

The psychological attractiveness of the work place: Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Identity Management

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(Extended) Abstract

Researchers have demonstrated that group processes have powerful effects on behaviors, beliefs and attitudes (e.g. Robbers Cave experiment, Sherif et al, 1961), and recently research within the work place setting have increased. The social environment at the work place is potentially a near perfect arena for the study of group processes (Hogg & Terry, 2001). As such social psychology may offer a detailed understanding of employees' behavior and moreover how the organization can benefit from this understanding in terms of human resource management. The empirical support for this relationship is growing. For example researchers have shown that intergroup processes affects turnover intentions (van Dick et al., 2004; Wegge et al. 2005), communication (Smidts et al., 2001), trust (Tanis & Postmes, 2005), job satisfaction (Wegge et al., 2005; Matthieu & Zajac, 1990 and; Terry & O'Brien, 2001), stress (Haslam et al. 2004, 2005), and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; van Dick et al., 2006; Wegge et al. 2006).

The positive association of work place identification indicates that it may be worth to test more complex, and potentially even more informing, models of identity in organizations, namely; a) a multilevel approach including both the team and organization in simultaneous analysis, and; b) a model that shows how the group processes can be managed in a work place setting. The current study is an attempt to commence the filling of these research gaps. Specifically the study looks at OCB (Organ, 1988) from a multilevel perspective and predictors of employees' identification with the organization.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Self Categorization Theory (SCT) (Turner, 1982) describes how people perceive groups, their motivation to identify with groups and the intergroup dynamics. SIT and SCT are complementing; while SIT is mainly concerned with the intergroup processes SCT provides a better insight of the cognitive aspect of categorization (i.e. how and why do people self-categorize). Thus, both theories are often described and applied together. For the sake of simplicity in the following both theories will be referenced as SIT only. According to SIT a group is subjective phenomena, which means that there are potentially and endless number of groups with which people can identify. When applying SIT to the work place setting researchers want to understand whether the employee identifies with the formal work groups (e.g. team, department and the overall organization). The formal organization of the work groups reflects that of a nested structure: team is contained in department and department in the overall organization. If and when employees are attracted to any of these groups the group will be important for the employees' self and in turn shape their behavior. The nested structure of the formal work groups is likely to create an interaction affect between employees identification. Specifically it was hypothesized (1) that when employees identify with the overall organization they will also identify with the team. However, it is important to note that although the categories are associated, they are conceptually different. Thus, it was hypothesized (2) that both the team and organizational category would predict OCB and (3) that a multilevel analysis of employees' perception of the team and organization would increase the understanding of employees' OCB.

The study also included an attempt to commence research of the circumstances within the organization that affects employees' identification with the work groups. According to SIT groups that are well defined and distinct are attractive. Thus, it was hypothesized (4) that the clarity of the organization's goals would mediate the relationship between employees' identification with the team and organization.

To test the hypotheses a cross-sectional study in a work place setting was conducted with 111 employees. OCB was measured using Podsakoff et al's (1997) conceptualization of Organ's (1988) framework of OCB. The study suggests that both team and departmental identity affects OCB. Further, the study shows that the link between team and organizational identity is fully mediated by the clarity of the organization's goals. Similarly the link between team and departmental identity was partially mediated by the clarity of the organization's goals. The study supported all hypotheses in full except hypothesis 4 which was only partially supported.

The findings are discussed in both an applied and theoretical context. In brief, the study shows that the organization's formal structure affects identification and that managers may be able to increase the attractiveness through the framework of SIT. In other words, a work place that is ignoring these mechanisms or mismanaging the group processes is likely, at best, to result in suboptimal performance and inferior organizational climate.

Human resource managers need to monitor the intergroup processes and enforce or diminish intergroup processes where needed through a long-term identity management strategy. The strategy needs to consider how the work place and teams

relate to the employees and amplify the attractiveness of the formal groups by sharpening the cognitive distinctiveness of the organization per se and the work groups embedded in it. Research suggests that both the organization and the employees will profit through such strategy.

Body:

The research studied a nested framework of social identities in a public service company ($n=111$). It was hypothesized that a nested framework of identities would be able to predict Organizational Citizenship Behavior and that the clarity of the organization's goals precede identification with the organization. The study supported nested framework and in part the antecedent of identification. The findings highlight the need to understand and be able to manage group processes in organizations.

Feeling part of a group is a powerful phenomenon with direct links to behavior, attitudes and beliefs. This was first demonstrated in the famous Robbers Cave experiment (Sherif et al., 1961), where intergroup behavior escalated to unanticipated levels and had to be interrupted. The basis for the participants' behavior was motivated by the feeling of belonging to one's group. This concept has since been studied in many different social settings, however only recently have researchers begun exploring the mechanisms in work place settings. The extension of the research agenda into work place settings is a natural progress because it is a near perfect arena for the study of people in groups (e.g. teams and departments) (Hogg & Terry, 2001). As such the study of group processes may offer a detailed understanding of employees' behavior (motivation) and how the organization can manage the group processes and benefit from the associated outcomes.

Group processes are associated with Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Self Categorization Theory (SCT) (Turner, 1982). SCT focuses on the cognitive aspect of identification and SIT on the intergroup dynamics. Together the theories provide a solid framework that describes how people perceive groups and when a certain group membership is directing behavior, attitudes and beliefs. Thus, SCT and SIT are compatible and complementing theories describing intergroup processes. For the sake of simplicity the framework will be referred to as only SIT in the following text.

SIT posits that people can identify more or less strongly with a group. The strength of social identification has an inverse and gradual relationship with personal identity. When social identity is salient, the individual acquire stereotypical behaviors, attitudes and norms of the group; the group becomes self. When personal identity is salient, behavior, attitudes and norms are idiosyncratic. The fundamental desire to identify with groups is motivated by self-esteem (positive distinctiveness) and uncertainty reduction (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Mullin, 1999). A group that is positively distinct from an out-group is an attractive group because it contributes to self-esteem which causes people to confirm or establish group membership. Popularly, this can be formulated as a basic need to look the best in the eyes of relevant others. The need for uncertainty reduction is linked to the increase in certainty about one's perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors and what to

expect from the physical and social environment (Hogg, 2001). Thus, when more social categories are available, categories that subjectively and comparatively provide higher levels of self-esteem are more likely to become salient (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Crocker & Luthanen, 1990). This essentially means that identification is a dynamic concept that calls for a context specific interpretation.

In the work place context, there are potentially a large range of groups with which employees may identify. Informally (subjectively) the work place is host to an unlimited number of groups (e.g. golf partners, lunch partners, males, females), and formally it is host to groups into which the work place is structured (e.g. departments and teams). When studying organizational outcomes researchers are interested in how the formal structure of the organization affects performance and the attainment of its goals and mission. For this, reason it is primarily the formal work groups within the work place that are being studied. This is not to say that the informal work groups are unimportant, but rather that an analysis of the formal groups may provide a better understanding of the link between group-processes and relevant work oriented outcomes. There is already a range of research findings showing that this approach (employees identification with the organization), can explain some important aspects of organizational life; turnover intentions (van Dick et al., 2004; Wegge et al. 2006), communication (Smidts et al., 2001), trust (Tanis & Postmes, 2005), job satisfaction (Wegge et al., 2006; Terry & O'Brien, 2001), stress (Haslam et al. 2004, 2005), organizational citizenship behavior (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; van Dick et al., 2006; Wegge et al. 2006). It is important to note that all the research listed except Tanis & Postmes (2005) and Haslam et al. (2004) (which were experiments), studied the overall organizational category (and not for example the team). The findings give a firm indication that group processes – that is organizational identification – play an important role in organizational life.

The positive association of work place identification indicates that it may be worth to test more complex, and potentially even more informing, models of identity in organizations, namely; a) a multilevel approach including both the team and organization in simultaneous analysis, and; b) a model that shows how the group processes can be managed in a work place setting. The current study is an attempt to commence the filling of these research gaps. Specifically the study looks at Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Organ, 1988) from a multilevel perspective and predictors of employees' identification with the organization.

The formal structure of identities in an organization are nested. The nested structure can be depicted as an onion, with the outer layer defining the organization as a whole, and the inner layers as smaller hierarchically organized units of the organization (e.g. department and team) (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Because the framework is nested it also implies a correlation between nested identities:

Hypothesis 1: Team and organizational identity will be positively correlated.

Current research that studies identification outcomes in organizations focus' primarily on the organization as a whole – and not both levels in concert. Intuitively it makes sense to include both levels, or more, when studying outcomes in organizations with more than two layers (e.g. organization and team), because it may potentially provide a more accurate understanding of the group processes. However, the

relationship between team and departmental identification is not causal. Although the identities are formally nested within the organization, subjectively employees may see themselves as part of the team and much less as part of the organization (and vice versa). The basis of self-categorization is that of distinctiveness (Turner, 1982). Only categories that can be meaningfully categorized into a group can become salient and as such influential of subjects' behavior. Hence, the relationship between team and organizational identity is postulated to be mediated by the clarity of the organizations' goals and the extent employees can see how his or her work team contributes to them. In other words when the organization has clear and distinct goals employees are more likely to identify with the organization:

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between team identity and organizational identity is mediated by the clarity of the organization's goals and knowledge of how one's work team contributes to them.

Previous research have shown that when employees identify with the organization they exert more OCB (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; van Dick et al., 2006; Wegge et al. 2006). OCB is behavior that benefits the organization; e.g. helping others out when needed, attending meetings and constructively contribute to the debate. Apart from the implied benefits Organ (1988) noted that OCB obviate the need for formal mechanisms ensuring that employees actively engagement in the work roles and place more resources at the disposal of the organization. There are also examples of a direct connection between OCB and team performance (e.g. Podsakoff et al. 1997). Thus, OCB is a highly relevant variable for organizations that describes the aspect of employees' motivation to be a 'good employee'. Hitherto, researchers studying OCB and identity (see references above), have all focused on organizational level identity as the predictor of OCB. In line with previous research it is expected that OCB is associated with organizational identity. Because, the team is the smallest group that employees can relate to within the formal hierarchy and it is more distinct than the overall organizational category, it is expected that identification with the team is a good predictor of employees behavior and in turn OCB:

Hypothesis 3: Organizational and team identity is associated with OCB.

Although the team and organizational level identities are associated, they are conceptually distinct. Thus, it is predicted that adding both team and organizational identity in a model will increase explained variance in OCB over a single level approach:

Hypothesis 4: An analysis including both team and organizational level identities increases explained variance in OCB over a model including either team or organizational identity.

Method

Design

The study was a cross sectional design studying different levels of social identity (team, department and organization). The independent variables were identification with the team and the organization. The dependent variables were Organizational Citizenship Behavior (measured at both super- and sub-ordinate level).

Awareness of the organization's goals was measured as a mediator between social identity and organizational identity.

Sample

Employees in a large public service sector organization were invited to participate. The organization consisted of a mother company (responsible for a large range of public services in Copenhagen). The study was limited to subsidiaries concerning one aspect of services and geographic locations. A total of 6 subsidiaries (or local service centres), were involved. Within the subsidiaries the employees were organized into 21 work groups (including management groups) ranging from 2 to 15 group members. A total of 137 employees were invited to participate. The response rate was 81%. Approximately 55% percent of the employees had relevant degree (BSc or more). Participants were between 23 and 64 years old. Most employees belonged to the age group 46-56. The distribution of age was almost normally distributed around the most populated age group (46-56). For reasons of confidentiality it was agreed that the specific organisation would not to be revealed directly or indirectly.

Data collection

Data collection was administered and managed by an online survey application. Employees' background information (e-mail, team, team role, department, age, gender) were uploaded to the survey application. All employees were sent an invitation by email with a brief description of the study and a unique hyper-link that provided access to the online study. The survey program was dynamic which meant that background information such as the name of the specific work group and leader would be inserted directly in the survey text when relevant. The link between e-mail address and replies was automatically encrypted by the application (not available to the researcher or anyone else), which gave the participants completely anonymity. All employees had email and computer access. Data was collected over approximately two weeks. Two reminders were sent out to employees who had not yet participated during this time. The study was presented as a study by the researcher and not the organization. Thus, I would keep all data confidential (incl. specific work groups), and only present general trends to the organization's management and the public.

Measures

Measures included in the study were: Identification (with primary group, department and organization), awareness of organizational goals and OCB. Control variables were; gender, group size, education, and type of work. All measures were measured on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from "Completely Agree" to "Completely Disagree". Variables were checked for univariate outliers ($\pm 3SD$), kurtosis and skewness (including visual inspection of distributed scores in a histogram). None of the measures improved normality when looking at the histogram, kurtosis and skewness together. Hence, no transformation was applied. Descriptives of all measures are provided in Table 1.

The measures were translated from English to Danish. The procedure for translation was as follows. First the experimenter – a native Danish speaker - translated the items into Danish. Then an experienced Danish, English translator (MSc qualification), translated the items from English to Danish. Five discrepancies were reviewed and discussed. The final version was reviewed by a Danish professional who normally conduct employee surveys for the organization where the data was collected

from. The final step was implemented to ensure that the translation did not hold any academic jargon and would be understood according to its intentions by the average employee in the organisation. Two minor corrections were made in response to this process.

Social identity was measured with four items using Doosje et al's (1995) scale. Participants' social identification with both their team and organization was measured using two scales. Example items from the scales; "I see myself as a member of my team" and "I see myself as a member of my organization". Cronbach alpha for team and organizational identity were .86 and .90 respectively.

Clarity of the organization's goals; The scale consisted of two items, "I know my organisation's goals" and "I can see that I contribute towards my organisation's goals". This scale is based on the principle of group distinctiveness; an attractive group will have distinctive goals and the group member will be able to enact them (exert in-group behavior). Cronbach alpha for the scale was .79.

The measure of OCB was based on Podsakoff et al's (1997) scale of OCB which is a conceptualization of Organ's (1988) theoretical framework of OCB. The scale was shortened to include only three items from each dimension (helping behavior, sportsmanship and civic virtue). The items were selected on the basis of the strongest loadings from Podsakoff et al's scale (loadings ranged from .79 to .89). Based on the recommendations in LePine et al (2002), OCB was treated as a latent construct consisting of helping behavior, civic virtue and sportsmanship. Cronbach alpha was acceptable at .72 (see Nunnally's (1978), criteria of Cronbach Alpha).

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

Variable	M	N	SD	No. of items	1	2	3
1. Team Identity	3.12	112	1.35	4	(.86)		
2. Organizational Identity	3.6	111	1.51	4	.48**	(.90)	
3. OCB	5.48	111	0.79	9	.34**	.31**	(.72)

Note: Cronbach's alpha values are given in parentheses.

Results

A correlational analysis of team and organizational identity was strong and significant: $r(109)=.48, p<.01$. This provides support for hypothesis 1.

A mediational analysis was carried out to examine the role of organizational goals as a mediator of the team-organisation identity relationship. The first three criteria of regression were met; team identity had significant bivariate relationships with goals ($\beta=.30, p<.01$) and with organizational identity ($\beta=.48, p<.01$), and organizational goals predicted organizational identity independently of team identity ($\beta=.47, p<.01$). When controlling for goals team identity continued to have a significant effect on organizational identity ($\beta=.44, p<.01$). A Sobel z-test of the mediation effect suggested that the model was significant, $z=2.89, p>.05$. Hence, the model suggests a partial mediation by goals in the relationship between team identity and organizational identity. Hence, hypothesis 2 is partially supported.

A correlational analysis of team identity and OCB was significant; $r(106)=.34$, $p<.001$. A regression analysis of organizational identity and OCB was likewise significant; $r(106)=.31$, $p<.01$. Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported.

To test hypothesis 4 a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted. Team and organizational identity were inserted into a multiple linear regression analysis in SPSS. The model including both team and organizational identification explained 15% ($R^2 = .15$) of the variance and was significant ($F(2, 103)=9.14$, $p<.001$). This model offered significantly more explained variance over a model including only the team category ($\Delta R^2 = .04$, $F(1, 103)=4.35$, $p<.05$). Thus, together the team and organizational category contribute with unique variance and is in full support of Hypothesis 4.

Discussion

The results highlight the importance of employees' psychological attraction to the embedded groups at work. It also questions whether group process research should focus solely on the organizational category, the team or perhaps should study them in concert. The study showed that the team and organizational category had a similar association with OCB. It even explained slightly more variance. Hitherto research of OCB has focused on the membership of the work place category only. Intuitively it makes sense to analyze the group processes related directly with the team when the outcome variable (OCB) is associated with mainly team behavior. The team category is also more distinct than the overall organizational identity which is a key driver of group attractiveness (see SCT Turner, 1982), and as such perhaps also group specific outcomes. The findings give renewed interest for a study of the category specific outcomes. Boehling, (2003) suggested that the overall organizational category is more closely related to long-term commitment (e.g. turnover intentions), and the specific (smaller) categories are more closely related to the day-to-day behavior.

It was hypothesized that both team and organizational membership was correlated and the empirical results suggests that that this is indeed true. The findings support a nested structure of social identities within the organization; a structure which is subjectively perceived as one overall category with more distinct categories nested within it. It was also hypothesized that both the team and organizational category contributed with unique variance to OCB which was supported. Hence, although organizational categories are nested and as such related they contribute with unique variance to OCB. It also suggests that the driver of OCB is a mix of how the employees perceive the overall organization and the team. Neither should be neglected in a HR strategy because in concert the categories can potentially apply leverage to desired outcome variables.

Finally it was hypothesized that the clarity of the organization's goals would mediate the relationship between the team and the organizational category. The results indicated that this is partially true. This suggests that the understanding of organizational identity in part can be explained through the clarity of goals. The reason for not getting a full mediation may be due to; 1) the nested association of the team and organizational category, 2) there are other predictors of organizational identity not accounted for in this study. Psychologically it may possible that subjective membership of a higher order category affects how one feels about a lower

order nested category. The reverse relationship is not thought to be as powerful because it implies a step away from category specificity rather than towards specificity. It seems more likely that there are other antecedents of organizational identity which has not been controlled for in this study (e.g. status). Similarly, it can perhaps also be inferred from this finding that a psychologically attractive team would need clear and tangible goals (goals that the employee can actually contribute towards).

If managers in organizations are considering what they need to do in order to benefit from the increased employee motivation and other associated outcomes, the study offers some preliminary answers: A clear strategy for goal formulation, that makes it crystal clear, even for the less technical and business minded, what the goals are how he or she contributes to them. Perhaps this could be implemented by specifying subgoals that clearly fit into the overall goals within the different teams in the organization. This is likely to increase the distinctiveness of the groups and as such provide a basis for identification.

The study has certain limitations which are worth mentioning. An obvious issue that the study leaves open is causation. To some degree the issue has been lessened by showing that the theoretical framework, in part, can predict the mediation of organizational identity. Further, intuitively it makes sense that a strong sense of group membership also results in greater motivation to exert an effort on behalf of the team and organization. Some further limitations are related to the sample. Data was collected in a public sector service organization, which to some extent may work differently from private sector companies. Perhaps, overall organizational identification is lower in this type of organization, perhaps due to the lack of public prestige that many public institutions are suffering. Further, the study was conducted in Denmark which raises the question as to whether the findings can be applied to American companies. Although, both countries are considered Western in terms of market economy, culturally there are differences at the work place which can be depicted by Hofstede's (2006) cultural dimensions (a comparison reveals large differences in the Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance and Long Term Orientation dimensions). However, previous research of social identification from the USA (e.g. Ruvolo, 2004), indicates that social identification is relevant in the USA as well as other cultures.

In short, this study have shown that the application of a multilevel approach to work place identification increase the understanding of OCB and that the goals of the organization in part explains identification. It is hoped that the findings will stimulate further research of group dynamics at the work place.

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