Joe is a high performer in a large IT company with a very detailed and comprehensive performance management system that acts as the backbone of all activities in the company. He works almost non-stop and seems to enjoy it. He has never had a sick day or a holiday and he meets with one of his colleagues at a cafe every single weekend - to work. How should we understand the way Joe’s managers his identity? In this paper we will suggest that Joe’s case cannot be understood simply at the level of interests – it is neither a question of his striving to achieve recognition, status, self-actualization or even increased wealth, nor is it a question of organizational control systems having harvested and colonized his identity, despite his better judgment. Both the interests of the organization and the subjectivity of the Joe are rather outcomes of the investment of desire in a social formation. In other words Joe’s case raises the question of how the distinction between interest and desire provides a basis for understanding identity management processes. This paper draws upon the work of Deleuze and Guattari, principally Anti-Oedipus, as a means of addressing this question. According to Deleuze and Guattari interests are always part of a social formation which forms investments of desire in to a particular interest. However, that desires are always invested to form interest also means that desire – the very drives and affects that transverses us and our surroundings - are never solely our own, but part of a social formation (Smith 2012). The subject, culture or discourse are often given primacy in studies of identity management but they are not foundational for Deleuze and Guattari.

At the level of the investment of desire, Joe’s case isn’t simply a matter of the struggle between his interests, on the one hand, and those of the company he works for, on the other. It is not primarily the social categories, norms and discourses Joe is intermingled in that drives him to form an identity as a high performer but rather the expansions of desire which these categories allow. In effect this means that the organizational control of identity in Joe’s case does not ascribe an identity stabilizing norm to him. Rather, the control works prior to the occurrence of any such stabilization. The IT company’s symbols, goals and slogans which encourage high performance employees do not operate as expressions of already fixed social categories and discourses, but rather as what Deleuze and Guattari (2004: 265) call asignifying signs that accelerate and organize desire in various ways. So organizational control, in Joe’s case, works by way of what Deleuze and Guattari call ‘a social machine’, that is, a social order which circulates and reproduces certain investments of desire. Such a social order works by reconstituting itself again and again on the basis of its own inability to fix identity in a stable form. It does not work by controlling identity or by fixing the identity of Joe. On the contrary it works precisely because it can never fix his identity. As will be shown, this very distinction between interest and desire addresses each of the three main theoretical discussions within identity studies (Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas 2008): how does the social relate to the individual?; is identity an essence or a process; and how should we understand power and resistance in identity management? This paper will offer and defend answers in each of these regards.