ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION, AND COMMITMENT AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

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Organizational Identification, and Commitment and Their Relationships

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Abstract – The psychological relationship between individual and organization has been conceptualized both in terms of identification and in terms of (affective) commitment. In the present study, we explore the differences between these two conceptualizations. Building on the proposition that identification is different from commitment in that identification reflects the self-definitional aspect of organizational membership whereas commitment does not, we propose that commitment is more contingent on social exchange processes that presume that individual and organization are separate entities psychologically, and more closely aligned with (other) job attitudes. In support of these propositions, results of a cross-sectional survey of university faculty (n=133) showed that identification is uniquely aligned (i.e., controlling for affective commitment) with the self-referential aspect of organizational membership, whereas commitment is uniquely related (i.e., controlling for identification) to perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. We conclude that the core difference between identification and commitment lies in the implied relationship between individual and organization: Identification reflects psychological oneness, commitment reflects a relationship between separate psychological entities.

Identification with a psychological group or organization (IDPG) is defined as the perception of sharing experiences of a focal group and sharing characteristics of the group's members. IDPG is conceptually distinct from the related concept of organizational commitment. In the present study with 263 employed persons, IDPG was shown to be empirically distinct from organizational commitment. In addition, IDPG was shown to have significantly less overlap than commitment with three related concepts: job satisfaction, organizational satisfaction, and job involvement.

This Study attempts to develop a framework for understanding social identities by linking together ideas from two disciplines which are normally pursued separately from each other namely, sociology and psychoanalysis. Drawing on the work of Craib (1989, 1994, 1998a) Bion (1961) and Scheff (1994a) in psychoanalysis and Mann (1986, 1993a, 1995, 1997) in sociology, the main argument is that social identities such as national identity are not just the result of sociological factors such as social classification, boundaries and processes of identification, they also have an important emotional dimension which coexists with but cannot be reduced to the social. In order to understand the persistence and indeed strengthening of nationalism and national identities in the contemporary world, we need to take account not just of changes in the inter-relationships between economics, politics and culture at the global level, but also of the ways in which they may now be coming to inter-relate with the kind of unconscious psychological processes and strong emotions such as love, hate, shame and anger, which occur within groups. The Study begins with a critique of existing sociological approaches to identity followed by an attempt to develop an alternative approach based on the psychoanalytic concept of emotional inter-subjectivity.

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The relationship between an individual member and the employing organization has long been known to have an impact on the attitudes, behavior, and well-being of individuals. In this regard, two of the more researched constructs include organizational identification and organizational commitment, both of which were developed in an attempt to understand, predict, and influence employee behavior.

Organizational identification, as the more recent of the two perspectives, examines the process whereby an individual's identity becomes psychologically intertwined with the organization's identity.

Although a long-standing interest to sociologists and social psychologists, the social identity approach, subsuming both social identity theory and self-categorization theory, has only recently emerged as

an important perspective in organizational behavior research (see Pratt, 1998; van Dick, 2004, for reviews). The second perspective, which encompasses organizational commitment, views the individual-employer relationship as a series of social exchanges (e.g., Cole, Schaninger, & Harris, 2002). Social exchange relationships between two parties are different from those of pure economic exchange, in that they develop through a series of mutual exchanges that yield a pattern of reciprocal obligation by each party (Blau, 1964).

Perhaps the most significant development in organizational identification and organizational commitment theories has been the recognition that both concepts can be directed toward a wide range of foci, or social categories, of relevance to workplace behavior (e.g., Becker, Billings, Eveleth, & Gilbert, 1996; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Riketta & van Dick, 2005; van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher, &Christ, 2004b). In general, this research has shown that the choice of one social category over another is dictated by the perceived salience that accompanies membership in that particular group. Among all possible categories that exist within an organizational context, none is as salient or visible as one's hierarchical level (i.e., the chain of authority; Mintzberg, 1983). Indeed, the notion that organizations are structured hierarchically (at least officially) is one of the most fundamental of organizational foci. Therefore, it should not be surprising that individuals may come to perceive their level within the organization's hierarchy as a salient social category that is shared with other members of an in group and not shared with members of an out group (a point we will return to anon).

Importantly, previous research offers only limited empirical evidence that organizational identity (OI) strength, organizational identification, and organizational commitment are distinct constructs. In a rare instance when both OI strength and organizational identification were included in the same study (see Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004), no discriminant validity evidence was reported to demonstrate that the two constructs are unique. Likewise, Gautam, van Dick, andWagner (2004) asserted that little research exists that has investigated whether organizational identification and organizational commitment are empirically distinct. We are aware of only three published studies that were designed to investigate whether organizational identification and organizational commitment are empirically distinct (Gautam et al., 2004; Mael & Tetrick, 1992; van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006).

No study (to our knowledge) has assessed individuals' perceptions of OI strength and organizational identification and organizational commitment in one study.

From a psychometric (measurement) theory perspective, researchers cannot assume that self-report measures elicit the same conceptual frame of reference across diverse groups (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000).

Rather, because survey measures are designed to tap unique aspects of the work experience, comparisons between groups are only appropriate if measurement equivalence can be established (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000; Vandenberg, 2002). Therefore, it is possible that individuals at different hierarchical levels do not use a common frame of reference when responding to items that reflect OI strength, organizational identification, and/or organizational commitment. Hierarchical differentiation may also influence the salience of each of the focal constructs and, as a result, each may relate to organizational outcomes in different ways. Thus, the foregoing discussion raises several important questions that need to be explored. For example, is there a difference between OI strength, organizational identification, and organizational commitment? Do the measures used to operationalize OI strength, organizational identification, and organizational commitment exhibit measurement equivalence across hierarchical levels? If so, do the focal constructs correlate with outcomes in unique ways across the hierarchical levels?

The aim of this Study is to focus attention on the psychological constructs of OI strength, organizational identification and organizational commitment, and, in doing so, address many of the questions posited in the preceding paragraph. First, we review the literature to demonstrate the conceptual differences with regard to OI strength, organizational identification, and organizational commitment. Second, using confirmatory factor analysis, we examined whether OI strength, organizational identification, and organizational commitment can be assessed as empirically distinct constructs. Third, using multi group confirmatory factor analysis, we tested the measurement equivalence of OI strength, organizational identification, and organizational commitment across three hierarchical levels of employees (officers, middle-management, and workers). The principal advantage of using a covariance structure approach is that we were able to test the assumptions of measurement equivalence through a series of nested model constraints placed upon selected parameters in an a priori manner. Finally, using multi group structural equation modeling, we explored whether the focal constructs' between-group correlations with a theoretically and practically relevant outcome variable (i.e., turnover intention) might yield differential relations, further highlighting any conceptual or empirical differences among the focal constructs.

Organizational identification: Over the past decade, organizational researchers have increasingly applied social identity theory to the workplace. As a specific form of social identification, organizational identification (henceforth identification) reflects the specific ways in which individuals define themselves in terms of their membership in a particular organization

(Mael & Ashforth, 1995). The focus on identification within organizational contexts has continued to intensify as it is purported to benefit individuals, work groups, and the organization as a whole (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Riketta, 2005; van Dick, 2004). Haslam et al. (2003) have gone as far to contend that without organizational identification, 'there can be no effective organizational communication, no heedful interrelating, no meaningful planning, no leadership' (p. 365). Organizational commitment: Organizational commitment has also inspired a tremendous amount of research (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Like a number of constructs, organizational commitment has, at times, been a difficult concept to define and measure (see Meyer& Herscovitch, 2001, for a review). As defined here, organizational commitment (henceforth commitment) refers to an individual's emotional attachment to and involvement in an employing organization. Recent meta-analytic evidence has reported commitment to predict a wide range of job attitudes, turnover intention, and citizenship behaviors (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Meyer et al., 2002).

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