCoP enhanced the practice of protégés. The role of reflection and transfer of tacit knowledge through various forms of feedback was highlighted as a major component in the design and outcomes of work in Protege. Importantly, the inclusion of discussions and interviews within Protégé added a fourth dimension to Wenger's (1998) definition of a CoP. With the knowledge that the definition of a professional VCoP should include 'a group of people who share a mutual engagement, joint enterprise, shared repertoire, and opportunity for reflection'.

Chapter 7 considered Wenger's discussion of identity development within a CoP. The data analysis and findings revealed that professional identity was enhanced by participation in a VCoP and formed through a three-stage process of self-recognition and

self-identification with others. A new formula of identity formation for professionals in a VCoP was proposed that focused on the role self-perception plays in forming a professional identity. The three stages of identity formation proposed by this thesis - the imagined, maintained, and actualised - extend Wenger's (Farnsworth et al., 2016) modes of identity work through an examination of how a person projects their imagining into the role they choose, and how they maintain that imagining throughout their early years of practice. The research also supports a finding of Nyström (2009b), that the process of professional identity formation may differ, depending on the pathway of the qualification a student undertakes.

8.2 How the findings extend current theory

The first finding addresses the primary research question:

1. The development of the protégés' professional identity was not directly influenced by how protégés perceived their own or others' competence and confidence but by how they learnt to practice in the VCoP.

The second finding addresses both the primary and sub-questions:

2. That the deliberate design of a VCoP was able to mimic the role a supportive workplace would play in developing a professional identity through exposure to peers and different ways of practice, and that this exposure, and the subsequent recognition of aspects of self in others, enhanced and assisted the development of a professional identity.

The third finding acknowledges the individual and their professional identity:

3. That the adoption of a professional identity occurs through a personal identification and recognition of aspects of the self that allow an individual to imagine they can undertake the role.

The four theoretical concepts address the sub-questions: “What processes may be involved in forming an identity as a professional migration agent?”; and “How have the experiences in Protégé enhanced/influenced participants’ perception and development of their professional identity?”

The findings extend the work of Trede (2012), who maintained that a professional identity “is constructed through experiences and the expression of ideas of self and one’s field or communities of practice in shared public and professional spheres”, and that it requires the “adoption of new elements of identity or elements of belonging that are partly imagined and partly ascribed.” (p. 32). They also support the work of Nyström (2009b), who found that students who had enrolled in a specific professional course adopted their professional identity more smoothly than those who chose to study an area that was applicable across a field of professions (p. 8).

The research findings add to the extant knowledge through the examination of how the professional identity of migration agents evolved. The findings expose that for protégés the first “other” they recognised and identified with was the client. This identification with the imagined client was premised on their own experiences as migrants, or their strong links to migrants and migration. Linking their past experiences and identity with that of the client allowed them to imagine how they would be suited for the role of migration agent. Their final recognition of “other” was the similarities between their selves and other protégés as migration agents. Identification with experiences of fellow protégés allowed them to actualise their professional identity. Their final perception of their professional identity moved from one that identified with the client to one that was focused on professional practice within a community of migration agents.

Trede (2012) asserts that a professional identity means “becoming aware of what matters most in practice, what values and interests shape decision making” (p. 163).

Such an awareness can arise from work in sole practice; however, the broader experience of values important to the profession requires a practitioner to connect meaningfully with their peers.

The three-stage process of professional identity formation that was developed during this thesis builds on the work of Wenger's three modes of identity formation within a CoP: identification, imagination, and alignment (Farnsworth et al., 2016), through the proposal that identity formation in a CoP involves three different stages: the imagined, the maintained and the actualised. This requires consideration of the internal identity qualities a person perceives they have that would enable them to project their imagining into the role they choose, and how they maintain that perception of their identity throughout their early years of practice.

Although Wenger's (Farnsworth et al., 2016) model of modes of identity formation, also consider decisions or identification with a working role outside of the CoP, it fails to account for why a person would imagine they could become a professional, or how they maintain that imagining through periods of stress and change that occur outside of the CoP. The process of identity formation, as presented in this thesis, of an identity that is imagined, maintained and actualised, supports the findings and theoretical concepts that expose how the protégés' professional identity evolved from the first imagining, when they made the decision to study to be a migration agent. The research highlights how crucial it was for protégés to maintain their professional identity through periods of change and unpredictability until actualisation. The impact of the VCoP is emphasised during the final process of actualisation, which involves an awareness of sharing professional experiences, values and goals with others.

This research has exposed that consideration of professional identity development should be viewed within the context of the profession. Students who choose to study in areas that lead to identifiable professions may have begun their process of

professional identity development as early as when they began to imagine which career they could follow. Consideration of why a student chooses an area of study would then focus on the aspects of self that students feel they bring to their chosen professional pathway. As professional identity development is an ongoing process this research has added to the knowledge, as this is an aspect that has not been considered within the literature on professional identity development.

In a study of the effect of peer reflection on work integrated learning, Trede (2019) found that students developed a sense of relational awareness, which allowed them to understand that their feelings or experiences were similar to those that other students had felt during their work placement. The knowledge that these personal experiences were shared by others allowed students to see them as problems or issues that could be negotiated within the workplace. The importance of relational awareness is supported in this research, which emphasised that a critical factor in the development and enhancement of a professional identity for protégés in the VCoP, to the stage of actualisation, was not the recognition by others of their skills and knowledge as practitioners. Instead, it was the recognition by protégés that they shared similar experiences, goals and values with their peers.

However, unlike Trede's (2012) students who took the knowledge that their peers were sharing similar experiences and used it to legitimate their experience as outsiders within a workplace, the recognition of 'self as other' by the protégés was a result of learning to practice within the supportive environment of the VCoP. This environment promoted a sense of belonging, which increased their feelings of trust in their interactions within the virtual community. As a result, the crucial experience for protégés within the community was not one of striving to belong, but one of recognising themselves as belonging. Recognition occurred through the ways protégés learnt to practice in the VCoP. The interactions and learning opportunities within the VCoP exposed how their

fellow protégés had the same goals, experiences, and values. The concept of ‘recognising as belonging’ that underlies the findings extends Trede’s (2012) research on the importance of relational awareness to professional identity formation. This is an addition to prior knowledge that has not previously been identified in the literature and is demonstrated by the qualitative research here.

Theory that focuses on professional identity formation within a CoP or VCoP must consider an examination of broader aspects of practice. Identifying with membership of a VCoP does not create a professional identity. Unlike Wenger’s (Farnsworth, et al. 2016) modes of identity development within a CoP, the three dimensions proposed in this thesis to consider identity formation reached beyond that of the VCoP. They broadened the consideration of professional identity formation and captured all professional and practice experiences of early career practitioners. The dimensions of ‘imagined, maintained and actualised’ identity formation reach back to the reasons why a person would imagine they could fulfill a particular professional role. In doing so they allow for a consideration of a coherent narrative of professional identity formation. The motivators that drove a person to pursue a profession and begin the development of their professional identity are key to the way a person then maintains that professional identity and reaches actualisation.

Expanding the definition and understanding of a VCoP adds to previous literature of VCoPs, and in particular those aimed at professional practice. This supports and expands on the work of Hall (2010) and Foley et al. (2015) who revealed the role a supportive workplace played in the identity formation of early career lawyers. Their work did not consider the possibility of creating the same support for early career practitioners in a virtual environment. The design of Protégé as a professional VCoP was vital in creating an opportunity for protégés to enhance the development of their professional

identity. The design added to features discussed in chapter 5, which were considered crucial in the literature for establishing a viable VCoP:

1. Accessible technology
2. A domain of practice
3. Goals
4. Consistent and reliable facilitators
5. Communication in a risk-free environment
6. A specific community of practitioners
7. Collaborative space

This thesis has added to these design features through the inclusion of structural features of Protégé and the support structures that mimic a workplace. The design features included aspects of architectural wayfinding (Golledge et al., 2000; Dickie, & van Galen, 2016), which in turn included the structural components of an office such as:

- A private sign-in facility for all protégés.
- A landing page that provided access to the Protégé VCoP site rooms.
- Shared spaces for discussion conceived as ‘a café’ where peers might discuss problems or successes of their case work without revealing client details of the case. This was also space where protégés could socialise.
- The facilitators ‘office’ which allowed protégés to discuss personal or problematic issues they did not want to share with their peers.
- Shared audio and video spaces as meeting rooms for continuing professional development or group meetings.
- A private chat forum for protégés.
- A library with resources, such as legislation and relevant case law.
- An events calendar for both social and formal announcements.

Importantly, the deliberate design of the VCoP was able to mimic the role a supportive workplace would play in developing professional identity through exposure to peers and different ways of practice. This exposure and the subsequent recognition of aspects of self in others, enhanced and assisted the development of a professional identity. The inclusion of specific features, based on Eraut's concept of a supportive workplace, provided support through various forms of feedback and increased the learning opportunities for protégés. These features included discussion forums for practice issues, private discussions, interviews, and opportunities to teach others in video classes. The VCoP allowed protégés to engage in the aspects of professional practice that Eraut (2007) identified as essential to workplace learning: the ability to work with clients and to engage with challenging problems and tasks, interaction with peers, and access to timely and strategic feedback, and importantly, to learn from one's own or others' mistakes (p. 409).

Supportive workplaces are safe environments that allow an individual to grow and make mistakes. The role of the facilitators was crucial to the design of Protégé. Their presence created a safe space for new professionals to engage with each other and learn together. While the role of the facilitator was designed to meet the parameters of a supportive workplace, the evolution of the role to a synergistic co-mentor (Dorner, p. 169, 2012) was unexpected and revealed the power of the VCoP in promoting professional growth. Eraut's concept of a supportive workplace includes the ability to seek support and advice or feedback from colleagues who may be more experienced but are not direct supervisors. This has also been highlighted by Levin (2009) who found that US immigration lawyers learnt to practice in various ways, including observation, advice from peers, or unsolicited advice from others who were not directly working with them. All of these factors create the "triangular relationship between challenge, support and confidence" that Eraut (2007, p. 417) considered necessary in a supportive workplace.

As a project, Protégé extended beyond the boundaries of the VCoP site itself. The acknowledgement that Protégé included aspects outside of interactions within the online site provides a new and unexpected facet to the structure of the VCoP. The inclusion of discussions and research interviews as components of the VCoP acknowledges that these interactions provided an opportunity for protégés to reflect on their practice, their identity, and their profession. The very nature of an interview requires contemplation on questions that often point to areas of life that have not been actively considered. The unstructured interviews with researchers provided this unexpected opportunity for protégés to reflect on their work and experiences, including their emotional responses to the work they were doing and the choices they needed to make. Russell and Kelly (2002) point out that the process of an interview does more than allow a person to recount previous events, “it constructs new stories out of the information and interpretation of both participants” (p. 6) which results in both participants being transformed through the process.

The discussions with facilitators were fundamentally different. They were intended to reflect interactions professional staff would experience in a supportive workplace. As such, they offered an opportunity for personal reflection and narrative that focused on aspects of the protégés’ practice work as professional migration agents. The combination of the two different forms of informal or incidental reflection provided a powerful way for the protégés to build their identity narrative and recognise themselves within a broader professional context.

The concept that reflection may not always require the processes proposed by Schon (1987) for successful professional growth, builds on the work of Eraut (2004b) and academics such as Trede (2012) Alexander, (2011) Collins et al., (2007) and Fruehwald (2015), and can assist educators of practitioners across a range of professions. Implementing a less rigorous regime of unstructured discussions with respected peers or

more experienced practitioners can ensure that new practitioners learn from their experiences in a natural and integrative way without the imposition of a structure that risks resulting in a forced and unnatural reflective process (Eraut, 2004b).

Importantly, the inclusion of interviews and discussions as reflective activities that remain central to the VCoP adds a fourth dimension to the work of Wenger (1998). As discussed in chapter 6, Wenger's (1998) original three dimensions of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire, which applied to the concept of a CoP, were expanded by this research to a consideration of a professional VCoP. This uncovered a fourth dimension of reflective activities, which brought the individual and their professional growth into the centre of the experience. This thesis establishes that including the dimension of reflection extends the criteria that should be considered when creating a professional VCoP to a group of people who share mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, a shared repertoire, and opportunities for reflection.

The dynamic interplay of the theoretical concepts underpinning the findings provided a unique insight into the processes of becoming and being a migration agent. The narrative nature of identity work lends itself to presumptions that professional identity is aspirational and as such, is always a forward-looking process. Yet this research found that, quite to the contrary, being and becoming a professional was a messy process not readily adapted to a linear timeline. The theoretical concepts this research has uncovered - *Building a bridge between past and present*, *Focusing on client-centered practice*, *Navigating the unpredictable* and *Co-creating knowledge* - demonstrated the ongoing nature of identity work as protégés began to take on their imagined identity as early as when they made the decision to begin to study to become a migration agent.

8.3 Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from these findings. As migration agents work in an emerging and stratified landscape, they face reduced opportunities to develop a coherent professional identity. There are several reasons, as discussed in chapter 1 and chapter 2, that expose why the profession remains fractured:

- A history of formal qualifications for migration agents that is relatively short and constantly changing. The continual change in the requirements needed to practice as a migration agent have prevented legitimacy based on qualification as a basis for forming a professional identity.
- The requirements for legal practitioners to register as agents has resulted in a conflicted membership that also results in differing levels of professional support and professional development.
- The evolution of numerous representative bodies purporting to offer support and professional membership, that are often in conflict with each other over legitimacy of representation, prevents a coherent base for developing the goals and values of the profession.

These factors have resulted in a profession that does not have an agreed professional identity that practitioners can readily claim. As a result, gaining a professional identity in an emerging profession such as this is not a process of becoming something already established and readily understood. Instead professional identity relies upon imagining and recognising individual similarities that legitimate belonging. This conclusion is upheld by the finding *that the adoption of a professional identity occurs through a personal identification and recognition of aspects of the self that allow an individual to imagine they can undertake the role*. The findings highlight the necessity for early career professionals to work in interaction with others in their field. Without the opportunities to observe others work, and to engage in discussions of practice, there is no

opportunity for the early career professional to recognise the “other” as themselves (Trede & Mcewen, 2012, p. 38).

The second conclusion is that Protégé enhanced the imagining, maintaining, and actualising of the protégés’ professional identity through specific aspects of its design. These VCoP design features provided opportunities to learn practice through purposeful and incidental feedback, observation, discussion and reflection. This type of workplace learning is essential to forming a joint imagining of professional identity that allows an individual to align their imagining with the broader community, and to develop their professional identity within a broader context of practice. This demonstrates that a deliberately constructed VCoP can increase practice knowledge and introduce practitioners to the norms and expectations of a profession without apprentice style supervision or the usual forms of mentoring.

The deliberate design of the VCoP and its effect on the way protégés learnt to practice raised the importance of both incidental feedback and informal reflection in workplace learning and identity formation. The role of informal reflection that is achieved through semi-formal and informal discussions removes the need to place emphasis on structured and imposed forms of reflection as a means of enhancing practice for early career professionals.

The theoretical concepts provided insight into the way tacit knowledge may be transferred in online settings. Tacit knowledge within the VCoP is revealed in the theoretical concept of *Co-creating knowledge*. This thesis supports the work of Pyrko et al. (2017) and Eraut (2004, 2007, 2010) in finding that the transfer of tacit knowledge is not purposeful. Rather, it is a byproduct of working together and is revealed in a joint understanding of context, and rules that underpin an action. Eraut (2007) considered this process so powerful that it could result in an identity shift. For protégés, this tacit

knowledge transfer became both a critical factor in how they learnt to practice in the VCoP, and the evolution of their professional identity.

8.4 Leading them out of the wilderness

Facilitators held their last discussions with protégés before the VCoP site closed. Researchers then interviewed them six months after the project ended. All protégés were invited to comment on the experience. The data from these two interviews were coded and fell under various focused codes such as “learning to practice”, “developing self-confidence”, “working in protégé”, and “building a practice”. These were all subsumed into the final theoretical concepts of *Focusing on client-centered practice*, *Navigating the unpredictable* and *Co-creating knowledge*. Appendix L lists the responses of all protégés in this thesis. In some cases, two responses are included in order to represent the temporal lapse between the discussion with the facilitator and final interview with researchers. Their words often speak for themselves. Below are two quotes that provide examples of the depth and breadth of the impact the project had on the way protégés perceived their practice, their identity, and their future:

I think it has been... it's impacted completely positively. It has really...it takes people out of the wilderness in which single, practitioners operate.

Ah...and that's a terrible place to be if I'm really honest. *Interview R3*

P14

Researcher talking to P8: So, is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

Or any questions you think I should ask you? Or things we should talk about?

P8: No. Not really. I think it was a fantastic thing, and putting it one way,

if there wasn't a Protégé, I wouldn't be where I was today. So that's putting it short and in context. *Interview 3R P8.*

Data from the Office of the OMARA supports the statement by P8 that Protégé was a factor in their success. The government database confirms that fifteen of the eighteen Protégés chosen for this study are still working as migration agents. Eleven initially registered in 2012, one in 2011 and three in 2013. OMARA statistics demonstrate that these agents have passed one critical time factor in their career and are entering another. Despite the growth in the number of migration agents since 2012 (from 4649 to 7,252), OMARA activity reports for the first half of 2019 confirm that only 13% of agents have been in practice for seven to nine years (Table 8.1). This places the protégés into a small cohort of agents that have achieved longevity. Testimony by the protégés demonstrated the personal impact the experience within the VCoP had on their confidence to continue working, and emphasised the privilege they felt in joining and working in this profession.

There is no doubt that the government focus in relation to the migration agent profession remains on the education and registration scheme for migration agents. A recent parliamentary committee report (Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 2019) repeated the claim from previous reviews (Kendall, 2014) that “the greatest risk to consumers stems from the lack of supervision of relatively inexperienced RMAs who receive unconditional registration on first entering the profession” (2019, para. 3.81). The theoretical concepts uncovered in this research highlight that this perception may not accurately reflect the needs of early career migration agents. While the focus remains on competencies and supervision, the realities of learning to practice in a constantly changing environment are ignored. These include continual changes to legislation and policy, and a deliberate distancing of the Department of Home Affairs from personal

contact through the introduction of online applications, email inquiry systems, and automated visa decision making. The theoretical concepts underpinning the findings do more than provide insight into how the protégés' professional identity developed. They expose areas where the broader profession and stakeholders can step in to assist migration agents to develop their practice competency and confidence.

The findings and theoretical concepts provide lessons that are generalizable to other evolving professions. They also provide guidance for emerging professions seeking to assist members to build their professional identity or enhance the efficacy of new professional organisations. A specifically designed VCoP for early career practitioners may provide a coherent platform for emerging professions to build on their shared ideals, practices, and expectations. This can simultaneously allow their early career professionals to identify values and practices they share, which would then allow them to actualise their new professional identity.

8.5 Recommendation:

This research demonstrates how supervised practice does not have to follow traditional methods. If, as the Committee noted, supervised practice aims to instill into the practitioner an increased knowledge of *how to practice*, then this research supports the premise that this can be learnt and nurtured through participation in a purposefully designed VCoP. Protégé presents a model that would make it accessible to early career practitioners, such as migration agents working in remote areas, or to those who are finding it hard to secure a position within a firm. It also offers further benefits to those seeking to implement a form of supervised practice for emerging professions. Working with peers ensures that changes in legislation and policy, and in practical aspects that affect practice, can be addressed quickly. Protégé demonstrated how co-created

knowledge could assist even the most experienced practitioners to learn new ways of practice.

Purposeful design is critically important. The rise of social media has increased the ability of migration agents to establish a network (Dickie, 2018) and share knowledge. In many ways, interacting on social media can be considered a form of peer-to-peer supervision (Dickie, 2018). One clear difference between the peer-to-peer interactions the profession has built through social media on the one hand, and a VCoP that provided supervised practice on the other, would be the design and purpose of the VCoP.

A VCoP for emerging or new professionals must not only be a forum where people seek advice on practice issues such as visa requirements. It must be one that provides participants with the opportunity to engage with each other on a meaningful level, to learn the values and goals of their profession, as well as provide opportunities for reflection. The design, or platform would therefore need to include:

1. Restrictions on the numbers of participants in each VCoP (current social media sites, including Facebook sites for migration agents, have 1800 members). Limiting numbers ensures that members of a VCoP remain in a bounded and safe community.
2. A means of confidential engagement, and enforceable protocols to ensure conduct in the forum and in practice advice are at the standard expected by the broader profession.
3. Facilities such as forums, and conference rooms, that allow participants to interact both synchronously and asynchronously, to construct a sound knowledge of practice, policy, law and procedure, thereby creating an environment where practitioners learn from their peers as well as more experienced agents.

4. A specific design component that requires members to undertake professional and reflective activities, such as discussions with an experienced agent as mentor.
5. Professional development opportunities, including those that allow practitioners to apply what they have learnt to guide others to an understanding of legal policy or practice issues.

8.5.1 Future research opportunities

This thesis maintains that the emerging profession of migration agents exists within a segmented profession, which impacts on the development of a professional identity of migration agents. The findings offer opportunities to address this lack of focus.

The Protégé project was a joint project with the peak professional body for migration agents, the Migration Institute of Australia (MIA). The project did not focus on the work that the MIA did for migration agents. Since the beginning of this project, several other organisations representing the interests of migration agents have formed. These professional bodies profess to provide a unique touchstone for agents and set the standards for professional behaviour.

A further study of the role that the relevant professional bodies play in providing a CoP for migration agents, including any formal or informal mentoring or supervision that arises from their interactions, would assist in informing broader decisions regarding the implementation of future registration and practice requirements for agents.

This process and research was one that rested upon the contribution of early career migration agents, struggling to find their way in a new profession. It has highlighted aspects that were not considered before, such as the impact the regulation process has had on the ability of the profession to grow in a coherent manner. This

presents an opportunity to further explore the role of government and politics in controlling the growth and development to this profession.

The conclusion that a fractured landscape fails to provide an emerging profession with a coherent basis for professional development is one that could lend itself to many of the emerging professions working within the legal space in Australia. A career in law is increasingly disparate and includes roles that may not require qualifications that allow an individual to practice law. Khan (2017) exposes this in her study, which considers migration agents, legal immigration specialists, and education agents. There are now many emerging professions working on the boundaries of legal practice in areas such as technology, conflict resolution, and mediation.

8.6 Autobiographical reflection

As a linkage research project, Protégé bridged the domain of the workplace and that of the emergent profession and met the parameters of the Professional Studies program at the University of Southern Queensland

The USQ Professional Studies program assists students who are undertaking doctoral studies to develop their learning profile, which in turn allows them to develop goals for professional practice. Students then go through a process of identifying gaps in learning they need to develop in order to meet their own professional development goals. Learning objectives arise from these gaps and assist in the identification of a work-based problem that is based in the practice domain (Fergusson et al., 2018). The learning objectives I developed were designed to capture the areas I wanted to focus on for my personal and professional development. These were addressed in the following way:

Objective 1. To identify and analyse issues critical to the early career development of new migration agents as professionals working in isolated environments and determine if these issues are addressed through peer interaction and recognition.

This thesis identified critical issues affecting early career migration agents through the development of the four theoretical concepts that underpin the findings. Each concept encapsulates the issues facing early career migration agents working in sole practice and addresses areas of practice, as well as identity and professional development. The process of coding highlighted the specific issues agents faced and allowed these issues to be brought together under the theoretical concepts. Through this analytical process the realities of working as an early career migration agent came to life. The data revealed that agents struggled with the reality of working with clients, the complexity of continually changing legislation and policy, and the impact of departmental processes.

The three findings highlight how working with peers assisted this process. Through feedback, advice, and assurance of their choices, protégés were able to recognise that their peers had similar values and goals and importantly were going through the same struggles. Peer interaction promoted both competence and increased confidence in protégés, and importantly, it assisted in the actualisation of their professional identity.

Objective 2. To extend the body of theoretical knowledge about the relationship between communities of practice, professional identity, and early career professionals by designing, implementing, and completing a research project that builds from a critical evaluation of existing academic insights into individual and social learning.

As lead researcher on the Protégé project, I led the design and implementation of Protégé from 2013 – 2014. The focus of this thesis has been on the value of the VCoP in developing professional identity. This learning objective was achieved through this doctorate. Academic insights into individual and social learning, focusing on the workplace, confirmed the notion that learning is a multilayered process that often involves subconscious processes. The findings focus on the role of learning in the VCoP and the role of peers within that process. The role of concepts such as tacit knowledge,

incidental feedback and reflection were explored and highlighted through the findings of this thesis.

Objective 3. To develop professional knowledge, tolerance for ambiguity and critical analysis skills by analysing and synthesizing findings of the Protégé project, in order to develop theory and provide recommendations that will assist professional development for early-career professionals in isolated or sole practice.

I have found the experience of working with protégés throughout this project, and the process of interpreting the data, to be exciting and humbling. At times, the analysis methods seemed to be akin to throwing data in the air and searching for patterns in the way it fell to the ground. Instead, I found that the outcomes and recommendations rested on a solid base and echoed the work of academics searching for answers to professional identity development and the role social learning plays in advancing knowledge across a range of professions. The findings, and the theoretical concepts which underpin them, provide guidance for the development of structures that can assist early career migration agents to develop their skills within a safe environment.

The research project also revealed the nature of assumptions or expectations I held prior to undertaking the data analysis. These were based on my experience as a migration agent and academic. The seemingly logical conclusions based on this experience were unfounded. Critical analysis has demonstrated the danger of imposing presumptions upon data. This was a result of the process that was both surprising and enlightening.

Objective 4. To contribute to the future development of early career professionals by building on findings of the Protégé project to develop structures and processes that can be introduced to assist early career professionals develop their professional skills within a safe and trusting environment.

Migration agents are ‘agents of change’ (Crock & Goddard, 2002, p. 2), and their work impacts daily on the life choices of people from across the world. For many of the protégés, the constant changes in law and policy presented challenges that required enormous courage and dedication to overcome. They may have eventually done so without the assistance of Protégé, yet their testimony tells us otherwise.

The findings and recommendations of this thesis relate explicitly to migration agents, yet in many ways, they could be applicable across other fields. Many new avenues of work and practice are arising from technological and social challenges. Many include working in small or sole practice. The insights that Protégé provides for new and emerging professions could assist them to establish stability and legitimacy within their membership and attract new members. The unique design of the VCoP provides a blueprint from which those seeking to assist in developing professional identity can explore opportunities to replicate the positive results discovered in this research or expand on further.

Objective 5. To enhance the future professional development of early career professionals in isolated or sole professional practice by analysing, synthesizing and communicating (through scholarly publication and conference presentations) well-reasoned outcomes of this research project.

As a linkage project, Protégé has had the support of the MIA since its inception. Regular updates on the project have been presented at the MIA annual conference in 2013 and 2015, and the annual general meeting in 2017. Since the beginning of this project, a new professional support group for migration agents has developed. The Migration Pro Forum is an online community for migration agents that connects practitioners through Facebook, regular podcasts and continuing professional development training. In keeping with the practice of communicating the progress of this thesis, I appeared on a Podcast called “The Migration Show” in 2019. The findings of this

research will lend themselves to journal publications and present opportunities to address ongoing issues with education and regulation of migration agents.

6. To demonstrate academic communication skills, including the capacity for critical analysis, abstract thought and theoretical debate by achieving scholarly publication of the key outcomes of this project.

The creation of a VCoP is reliant upon the premise of a bounded 'safe' place. The difference between the classroom where 'mistakes' and 'silly questions' do not have real life consequences, and the workplace where they do, is one of the distinguishing points of difference for new practitioners. The ability for new practitioners to continue to grow knowledge in a 'safe space' is essential and a key missing ingredient for sole practitioners. The design of Protégé, which encompassed the components of a supportive workplace (Eraut, 2004), ensured that protégés felt they were able to grow their practice knowledge and develop competence and confidence in their skills within the safe environment. The design features that allowed them to do so, stand outside of social networking opportunities and current professional development opportunities available to migration agents.

It is expected that these insights will provide opportunities for publications at the completion of this doctorate. In many ways the knowledge gained in this research is more applicable today than it was when the research began. Recent world events have seen a rise in virtual work that has highlighted the need for workplaces to remain connected and supportive. The findings from this thesis that highlight aspects of a supportive workplace can stand outside or within the tighter concept of a professional VCoP. All forms of online communication, through email, Zoom, Facebook or platforms such as Slack, require boundaries in order to remain safe and productive. The future for many professions will remain in the virtual world, and the need to ensure that this world also remains a supportive workplace is greater than before.

8.6.1 Final thoughts

This study began when an article by a US Law academic triggered my curiosity. The article revealed what seemed to be commonalities between the experiences of US immigration lawyers and Australian migration agents. This held true throughout the study, yet the findings lend themselves to a broader audience and present pathways for further research. As an emerging profession the work of migration agents has been much maligned within the public sphere, yet their work is largely undocumented, despite the lasting impact it has for their clients. As a researcher I have been privileged to work with the migration agents as protégés, academics and facilitators throughout this project. Their experiences provide insight into the complex area of law they practice, and they inspire me to continue researching and revealing ways to improve a profession that is so essential to the nature of a migration nation such as Australia.

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Table 3.1*Protégé interviews identifying final data for protégé effect*

Protégé	Research ID ⁹	Interviews with researcher			Facilitator interview		Total Interviews	
		1	2	3	1	2	Completed	Coded
1		√		√	√	√	4	0
2	P1	√	√	√			3	3
3	P2	√	√	√	√	√	5	5
4	P3	√	√	√	√		4	3
5	protege			√	√	√	3	0
6	P4	√	√	√	√	√	5	5
7	P5	√	√	√	√		4	3
8	P6	√	√	√	√	√	5	5
9	protege	√	√				2	0
10	P7	√	√	√	√	√	5	5
11	protege		√	√			2	0
12	protege	√	√				2	0
13	P8	√	√	√	√	√	5	5
14	P9	√	√		√	√	5	5
15	protege		√	√			2	0
16	P10	√	√	√	√	√	5	5
17	P11	√	√	√		√	4	3
18	P12	√	√	√	√	√	5	5
19	P13	√	√	√		√	4	3
20	P14	√	√	√	√	√	5	5
21	protege	√	√			√	3	0
22	P15	√	√	√	√		4	3
23	P16	√	√	√	√	√	5	5
24	protege	√			√	√	3	0
25	protege	√	√	√			3	0
26	protege	√	√				2	0
27	protege	√					1	0
28	P17	√	√	√	√	√	5	5
29	protege	√		√		√	3	0
30	P18	√	√	√	√	√	5	5
1. Completed protégé interviews to be analysed as part of Protégé Effect								78

⁹ Pseudonyms

Green original coded interviews; yellow theoretical sampling.

Table 3.2*Protégé Participation and Background*

Intake	Protégé	INT 1 F	INT2 F	1R	2R	3R	Register	Work	Membership	Previous qualifications
2	P1			21/4/14	4/4/21	3/3/15	2013	SELF EMP	MIA	Law
1	P2	28/9/13	7/4/14	5/9/13	15/7/14	6/3/15	2012	SELF EMP	MA	Commerce/Science
1	P3	1/10/13		27/8/13	14/7/14	10/2/15	2012	PARTNERSHIP	MIA	Law/Communications
1	P4	19/9/13	10/3/14	26/8/13	04/07/14	23/2/15	2013	SELF EMP	MIA/MA	Psychology
1	P5	18/9/13		27/8/13	27/6/14	6/3/15	2012	FIRM <5	MIA/MA	Science
1	P6	24/10/13	2/3/14	20/8/13	2/7/14	3/2/15	2012	SELF EMP	MIA/MA	Unknown
1	P7	20/9/13	6/3/14	26/8/13	3/7/14	10/3/15	2012	SELF EMP	MIA/MA	Unknown
1	P8	20/10/13	4/3/14	20/8/13	18/07/14	27/2/15	2012	SELF EMP	MIA	Unknown
1	P9	13/10/13	13/3/14	7/9/13	16/7/14		2013	SELF EMP	MIA/MA	Unknown
1	P10	28/9/13	2/4/14	23/8/13	4/7/14	13/2/15	2012	SELF EMP	MIA/MA	Law
1	P11		6/3/14	19/08/13	15/7/14	10/2/15	2012	SELF EMP	MIA	Unknown
1	P12	1/10/13	19/3/14	23/8/13	15/7/14	24/2/15	2013	SELF EMP	MIA/LS	Law
2	P13		20/6/14	2/4/14	11/8/14	6/2/15	2011	FIRM <5	MIA/MA	Law
1	P14	19/9/13	3/3/14	21/8/13		23/2/15	2012	SELF EMP	MIA/MA	Unknown
2	P15	5/6/14		4/4/14	13/8/14	30/1/15	2013	LAW FIRM	MIA	Law
1	P16	23/9/13	1/2/14	19/8/13	28/7/14	4/2/15	2012	LAW FIRM	MIA/MA/LS	Law
1	P17	20/9/13	2/3/14	27/8/13	4/7/14	4/2/15	2012	SELF EMP	MIA	Unknown
1	P18	20/8/13	2/4/14	20/8/14	2/7/14	17/2/15	2012	SELF EMP	MIA/MA	Phd Science

Note. This table presents details of background and interview participation of the Proteges who were included in this research. Detail on prior qualifications was not collected for the study, however, where they have been disclosed and presented in Chapter 4, they are included in the table.

Table 3.3*MAXQDA codes for sorting memos*




Symbol	Name	Description
	INITIAL CODING	Descriptive of concept codes. These memos enhance or add to the initial coding by providing a fast way to capture what is happening in the interview using gerunds.
M	USEFUL OR EMERGING THEMES	Concepts that were arising from the data, including chapter headings or codes that seemed to leap out at me.
	EXPLANATORY	Can be linked to codes – they can provide more information or descriptions where necessary or explain what I was thinking when I assigned the code.
	ISSUES	Things that impact on the data such as technical issues with quality of interview etc.
?	QUESTIONS FOR ME TO CONSIDER –	Thoughts that arise from the data, questions I ask myself or want to pursue/keep in mind when analysing further.
L	ASPECTS TO CONSIDER	Things I may need to follow up or think about.
!	MEMO TO SELF ABOUT PROCESS OF CODING	Explanation about the code and why I made it.

Table 3.4

Sample of linking codes


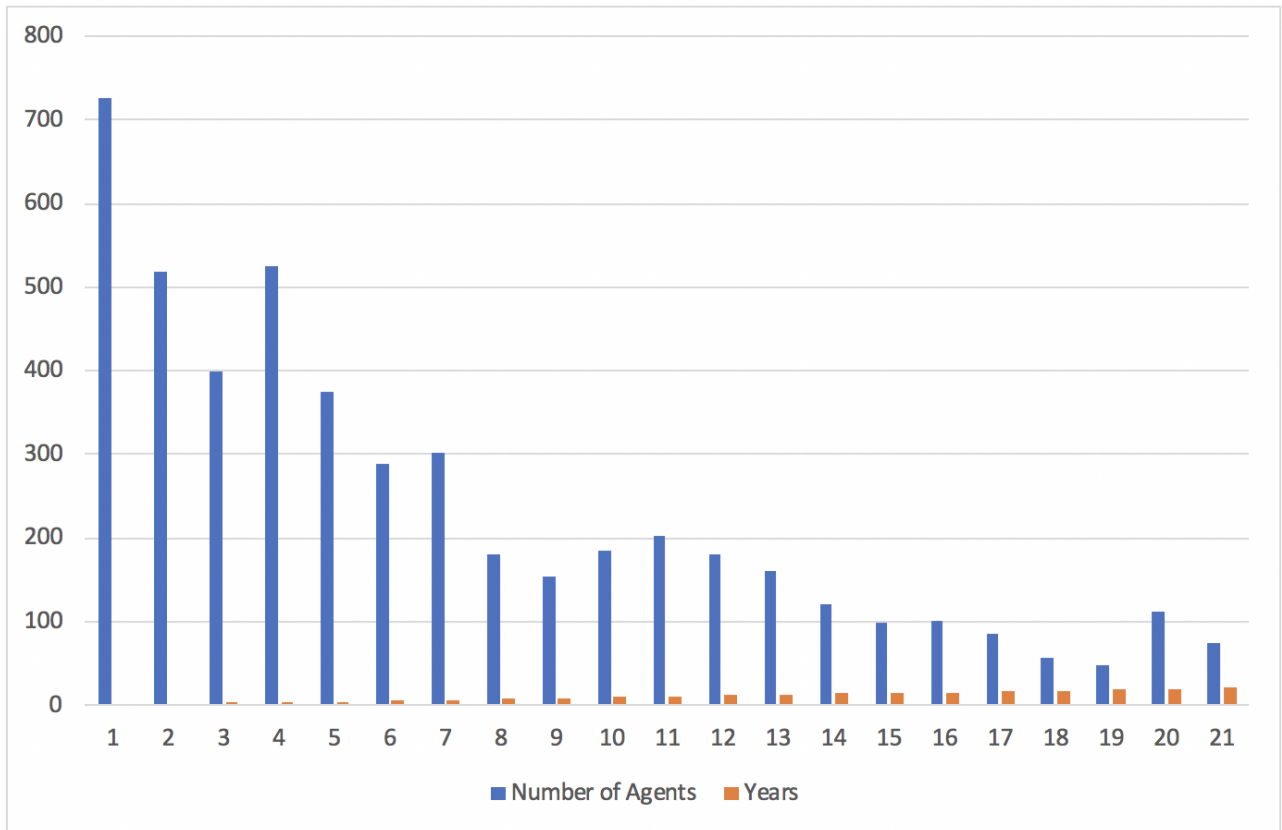
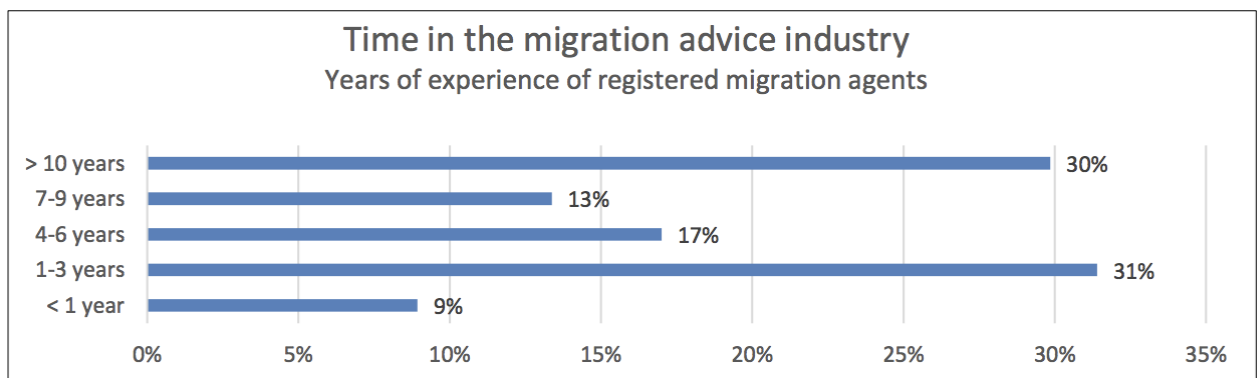
SYMBOL	CODE/DESCRIPTOR	LINKED CODES	GERUNDS
	Safety net of Protégé	INTERVIEWR3\Protege\reciprocity INTERVIEW R3\Protege\safety net of protege INTERVIEW R3\Protege\I was sort of out here swimming and not being a very good swimmer INTERVIEW R3\confidence\was that confidence boost that I needed, um, to just be able to INTERVIEW R2\finding value in Protege INTERVIEW R2\finding value in Protege\Safety net of Protégé FACILITATORS\chris and lisa\F1 LISA\protege INTERVIEW R1\NETWORKING\needing to feel safe with peers INTERVIEWR1\NETWORKING\seeking connections with other agents	finding a safe place for learning acknowledging confidentiality learning from others feeling alone seeking connections

Table 8.1

Length of time agents remain in practice



Adapted from the OMARA Annual Report 2012 – 2013 p.8. Continuous registration of migration agents



Adapted from the Department of Home Affairs Migration Agent Activity Report 1 January – 30 June 2019 p.7

Figure 3.1.
Theoretical Sampling: Building a Bridge Between Past and Present



Figure 3.2
Theoretical sampling: 'people's lives are in question'.



Figure 3.3
Sample initial coding of interview

Interview 1 with researcher	Initial coding
<p>Researcher: Okay. What then motivated you to become a migration agent?</p> <p>Protégé 16:</p> <p>I did lots of areas of law that were disappearing, so I had done Compensation law for about 13 years. And then the rules gradually changed in relation to that. Um while I was doing Conveyancing, well I still am, but the market went down with the Global Financial Crisis. So, lots of the areas of law that we were doing were getting eroded. So, we wanted something else that could add on to what we were already doing.</p>	<p><i>Seeking an alternative</i></p> <p><i>Describing employment background</i></p> <p><i>Explaining motivation</i></p> <p><i>Building a bridge between past and present</i></p>

Appendix A Call for participants

Project Title: Protégé

The ANU College of Law Migration Program and the Migration Institute of Australia are conducting a joint research project on the impact an online community of practice can have upon the development of professional identity, confidence, connectedness and practice of newly registered agents.

Investigators:

Marianne Dickie, Assistant Convenor and Sub Dean of Migration Law Program, ANU College of Law, Legal Workshop.

Andrew Bartlett, Research Fellow ANU College of Law, Legal Workshop.

Invitation: We are seeking a small number of newly registered agents who are willing to participate in this project.

If you are selected and you agree to be part of this research project, we will ask you to join our small online community of practice (20 - 30 participants) where you will work alongside recently registered agents and experienced practitioner mentors. This will take place in a secure online environment which facilitates informal learning, professional development and a number of structured reflective group-based tasks.

Environment

The project intention is to create a space for new practitioners to begin their practice in a supportive online environment designed to mimic an 'ideal office'.

Participant Involvement

As we are interested in individual professional development within a community of peer practitioners, the focus and boundary of our study will be on the professional development of individuals in their capacity as migration agents. We will not be undertaking any study into your personal lives and interactions or providing financial assistance or advice to you or any other participants.

Time commitment

There is no requirement to spend a specified amount of time interacting within the Community. However, you will be asked to participate in three separate one-hour interviews during the life of the project. You will also be asked to complete a professional development plan (PDP) that allows you to reflect and consider ways to build upon and progress your career goals; you will need to participate in separate meetings with your peer supervisor for this process. We will aim to hold weekly staff meetings for all protégés and peer supervisors.

All protégés will be invited to one face to face meeting before the project begins. This will be an orientation and planning meeting to familiarise participants with the project outline, the technical interface and the objectives of the research.

Cost: There is no cost associated with this project. Participants can withdraw at any time.

Marianne Dickie

Assistant Convenor and Migration Law Program Sub-Dean

ANU Legal Workshop

Australian National University

Ph: (02) 6125 9518

Appendix B Consent form



CONSENT FORM PROTÉGÉ: Developing and evaluating an online community of practice for early career Australian Migration Agents

I.....consent to participate in the Protégé Research Project. I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understand that the objective of this project is to investigate the effect of an online community of practice on professional identity perceived competence, connectedness and practice.

2. I understand that the project will involve in-depth interviews and online participation. The information sheet explains the nature and purpose of the project so far as it affects me, to my satisfaction. My consent to participate is freely given.

3. I agree to participate in the online environment and in doing so I agree to use my real name and photograph of myself as a means of establishing my online persona. I understand that all participants will remain anonymous in the final project and no identifiers such as my name or photograph will be used. I understand that my personal details such as my name, photograph and discussion forum postings on the site will be archived after completion of the project and accessible only to the principle investigator.

4. I understand that by consenting to participate, I consent to be interviewed by an ANU Researcher at my office or another location at a mutually convenient time and that to help me prepare for the interview; I will be provided a framework of the types of questions to be discussed. I understand that the nature of the interview is semi-structured, and that certain questions or issues may require more discussion than others. I understand that I can choose not to answer any particular question without adverse consequences.

5. I understand that the interview will be audiotaped to validate the research process and I understand that the tapes will be securely stored at the Australian National University which will be erased at the conclusion of the project.

6. I understand that these tapes will be held securely, and the data and final report will replace any identifiers such as my name or place of business with a Code known only to the research staff.

7. I understand that although any comments I make will not be attributed to me in any report or publication without my express written consent; it is possible that others may guess the source of the information and that I should avoid disclosing information to the researchers which is of confidential status or which is defamatory of any person.

8. I understand that any advice provided to me within the CoP of practice cannot be taken as legal advice for individual clients or cases that I represent. All advice and guidance will be for general situations that may occur.

9. I understand that all interactions and comments within the CoP are to remain confidential between participants and cannot be discussed outside of the Research Project.

10. I understand that I may withdraw from the project at any time, without providing any reason and without any adverse consequences for me. If I withdraw, the information I provide and data such as

photographs and forum posts will not be used by the project unless I give my consent for the research team to do so. If I do not consent, then all information will be deleted from the site.

Signed

Date

Appendix C Participant information sheet



RESEARCH Participant Information Sheet 2013

PROTÉGÉ: Developing and evaluating an online community of practice for early-career Australian Migration Agents,

Project Title: Protégé

We are studying the impact an online community of practice can have upon the development of professional identity, confidence, connectedness and practice of newly registered agents. This research project is a joint project between the Australian National University College of Law Migration Program and the Migration Institute of Australia. The research is supported by an Australian National University linkage grant.

Investigators

Marianne Dickie
Andrew Bartlett
Dr Tushar Das
Sudrishti Reich

General Outline of Project

We are undertaking this project to investigate ways to support newly registered agents by assisting the development of their professional identity and engagement within a professional community. Protégé will create an online environment that mimics the professional support found in an ideal office.

Why are we investigating this?

There are currently 4,500 registered migration agents in Australia. The majority of agents are sole practitioners (79%) and have been registered for less than two years, with the overall majority of agents maintaining registration for an average of only four years. The consistently poor retention rate and the number of agents in sole practice remains a concern. We consider the key to low retention rates is that sole practitioners miss out on essential skills and peer mentoring in a supportive work environment. We expect this project will reveal a range of actions that can be taken by educators, the regulator and professional bodies to assist new agents in their first years of practice.

As newly registered agents we believe you are likely to help us to realise the objectives of this research. If you agree to be part of this research project we will ask you to join our small online community of practice (20 - 23 participants) where you will work alongside recently registered agents (5 who have been in practice for two years, 15 in their first year of practice) and three experienced practitioner mentors in a secure environment which facilitates informal learning, professional development and a number of structured reflective group based tasks.

Exclusion criteria

You, along with all other participants have been selected from the MIA database of newly registered agents. This means that newly registered agents, who are not members of the Migration Institute of Australia, have been automatically excluded. Newly registered agents who are members of the MIA but who have gained registration through pathways other than completion of the Graduate Certificate are also excluded from the research project.

Environment

The project intention is to create a space for new practitioners to begin their practice in a supportive environment designed to mimic an 'ideal office'.

The site for the CoP will be a secure website, only available to members through a secure login portal. The site will contain specific discussion forum areas, information portals and community notice boards. You will be provided with a space to create a professional log and store research documents and notes

Participant Involvement

As we are interested in individual professional development within a community of peer practitioners, the focus and boundary of our study will be on the professional development of individuals in their capacity as migration agents. We will not be undertaking any study into your personal lives and interactions or providing financial assistance or advice to you or any other participants.

Participation is voluntary: you can withdraw from the project at any time. If you choose to withdraw you can ask that any information/data resulting from your participation is not used. If you wish that any participation is not taken into account, we will remove all data associated with your participation in the project. Your password will be revoked and photos, discussion forum posts and professional development plans will all be deleted. As a result, there will be no data on the site that indicates you were a participant in the project.

Time commitment

This project will require a time commitment on your part.

Interaction:

There is no requirement to spend a specified amount of time interacting within the CoP. However we will provide activities (such as staff meetings and advice sessions) and resources that encourage you to stay in contact with other protégés and peer-supervisors on a regular basis.

Interview: 3 hours across the project

You will need to participate in three separate one-hour interviews during the life of the project. The interviews will be by phone or skype. We will provide you with a calendar in the site and an interview booking facility to allow you to choose the time most suitable to your work schedule. We propose to hold the interviews at the beginning, middle and end of the project. The interviews will allow you to discuss your feelings and expectations about the project and will enable the project team to adapt the environment if needed. All data and audio of the interviews will be confidential, and any identifying features will be removed from the final report.

Professional development: 3 hours across the project

Along with all protégés you will complete a professional development plan (PDP) that allows you to reflect and consider ways to build upon and progress your career goals. You may discuss the PDP with the researcher during your interview or you may wish to keep this part of your work in the project between you and your peer supervisor. A booking facility for Professional Development Discussions will be available on the site. Three discussions will take place at a time prior to your research interviews.

Staff meetings approximately 11 hours across the project (approximately)

We will hold weekly staff meetings for all protégés and peer supervisors. These will be conducted in discussion forums and Adobe classrooms. Whilst not compulsory, they will add significant value to the work of new migration law practitioners.

Group meeting

All protégés will be invited to one face to face meeting before the project begins. This will be an orientation and planning meeting to familiarise participants with the project outline, the technical interface and the objectives of the research.

Confidentiality: clients, participants, individuals

Developing effective and ethical ways to make use of a professional support network is a core objective of this community of practice, and a key focus of the evaluative research.

As a participant in this online community of practice, you will be personally identified to other participants. In order to build an authentic and genuine community, you must use your real name and photograph and you will be encouraged to share some personal information to build trust and understanding.

Briefing day

We will hold an initial orientation day and provide guidelines on netiquette in the site to ensure that you are aware of how to address issues without breaching confidentiality of your client or colleagues. However here are some ways we aim to protect you and your work.

Clients: We will establish specific online forums, protocols and processes which will allow you to discuss client work without revealing identifying details of your clients.

Between participants (protégés and peer supervisors): We will provide avenues for private and confidential communication with other participants, but we expect the majority of communication will be open to the entire COP.

Individuals (protégés and peer supervisors): You will complete a Professional Development Plan (PDP) and meet regularly with your peer supervisor. Issues that arise from these discussions will be confidential. If you wish to disclose the results of these discussions with the researchers, or if you are willing to allow researcher's access to the PDP, excerpts from the PDP and interviews may become part of the data. We will provide a forum that allows you to talk directly to a peer supervisor but remain unidentified. This allows you to ask or discuss issues that you might find embarrassing or personal.

Data Storage

All data such as interview transcripts and audio tapes will be stored on a secure network available only to the researchers. When published or otherwise disseminated, the results of the project will only refer to de-identified qualitative data (e.g. quotes). Individual participants will not be identified. At completion the site will be archived. Access will be restricted to the Principle Investigator. If you withdraw from the project before completion and indicate that you no longer wish for any of your participation to be used, the data associated with your work and contributions such as log in access, photo and discussion postings will be deleted from the site.

Queries and concerns

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about how this research has been conducted, please contact Human Ethics Officer:

ANU Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Research Integrity, Research Services
Chancellery 10B, Lower Ground Floor, East Road
The Australian National University, Acton ACT 0200
T + 61 (0)2 6125 3427

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please feel free to contact:

Marianne Dickie
Marianne.dickie@anu.edu.au T + 61(0)2 6125951

Appendix D Roles and responsibilities



Welcome to Protégé

Role and Responsibilities of a PROTEGE

Your participation is voluntary however in order to ensure that the project is reliable we have asked for certain commitments from you as a Protégé:

- Allow time for staff meetings (community meetings)
- Allow time for interviews with researchers,
- Participate and contribute to your professional development plan,
- Protect the confidentiality of clients, other protégés, facilitators and the research team,
- Approach the Community of Practice as you would a workplace, remain respectful of other participants in all posts and discussions within the site and when discussing the work in meetings and on the phone.

Role and Responsibilities of a FACILITATOR

Your facilitators are your peers, not your teachers or 'bosses'. They are there to:

- assist you with difficult decisions,
- discuss case work with you,
- help you reflect upon your business and work as an agent,
- share resources and news,
- provide a shoulder to lean/cry on and a friend to laugh with.

Role and Responsibilities of a RESEARCHER

As researchers we will play a minimal role.

- We will interact during interviews.
- Protect your confidentiality at all times.
- Provide feedback at the end of the project

Appendix E 'Slackers'

<p>04/12/2013 17:23 Slackers!!! Original post</p>	<p>I had a client come into me for a partner visa August and it took him two months just to sign my contract. after 4 months, they have e-mailed me some information and hand filled out questionnaire/forms. I am still waiting for original documents and paperwork, every time I ring it is always 'will do it tomorrow or yes, I will post it be end of the week' I could lodge it tomorrow if I had the documents and I would like it off my desk and paid for. I have two pages of client file phone lodgements just asking this client for paperwork!!!! Now I am in no particular rush but you think a newly married couple would want to be together!!! Sound fishy if they are not fussed about getting together and smooching!! and I would like to pay my bills!Any thoughts? Protege</p>
<p>04/12/2013 18:47 Slackers!!! Response</p>	<p>I have partner visa clients that are quite similar except they are quite mature ... but, worse in that they don't reply to emails or phone messages and I haven't seen them for over 3 months ... Application has been started so if I want to, I'll draw the appropriate amount from the fees as these were paid up front ...Odd all the same Protege</p>
<p>04/12/2013 19:05 Slackers!!! Response</p>	<p>I always find that an Invoice to a client like that, stating that you are drawing down fees for a completed stage usually gets people back on the wagon again! Facilitator 2</p>
<p>05/12/2013 00:02 Slackers!!! Response</p>	<p>Client management is all part of the role. In essence if you cannot manage the client (because they are "unmanageable") then it is better to terminate the contract. They will come out of the woodwork, if they protest and want to continue clearly establish the working relationship, if they don't then you have got rid of a pest - either way you win. It is these recalcitrant clients that will come back and complain about the time "you" took to lodge their application, will be slow in paying and will give you grief. It is better to let your competition deal with them and suffer all the wasted time, effort and money! Facilitator 1</p>
<p>05/12/2013 16:47 Slackers!!! Postee</p>	<p>Just reporting back on tip above. After reading those I sent one of my slackers an invoice saying I was drawing down the fees for the completed section and reminded him yet again of the outstanding docs I was still waiting for. A few hours later I have an inbox of documents! Protege</p>
<p>05/12/2013 17:41 Slackers!!! Response</p>	<p>Your very welcome ☺it always works for me too! Facilitator 2</p>
<p>05/12/2013 20:18 Slackers!!! Response</p>	<p>As cash flow hasn't been an issue, I normally don't take funds until the job is finished. However, with new offices and costs, I will send out the invoice see what happens. I would frankly rather be rid of them if they are not going ahead so I can take them out of the work schedule. In terms of controlling customers, this is certainly something I'm dealing with now. Managing workloads and expectations along with the little bumps in the road such as 'form version changes' requiring more work than planned. Life goes on ... and onto more interesting clients. Protege</p>
<p>06/12/2013 10:09</p>	<p>Yes, indeed - and that is one of key issues with practice - "more work than planned". I think this is the trap those intending to be agents and new agents (and believe me some old agents:-) {{me!}}) fall into. On the surface it seems easy, just get some information, fill in</p>

Slackers!!! Response	<p>a couple of forms and send it to DIBP charge \$4k for it and get rich quickly, more and more people will come to you and life will be fantastic!! Ho Ho Ho.... Indeed, as you are no doubt finding there is the time interviewing clients, there are those that don't proceed, there is the task of extracting information from them, sometimes like trying to "find hen's teeth", there is the multitude of forms and declarations and documents to get to copy, scan and certify, there is the ongoing follow up with clients and then there is the 28 day requests from Case Officers, despite the fact that you already provided everything required and a bit more, then there is the client calling up every second day for 5 months asking has the visa been approved yet and the approval comes through and needs checking and you send it out to the client and then they call to find out what it means and then there is the administration, the insurances, the rent, the bulletins coming in that you have to read, oh and a CPD to go to, oops have to reconcile the client account, ah the copier is out of paper.....there is SOOOOOO MUCH MOOOOOOORE you have to do than anticipated, and what about working ON the business, some marketing, development and planning????? and more. Yes, you don't need recalcitrant and troublesome clients on top of all that, and more!</p> <p>Facilitator 1</p>
10:12:2013 15:13 Slackers!!! Response	<p>Yep ... that's me ... :) I even have a client that fits the walk in, do the forms (he's done them all already!), pay the money ... not quite \$4K though, and now the fun stuff begins category ... Protege</p>

Continued; Appendix E 'Slackers' Site Data

Appendix F MEMOS

Appendix F Example 1

NETWORKING

Created: mariannevangalendickie, 22/8/17 1:39 PM

Codes:

needing to trust someone as a mentor

NETWORKING

bothering busy agents with questions not appropriate

seeking connections with other agents

NETWORKING - he is a busy man – there was a feeling that they could not ‘use up the time’ of busy or important agents...This was a big issue for all applicants. Trust was top of the list...people needed to trust their network was giving them sound advice. The need to link with a more experienced practitioner and most importantly the need to trust the people you linked with. There was the element of the need to ‘ask a stupid question’ to learn and the concern that this would lead others to view you as stupid! There was a strong sense of isolation despite all participants having some level of contact with others. Leslie Levin spoke of the ‘practice board?’...as the community of practice but in this case, this was not so. Agents have the MIA, but the link did not seem strong and importantly the MIA did not seem to be serving the community of practice purpose identified by Levin. When participants had a connection with an experienced agent, they felt unable to call on them regularly...not wanting to where out the welcome... or bother an important person. The link was viewed as tenuous, fragile and as a limited resource not to be used up too quickly.

Appendix F Example 2

Memo connecting coding in MAXQDA

WORK AS AN AGENT

Created: mariannevangalendickie, 22/8/17 1:40 PM

Codes:

INTERVIEW R1\WORK AS AN AGENT\describing the day

INTERVIEW R1\WORK AS AN AGENT\describing the emotional impact of work

INTERVIEW R1\WORK AS AN AGENT\operating as an agent in the regulatory framework

INTERVIEW R1\WORK AS AN AGENT\feeling responsible for client outcomes

INTERVIEW R1\WORK AS AN AGENT\think it's stressful because it's er so important to people...

When describing their day most said it was variable. They did not have regular clients and began their story with bravado speaking of clients but ended with an explanation that revealed they had only one client or many inquires that had not been formalised. They all pondered the amount of clients they would see as optimum, not wanting to get too big but not wanting to be a viable business. The description of a day's work focused on marketing, website and answering emails – due to lack of clients. There was an emotional impact of the work they did with clients, a recognition of the humanity there. And a great deal of stress is associated with change, the need to be correct in the legal advice, insecurity about their practice knowledge and the constant changes by DIBP. Their days seemed to focus on marketing, emails and setting up the business or sorting through what seemed to be messy client issues. The need to become viable financially was pressing and some defined success as an agent in modest financial terms. Some were very keen on defining a difference between they worked or intended to work and the view of agents generally. Working as an agent seemed uncertain, stressful and tentative. They were uncertain with aspects and things needed in a particular visa category for example if you are doing a skilled visa how do you gain the business skills needed to understand what to

ask the employer for? Their financial transactions etc.? Some described the work they do as taking financial risks... and minimizing risks by taking on less customers or just working alone.

Appendix F Example 3

Memo writing thoughts after coding “Being a Migration Agent”

Being a migration agent – the process of becoming and being are a continuum– this involves the navigation and the unpredictability – the reasons they can discuss so openly and vent in this way is because they all recognise each other and recognise the experience; this recognition builds trust...its not you it happens to all of us. Here is where Wenger’s theory of a community of practice comes in to play...if you were alone struggling through all of this uncertainty then presumably your development would remain at the level of the first interview – checking checking againto make sure you are correct. The mutuality of the COP meant there was no reciprocity factor that burdened agents. They don’t feel they are limited to asking a finite amount of questions or not using up their quota of newbie help.

Appendix F Example 4

Memo writing thoughts after coding “Focusing on Client centered practice”

I can see practice for the agents is client centered. When talking about being an agent they do so stories about their clients and the visa problems. They talk about clients as a burden- the burden of practice. Because they are scared of ruining their clients lives and something terrible will happen – in the interviews with researchers. But between themselves this extends to include the above. Because some clients don’t listen to advice. Because they

find they are fixing a lot of mistake client have made. Because clients know it all.... because clients don't tell them all the information they need

So why do the negative aspects of client centered work come out in the site interactions? Why do agents describe their negative clients? It is because a client interaction can personify the unpredictability of practice. Is it the unpredictability of practice that is used as a means of binding the agents? Or are they finding their way together? Is it because practice is so unpredictable they cannot form a professional way of working easily? There is no set way of approaching a visa or a task. The client is unpredictable the Department is unpredictable the methodology of lodging unpredictable, the law constantly changing. To address the unpredictability the protégés bounce ideas off others and to see if their experience is unique or something others have encountered.... they build a logic through their interactions.

Repeatedly on the site they refer back to the code of conduct as a touch stone for ethical and practice behaviour. They don't refer to the COC in their interviews. And rarely refer to clients in this way. The site allows for a 'spontaneous vent' as well so they can let off steam to others that understand what they are going through...building an idea of a person becomes more complex when you use both observations through their interactions on site and the interviews which reveal a more intimate view of their personality. It is striking how I thought about the client centered nature of the agents work – their empathy for clients and now I can see the other side- the annoying client

Appendix G Design aspects of Protégé



Appendix H Invitation to present CPD - Site data

Last 3 spaces left, grab them While you can!!!

Now is your chance to take the last three presentation spots available: 1st, 8th and 15th July, 2014!!! This maybe your last opportunity to present a topic and reap the benefits of presenting a topic! All those who have presented agree that it is a wonderful way of gain in-depth knowledge about a visa, particular topic or a subject that you are an expert on and feel would benefit us all in our business practises, so grab it now for the last three weeks that are left!!!

Don't forget to join us tonight for Ian presenting partnership visa, how to prove you are in love....

Awwwhhhh.....

Regards Mia

COMPLETED SESSIONS

2. Tuesday 14th Jan - State Sponsorship - starring Mia
3. Tuesday 21st Jan - BVB's - starring XX
4. Tuesday 28th Jan - Technical Issues - session deferred
5. Tuesday 4th Feb - Training Benchmarks starring Nancy
6. Tuesday 11th Feb - Kirsty
7. Tuesday 18th Feb - Frank
8. Tuesday 25th - Unlawfuls! What now? - xx
9. March 4th - MRT, RRT, AAT How to address the Tribunals - Ian
10. March 11th
11. March 18th - Anthea - Citizenships
12. March 25th F1 - How to Improve the Profitability of Your Business
13. April 1 - Mia - Types of Clients
14. April 8th - Partner and Parents - Ian
15. April 15 - RSMS - xx
16. April 22 - Improving your profits - work smarter not harder
17. April 29 - Health waivers
18. May 6 - Fire and wine... (night off)
19. May 13 - 5 tips for profitable sales meetings
20. May 20 - Skills assessments
21. May 27 - Business Practice Part 1
22. June 3 - Business Practice Part 2
23. June 10 - RRV - the case of the residents - Frederico
24. June 17 - 485 Visa - xxx (way to go getting the students in!!)
25. June 24 - Partnership Visa - Ian loving this one!!
26. July 1 -
27. July 8 -
28. July 15 -
29. July 22 - The visas that are available and the questions we can ask to see which is the best for your client - Anthea
30. July 29 - Tissues and issues - Saying goodbye - where do the Protégés go from here.....

1. OPPORTUNITIES TO PRESENT THESE OR OTHER TOPICS

2. Priority Processing
3. The Paperless Office or the Less Paper Office how to avoid paper mites in your office - This is no joke and not for fools! - Ross -
4. Unlawful non-citizens
5. Rare visas
6. Citizenship Update
7. Ministerial Intervention - How when why
8. Status Resolution Application
9. 808 - Confirmatory residence, when, why, can you really use it just to get to tribunal?

Appendix I Bridging visas no work Condition

<p>MARCH10/03/2014 Bridging visas - no work condition Original Post</p>	<p>Hi, all. We had an excellent presentation on Bridging Visas a couple of weeks back and I wish I had thought to ask this question then, but the situation is new to me. I have a client on a 457, who has an application in for Partner 820/801. The 457 expires this week and I want to alert the client that the BVA will come into effect (info r.e. overseas travel & need for BVB etc). It was mentioned in a thread several months ago that Partner applicants seemed to be getting BVAs with no work conditions these days. Can I take it, if it says, "Visa conditions: Nil" on the BVA that the 457 conditions are no longer in place? I'm pretty sure it means what it says, as elsewhere in the grant letter it refers to "full permission to work". I just want to be re-assured before I send out the letter that this BVA is what I think it is - free of 457 conditions - as it is the first time, I have had to alert someone to such a change in status. – Protégé</p>
<p>MARCH 10/03/2014 Bridging visas - no work condition Response</p>	<p>Hi You are correct - once the 457 expires/ends (other than if it is cancelled), the BVA comes into effect and, because it is a BVA issued for a Permanent Visa (provisional component), there are no visa conditions applied. (Just checked the notice I have for a client in a similar position and it says the same as yours). Travel as you've identified requires the BVB - and a really good idea to tell the client of the need for the BVB in writing Protégé</p>
<p>MARCH 10/03/2014 Bridging visas - no work condition Response</p>	<p>About 60% of my business consists of partner visas, and often it involves the applicant being on a sc457 visa. So, your understanding is correct that transition from a sc457 to a sc820 will result in no conditions and therefore full work rights on the BVA. The only time there may be an issue with work rights is when the applicant is unlawful or on a BV-E, but if no work condition, you can on the back of the sc820 request full work rights by applying for a variation of conditions (new BV application, attach budget and make a strong argument that full work rights are granted to sc820 visa holders). One of the scenarios discussed during the presentation you refer to include a case example (see the PowerPoint), is exactly this: transition from a sc457 to sc820 and the work rights on the BV. Protégé</p>
<p>MARCH 10/03/2014 Bridging visas - no work condition Original postee</p>	<p>Thanks, for your prompt replies. This client first approached hoping to get off a 457, so this will be good news.</p>
<p>MARCH13/03/2014 Bridging visas - no work condition Response</p>	<p>Hi Frank Of course, the BVA does not come in until the 457 expires! Regards F1</p>
<p>MARCH 13/03/2014 Bridging visas - no work condition Response</p>	<p>Hi There, was another discussion regarding similar issue ... IF I recall correctly, get a sc600 "1 day" and come back then BVA for sc820 comes into effect Protégé</p>
<p>MARCH 13/03/2014 response</p>	<p>Although this seems possible and clients are reporting to their agents having gone into an Immi office and Immi suggested this, it does seem risky. Certainly the sc820 must already be lodged, and the BVA granted.-Protégé</p>

Appendix J Professional fees am I charging too much?

<p>03/09/2013 13:19 Professional fees am I charging too much Original post</p>	<p>Hi everyone, I know that some agents tend not to like discussing their fees but I'm just going to throw this out there :) Our firm charges \$3000 + gst for a partner visa application (that was not previously a 300-fiancé visa). I have just quoted a client a total of \$4000 + gst to prepare a 300-fiancé visa and an 820-partner visa once the marriage has taken place (\$3000 for the 300 fiancé and \$1000 for the 820). The client has asked for a reduction in the total fees of \$1000. I carried my fee structure over from the firm I did my first year of experience with and have always thought it to be fairly reasonable but to be honest I have not had the opportunity to compare that firm with other agent's fees - maybe it was/is expensive? How does this compare with what you would charge in this case? Protégé</p>
<p>03/09/2013 13:32 Professional fees am I charging too much Response</p>	<p>I would say that this is a tough one as everyone charges differently. I know MARA states the following: Fees charged for work performed can vary as a result of a number of factors. A registered migration agent might charge lower fees due to: their inexperience as an agent the desire to enter a particular market their desire to assist in unusual circumstances the ease of that particular application the applicant having already partly completed the assignment the current marketplace fee levels. A registered migration agent might charge higher fees due to: their level of experience as a senior registered migration agent the specific difficulties or complexities of a particular case the costs associated with running a larger business or practice the desire of the applicant for high personal levels of service I personally rang around and got quotes from other migration agents in my area, compared them to the MARA fees and went somewhere in the middle, this is because I wanted to be competitive but not cheap. I don't separate the partner visa and price one fee for the lot and I have to admit that I am a lot cheaper than you by well over \$1000.00 but then again, I am a new agent trying to get into the market, I think I am being reasonable for my experience and market. What do others think? Protégé</p>
<p>03/09/2013 16:03 Professional fees am I charging too much Response</p>	<p>When I set my fees scales up, I did a search on the web and some of the agents advertise there. At that time DIAC had 1500-3520 listed as the average fees (just partner visa). Most of the others I have for the partner were 3000-3500 but this was a year ago. The prospectives I have listed are about 1100. I charge just under 3000 for a partner. I tried to set my fees like ... - competitive but not cheap. What do you guys charge for a skilled independent 189/190? Protégé</p>
<p>04/09/2013 00:01 Professional fees am I charging too much Response</p>	<p>Hi, Proteges. I am doing a Partner Visa for way less than that, based on a few factors - the visa application is easy, my inexperience, the desire to enter this market and my own estimate of what I thought this client would expect to pay for such a service. On a more general note, there is another reason why I am tending towards the lower end of the oMARA scale. Does charging a higher fee "hold out" or represent to clients that you have some kind of experience/expertise in a particular area? As a lawyer, I have to be conscious of issues like this - I explain my lower fee to clients by saying that I am charging them as a migration agent, not as a lawyer (they sign a disclaimer at consultation that I am their agent not their lawyer). Protégé</p>
<p>04/09/2013 11:57</p>	<p>My additional comments on this subject are as follows: There are few ways we could look at this: A client may believe that a higher charge</p>

<p>Professional fees am I charging too much Response</p>	<p>may mean that the RMA really knows their stuff, and on the flip side, those clients will also believe that a really cheap agent one may not know enough or not even be registered. (You may have an advantage as a lawyer that clients assume that you know the law already)</p> <p>Other clients may believe that expensive RMA's are just rip off merchants and that cheap one are just about value for money.</p> <p>I paid my Migration Agent in XXX around £5000.00 (approx. \$8500.00, current rate) just for their services, but to be quite honest we would have been prepared to pay much more as we thought that our Agent was worth every penny and some. Yet we approached a big Migration Agency in XXXX prior, who was cheaper (not by much) and the RMA came back and said we didn't qualify and wouldn't be able to obtain a visa for Australia. I think that if you charge a very high price for your services that you can justify your knowledge and experience.</p> <p>I suppose it comes to down to a couple of things: How much you think you are worth and how much the client thinks you are worth to them. Like houses, we are only worth what someone is willing to pay for us. Protégé</p>
<p>04/09/2013 13:38 Professional fees am I charging too much Response</p>	<p>Dear Colleagues,</p> <p>At the moment, I am charging by the hour. I have had a look at the MARA's range of fees for RMAs and my estimated quote is at the higher end of the range. I am charging a higher hourly rate because of my legal experience, although I am new to immigration law, I am very experienced in analysing legislation and case law and preparing submissions.</p> <p>However, I will not charge the client for any work due to my inexperience as an agent. For example, I will charge a client for any research done for Researching the Act Regs or PAM, because no matter how many times that I do a visa application I will always go back to that source information. However, I will not charge the client if I have to work out how they apply for an eMedical appointment. As this is something that I believe as experienced agent ought to know and if there were changes a good agent would have done research on those changes and not charged a client.</p> <p>My hourly rate weeds out many potential clients, but in reality, if I lowered my hourly rate, I would be doing myself a disservice because I can be doing other legal work at the same charge out rate and by accepting work at a lower rate I am tying up that time and losing my business money. Protégé</p>
<p>04/09/2013 13:52 Professional fees am I charging too much Response</p>	<p>I believe \$3000 for an 820/801 visa is reasonable Works out to 20 hours of work collating and submitting documents plus providing advice on statements and evidence. A further \$100 for fiancée visa is warranted. I think you are in the area.</p> <p>Facilitator 2</p>
<p>05/09/2013 11:47 Professional fees am I charging too much Response</p>	<p>Hi Anonymous,</p> <p>Is a good migration agent worth less than a good migration lawyer?</p> <p>Do not undersell yourself or you will end up with clients that just want the cheapest and will send you broke or drive you crazy!</p> <p>Why would a lawyer necessarily have more skills in the migration field than you?</p> <p>Facilitator 1</p>
<p>07/09/2013 01:34 Professional fees am I charging too much Response</p>	<p>I've just signed up a 300/820/801 for \$3600+GST (have done a few 309/820's before and some take more time than others). I've sent my fees based on the advertised fees of two other respected/experienced agents here in Perth and I'll use these as a starting point. As I do a few more I'll review my fees against my own experience and then adjust my fees accordingly. In respect of clients asking for discounts, I've done that in the past but won't do it anymore... Why? Because we are worth what we charge ... and probably a lot more :) Protégé</p>

<p>25/09/2013 9:44 Professional fees am I charging too much Response</p>	<p>My fees are not set-in stone. It depends on the client's needs. I may do a visitor visa much cheaper because it is part of getting the person onshore so we can lodge another visa. There is the danger as has just happened, that things fall flat and I charged very little for the first visa, and then things do not progress to the higher earning visa applications. Protégé</p>
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Continued; Appendix J Professional fees am I charging too much?

Appendix K Direct Entry Stream

<p>28/02/2014 11:28 186 and 187 Direct Entry Stream Original post</p>	<p>Good morning, It is one of those mornings that I feel that my brain is still in a sleep mode and I feel that I have missed something. I have a client on a 457 who had been working for 6 months with one employer and changed employer last December. He would want to apply for a PR before the 2 years with the employer is full, thus qualifying for the Temp res stream. have been looking at the Direct Entry Stream of the 186 or 187 visas. The way that I understand the client may be eligible for the direct entry stream providing that he has been working for 3 years in the nominated position but does not need to have been working for the same employer for 2 years, has skills assessment (for 186), has IELTS and is nominated. Obviously, the occupation on CSOL for 186 or 187 ANZSCO criteria. The main issue that I am thinking is the work experience, issue, is there a limit one way or another, apart from assessed (by skills assessment for 186 or other way for 187) as having suitable skills, that needs to be taken into consideration? It feels that I have missed something, any suggestions? I hope you have a great weekend,</p>
<p>28/02/2014 18:35 186 and 187 Direct Entry Stream Response</p>	<p>If your client changed employers and therefore does not have a full 2 years' work experience with his current employer, who will be his nominator, then you can only look at the Direct Entry stream, not TRT. There are several pathways to PR for 457 visa holders. The most common are Direct Entry (requires a skills assessment and IELTS of 6, but can be nominated prior to the 2 years, as long as he can evidence having at least 3 years highly relevant work experience in the nominated occupation). Skills assessment must be dated prior to date of application. The 2nd option is Temporary Resident Transition (TRT) requiring at least 2 years with the same sponsor in the nominated occupation. Because of the training component of the 457 visas, a skills assessment is not required, and IELTS is 5.5. For both these options, if professional registration is required or if the occupation is a licensed trade, then this must be obtained prior to applying for the visas. For RSMS the same two pathways apply, but the RCB support is required for the Direct Entry option. Many of the RCBs now also require Labour Market Testing as part of the application. A skills assessment may be required if the person does not have evidence of an Australian qualification that aligns with the skills level (ANZSCO). Hope this helps</p>
<p>02/03/2014 10:15 186 and 187 Direct Entry Stream Original postee</p>	<p>Thank you, that is confirming what I was thinking. While I have been working with both streams, I haven't worked on client on 457 with less than 2-years' work experience with the same employer. I just had a feeling I had missed something, just like sometimes one wonders if they left the iron on:) I believe for the RSMS you do not need to have a skills assessment as long as they have other documentation to prove their skills. An interesting thing is to show the potential labour market testing as the client is already working with the company and if generally the labour market testing needs to have been conducted in the past 12 months. Also, the fact that the client is an aeroplane pilot, where in general the demand cannot be compared with electricians or other occupations where the demand is established more easily. It will be interesting:-) Protégé</p>
<p>02/03/2014 15:20 186 and 187 Direct Entry Stream Response</p>	<p>Also of course there is no experience requirement with RSMS. As long as he has a diploma or better and the skilled occupation (plus IELTS etc) then he qualified. As a pilot should be ok if in a regional area. We usually don't have much of an issue with Labour Market Testing except in some areas in Victoria! Generally, no Skills Assessment requested for RSMS (some trades cooks in particular Cert III or IV require 2 years' experience) Sounds OK - Facilitator 1</p>
<p>02/03/2014 15:28</p>	<p>I'm busy planning to do a RSMS for an Insurance Broker. He holds an Aus Diploma in Financial services (so highly relevant) and has worked in Aus for 3 years (1 year with</p>

186 and 187 Direct Entry Stream Response and new query	the same employer in WA). Skills level 2 requiring at a minimum a diploma - which he has. So, I guess it is unlikely he'll need a skills assessment. Protégé
02/03/2014 16:42 186 and 187 Direct Entry Stream Response	Yes, he should qualify on his Diploma - skills assessment not necessary for RSMS. As he has been in the position further LMT should not be required either. Facilitator 1
03/03/2014 10:20 186 and 187 Direct Entry Stream Response	I started the WA RCB application, and it requires evidence that the position has been advertised for 3 months. So, looks like WA requires LMT for the RCB application. Protégé
03/03/2014 14:38 186 and 187 Direct Entry Stream Original post	Thank you for the advice and help. Protégé
04/03/2014 12:00 186 and 187 Direct Entry Stream Response	Yes, nominations under RSMS for WA do require LMT even were the applicant is working for the 3/9/2015 186 and 187 company (did one 2 weeks ago). The LMT benchmark is quite low though with no required period of advertising only that it was done no less than 2 weeks before and no more 3 months prior to nomination. There are other requirements for the RCB (I'm guessing similar to other States) for justifying the position. You'll need to attach the usual array of documents - company financials, evidence of salary equivalence (Citizen/PR), role/job description and the declaration that a genuine attempt has been made to employ a local plus a few other bits. Following on from some earlier advice from F, if the qualification is not Australian, its best to have the Overseas Qualifications Unit verify it is being at the same standard. Protégé
04/03/2014 23:22 186 and 187 Direct Entry Stream Response	In some States the State Government Department is the RCB, in others there are councils and chambers of commerce etc. They all have different standards and different requirements. The State Departments are of course more bureaucratic in their approach. Some RCB's also have long processing delays! Facilitator 1

Continued: Appendix K Direct Entry scheme

Appendix L The Protégé effect

P1	Um, I really enjoyed Protégé it's a good platform for beginners. Not only beginners because beginners can be anything from one to three years... Well, I've definitely gained more confidence through that project but also the people in that project today have set up something similar, and today we continue. [R3] MARCH 2015
P2	Ah, yes, extremely, ah, it's so practical, it's so real world, and with a couple of extra moderators, yourself included, that kind of help steer people onto the right track, instead of like, um, a classroom sort of thing, where everyone's kind of guessing or referring to the primary legislation, maybe not even the right cases, although we do get there eventually. Ah, so, it's valuable. I mean, that I don't apply it from my perspective is a problem, obviously, but the, the value is, is there most definitely. It's the most valuable resource, frankly, that I think's around. [F2] APRIL 2014 I think it was an excellent experiment that, um, you know, that needs an MIA sponsorship or government quality sponsorship to be a neutral sounding board or something. [R3] JUNE 2015
P3	Um, I did find it helpful. I think at the time, especially if I really couldn't, um, you know, if I had sort of exhausted all of my resources, in terms of trying to look at something from a different angle, it was the little things that someone might come up with that would point you in the right direction.
P4	I think the biggest benefit for me was getting questions answered that you found terribly difficult to answer by yourself. ...It was nice because everyone was helping each other, but it was like, oh no, it's terrible. So, this has been great in terms of people have come back who know, and you're thinking "Ok, right, how do I resolve this problem?" and it's been really helpful. And the second one was that I find that it's like additional training. Like CPDs for some of the additional things, we did online, the group meetings. [F2] MARCH 2014 You know, um, I did enjoy the presentations, and I found that, you know, (facilitator) being there was sort of valuable, because I know it, it was meant to be a level playing field, I know that, and, ah... at some stage...any stage I didn't feel that you know, (facilitator I) had superiority or whatever, however, his knowledge, because he's so advanced as an agent was so invaluable. It was really, really helpful. [R3] FEB 2015
P5	Well, the real benefits of Protégé were the interactions when somebody asked questions. And if you looked at it and knew the answer or thought you knew the answer, you would share your opinion. And we all learn off each other it was an excellent idea I'm hoping you'll roll it out for the subsequent years so that more people benefit.
P6	The support and help over the last, it will be nearly a year, has been great. It's a great help to get started. And I suppose really you build that confidence and that time I suppose anyone not considering renewing, I think would continue on. I think that's one of the things that would have helped with... the ones that are struggling and saying, 'I can't do this because I'm scared, it's a huge responsibility... and it is stressful... and you realise the important part it plays in people's lives. And if there wasn't any support there, you'd might think, well, ok I'm not renewing it, I have done it and I am not doing it and, the Protégé program would have helped people to get over that sort of hurdle and to move on. [MARCH 2014] But I do think Protégé, um, without it, I'd probably have considered not re-registering, because without the support it is very stressful, and, you know, you can learn so much from the others, and from reading the problems that others have, even though I might not have a visa with the same problem, but at least it makes you think, "what would I do if that" it was a bit scary not having anyone to ask or to talk about it or the risk of making a huge blunder when a visa is such an important part of somebody's life. You could have a family that gets refused because of something you did. That's what's weighing heavily on me, ... that fact it was such an important thing in the person's life. I was sort of out there swimming and not being a very good swimmer. [R3] FEBRUARY 2015
P7	Stress relief. Main benefits I think are really having that support network is such a huge thing for me. And it really has helped with stress levels and all sorts of things, so having a support network

	<p>is the number one thing, it's also been like a professional library, it's been an amazing source of information. [F2] MARCH 2014</p> <p>...so you know, developing myself professionally, being confident and comfortable in the role, you know, there's certainly been days when I've just thought, "This is incredibly stressful and incredibly risky, is this even what I want to be doing?", and being able to talk to other people in the Protégé program during those times has been really, really comforting, um, [R1:Mm], you know, everybody else is out there, they give you practical advice, and, like I said, because of the experience that we had, that's something we didn't want to give up, and we'll go on to have our own group.[R3] MARCH 2015</p>
P8	<p>it just gives me a little bit more confidence that I am doing the right thing and I think for that purpose it is brilliant it is absolutely brilliant. It really takes more stress away from me when I actually use that so...[F1] MARCH 2014</p> <p>If I was saying it shortly... (describing Protégé) I'm just saying it's a group of people who care about you. Because people were just there so if I'm explaining it to someone. It's a group of people, like-minded people who wanted to do well in their job and are interested in doing well. And help other people. So, this group of people are able to assist you and guide you with their experience and then me as a graduate, I'm able to help other people have similar questions with what I've been going to or similar quotes about visas or whatever that might be. So, it's a support group with each individual is helping everyone because all of us have different experiences and different knowledge on things... I think it was a fantastic thing and putting it one way <i>If there wasn't a Protégé, I wouldn't be where I was today. So that's putting it short and in context.</i> [R2] FEBRUARY 2015</p>
P9	<p>I think it is very good source of information. Ah, I read, eh, the questions and some, most of them, you know, put it this way, some of the issues are quite straight forward, some quite complex, but I don't think I'm come across with that problem that they are facing, so, yeah. But I think its good source of information, anyway. [R2] JUNE 2014</p>
P10	<p>I've found it to be, um, really um, constructive and useful and all of that. I'm really glad that I've participated in it. [F1] APRIL 2014</p> <p>I found the Protégé thing to be very positive; it was a very positive experience for me. And that, I think it's a very hard road to hoe for a new Migration Agent to get out there and set out, put their shingle out and start advising people about migration law. You know, it's a... it's a labyrinth, it's complicated, and... I think that, ... I... I can understand why so many of them drop out, and don't continue on with it, it's so easy to make a mistake [R3: Yeah, yeah.] And without a mentor, or, you know, somebody who's very aware of the traps for young players, then I think it is quite possible to make, um, make mistakes, and... but it depends on the individual. [R3] FEBRUARY 2015</p>
P11	<p>Um to give me some confidence, you know that you're on the right track. And someone might have posted a question, and I know the answer, and then other people answered, and I thought yeah, I know that so yeah. And a feeling of belonging, working in a remote area sometimes you feel isolated. [F2] MARCH 2014</p> <p>It was worthwhile for sure. To be part of it, and, and, just having that backup, when you first start out there are processes and procedures that you're not sure how immigration deals with it, and you have, you know, the experiences of other agents, or, going through a similar situation, which was good. [R3] OCTOBER 2015</p>
P13	<p>I think Protégé as a concept and how it's actually being run now is brilliant. I would love to see that become part of the regular scene of being a migration agent, especially one for new agents. I think it's fantastic at I mean any point in your career you're always learning and given that migration law is constantly changing. I guess, I mean if it was something that was opened up to agents that had been around longer. It's great I think what I love about it the most is that strikes the right balance between the number of new agents and number of experienced agents who are actually able to take the time to provide really informed responses. I've been really impressed with the project. [F2] JUNE 2014</p> <p>Um, I think, look I mean what I found with, what was really lovely about Protégé in contrast I guess with my experiences in ...was that I mean, Protégé does seem to attract a particular kind of</p>

	<p>migration agent, an agent that really wants to learn, really wants to develop themselves professionally, and you know wants to, you know wants to do the best that they possibly can for their clients, and I was super impressed with a number of posts where people, I mean just in terms of the issues that they were facing, this and the fact that they are so committed to getting to the core of the problem and some of the responses that came up, it was really impressive...So I valued the ability to be able to extend my opportunity to connect with agents who think more like I do. [R3] JUNE 2015</p>
P14	<p>I think it is (Protégé) an informal support network, it's a sounding board for ideas and problems and it And, I think it's, it's probably, it a stranger sort of thing, it's...it's a safety net to some extent. You've got, you have sort of a sense that if you really get stuck with a problem, you can put it out there without, you know, it's confidential, and it's...they're prepared to actually help you, so you have this very much a safety net. Um, undefinable, but that would be the three things that I really like about it. And lots of others. It's really interesting [F1] MARCH 2014</p> <p>I think it has been its impacted completely positively. It has really; it takes people out of the wilderness in which single, single practitioners operate. Ah...and that's a terrible place to be if I'm really honest. So, it was, the whole process of Protégé was still far better than most of the CPDs I've done since almost all of the CPDs that I've done since [R3] FEB 2015</p>
P12	<p>Oh, I am, absolutely, and I, it has taken a whole level of worry, you know what I mean, out of the thing. You know, I was a junior lawyer in a firm, and I know how important it is, you go out, and you meet a client, and you act like you know everything, but when you come away, the first thing you do is run to your senior supervisor and go, "What do I do with this?", you know, and being able to do that is actually fantastic, you know what I mean? [F2] FEBRUARY 2014</p> <p>It was an enormous help. I would actually hate to think about how it would have been without it if you know what I mean. And, for a beginner, one of the first things is the consultation. And also, of course, people have been very honest and fessed up to their mistakes, and it has made me double-check things, you know what I mean? I suddenly realised, "Oh my god, I didn't know that!". [Laughs.] And that, you know, being able to collectively learn from others mistakes and know that that was something you had to avoid, it was certainly a lot better. Yeah, look, I can't tell you how much being invited onto it that day in Canberra just was like a light being switched on, as in "Ah-huh," for me as well. [R3] FEB 2015</p>
P15	<p>I have to tell you I am very happy to be part of Protégé I think I would have had a nervous breakdown in the last 6 weeks if I had not had the benefit of it. [F2] JUNE 2014</p> <p>Oh, look, well I'd just use all the superlatives so far about it, ok? Look to be quite frank I think I would've been a case if, dealing with, in sole practice dealing with, even those relatively simple immigration, partner visa matters that I've done I would've been a total cot case. Because you'd be surprised the sort of a whole lot of simple things that'll bring you to a halt and some of them are to do with changes in oh I don't know changes in, it's hard to just think...., as I've said to you... I can't think of an adjective to describe it. So, after Protégé... Protégé was a crucial change for me, absolutely. [R3] MARCH 2015</p>
P16	<p>Yeah. Good. Good. It's nice to have that, to sort of see what questions people are asking, and to have somebody to ask when you've got a question. So, I've been enjoying it. [F2] FEBRUARY 2014</p> <p>Um so, that for me was that confidence boost that I needed, to just be able to say, 'am I on the right track'? And I'm a, I am a fairly... I doubt my abilities, I don't think I have as much knowledge as I have, that's just how I am. And sometimes I surprise myself and go, Oh My God! I do actually know a lot more than I thought I know. Protégé was a real saviour, and the amount of work that F1 and ...F2 put in was phenomenal, and they were, you know one of the two of them were on there most nights a week, um, and at the end they deliberately pulled back ... and you know they just put a different spin on it to what I'd ever considered and those sorts of things were, you know I found them as valuable as you know the participants contributions as well so that, it was just more to um, acknowledge that they put so much time in.[R3] FEBRUARY 2015</p>

P17	<p>...it's great to have a record of other peoples' experience. Not that one's own experience is likely to be identical simply because it depends on how much the individual department officer. But nevertheless, give you an idea of the kinds of things that are possible. [R2] MARCH 2014</p> <p>The advantage was, what happened with Protégé was it gave me a really in-depth exposure to the kinds of issues that arise when you get away from asylum-seekers, um, and, the problems that people can have, problems that agents can have as well as problems the clients can have. [R3] FEBRUARY 2015</p>
P18	<p>It's quite nice because I used to go on the MIA website and, um, you've got the really experienced people, and you're terrified about putting a question on there. Whereas here, you can actually see that we are all newbies, and we're all trying, and you know, that some of us have only had experience in certain areas. It's very, very useful, yeah. [F1] APRIL 2014</p> <p>I think one of the important things I learnt was that we're all human and that I'm not... that I do actually have a brain and can think things through. Just from seeing how other people you know were starting out and the level at which I was and the understanding of certain areas. Yeah, you know that I was doing ok really. Um... so that there was confidence that was a big thing for me the confidence that I obtained from that, you know? And sort of a sort of a validation that yes, my ideas were appropriate, and I was thinking along the right lines most of the time. It did give me that boost I think to know that we all think different ideas and bringing in different answers from people makes you aware of something that you might not have thought about and that quite often there really are a number of different solutions but just because you don't deal with them every day it doesn't automatically come to mind yeah. [R3] FEBRUARY 2015</p>

Continued; Appendix L protégé effect

Appendix M Variation on Human Ethics Protocol

22/12/2020

Gmail - Fw: Variation - Human Ethics Protocol 2012/552



marianne dickie <mvangalendickie@gmail.com>

Fw: Variation - Human Ethics Protocol 2012/552

1 message

Marianne Dickie <marianne.dickie@anu.edu.au>
To: marianne dickie <mvangalendickie@gmail.com>

Tue, Dec 22, 2020 at 12:41 PM

From: aries@anu.edu.au <aries@anu.edu.au>
Sent: Wednesday, 7 October 2015 9:27 AM
To: Marianne Dickie <marianne.dickie@anu.edu.au>
Cc: Human.Ethics.Officer@anu.edu.au <human.ethics.officer@anu.edu.au>
Subject: Variation - Human Ethics Protocol 2012/552

THIS IS A SYSTEM-GENERATED E-MAIL. PLEASE DO NOT REPLY. SEE BELOW FOR CONTACT DETAILS

Dear Ms Marianne VanGalen-Dickie,

Protocol: 2012/552
Developing and evaluating an online community of practice for early-career Australian migration agents

I am pleased to advise the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved the variation you submitted on 30/09/2015 requesting:

"The team of researchers, agreed in a meeting on the 18/19 March 2014 that the central question of professional identity would be used by the head researcher Marianne Dickie as part of her Doctorate of Professional studies with USQ. The potential for the data to yield papers on a range of issues (through grounded constructivist grounded theory) was great. The researchers felt that coauthored papers on other themes would be the best way to move forward. Minutes of the discussion and previous meeting have been sent by email to ARIES human ethics.

Chair's Comments 7/10/2015:

Approved. Thank you for advising us of the use to which you wish to put the data you have gathered - this use is consistent with that envisioned in the original protocol and creates not additional ethical issues, so the ethical aspects of the research remain as for the original protocol."

You may now commence your research as per your modified protocol.

All the best with your research,

Human Ethics Manager
Research Ethics
Research Integrity & Compliance
Ground Floor
Chancelry Lower10B
The Australian National University

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ik=f996fa6d8&view=pt&search=all&permthid=thread-f%3A1686744483745148811%7Cmsg-f%3A1686744483745148811&simp...> 1/2

22/12/2020

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