

The Impact of Organizational Identification on Psychological Empowerment Dimensions:

A Survey on Greek Citizens Service Centers (KEPs)

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to examine the predicting role of organizational identification construct on both overall psychological empowerment and its dimensions. Data from 159 public employees, working on Greek Citizens Services Centres, demonstrated that organizational identification influenced psychological empowerment. More specifically, organizational identification had an impact on three out of four psychological empowerment dimensions, namely meaning, competence and impact. Limitations and future research were also discussed.

1. Introduction

Organizational identification and psychological empowerment constitute two important constructs that have been substantially studied vis-à-vis various organizational variables. However, there is a gap in the literature with respect to the influence of the former on the latter. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to address this void by examining the impact of organizational identification on employees' psychological empowerment. Also, the present study examines the effect of organizational identification on each dimension of psychological empowerment, namely meaning, competence, self-determination and impact.

Citizens Service Centers (hence KEPs – as they are known in greek language) are an expression of Greece e-government policy to modernize public sector and deliver better and direct services to citizens (Introna et al., 2010). In other words, KEPs are 'one-stop' shops, introduced at the beginning of 2000s, which operate across different geographical areas in Greece (Hahamis et al., 2005). The innovation introduced by KEPs is that they provide citizens with unified services of different governmental departments in a flexible and direct manner.

2. Theory and Hypotheses Development

Organizational Identification

There is a research growing interest about organizational identification as a key construct that predicts numerous important attitudes and behaviors in the workplace (Edwards, 2005). Much of the research examining organizational identification has been influenced both by social identity theory and the literature

regarding group identification processes (Smidts et al., 2001; Fuller et al., 2006). The 'core' idea of social identity theory is that people tend to identify with a particular social group that determines their tendency to behave in terms of their group membership (Carmelli et al., 2006).

A classical definition of organizational identification, based on social identity theory's approach, is that of Mael and Ashforth (1992, 104) that describes organizational identification as the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he or she is a member". Two basic motives to organizational identification can be derived from social identity theory: the need for 'self-categorization' which defines the individual's position in society and the need for 'self-enhancement', which attributes to the group membership a rewarding sense (Pratt, 1998; Smidts et al., 2001).

Riketta, inspired by O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) approach of affective components of organizational identification, views organizational identification as "the desire to maintain an emotionally satisfying self-defining relationship with the identification object" (2005, 360). Organizational identification is defined by Dutton et al. (1994) as a cognitive connection of sharing attributes between a person's self-concept and the perceived organizational identity. In other words, organizational identification is thought as a combination of both cognitive and affective components (Riketta, 2005).

Psychological empowerment

There are two related, yet distinct, approaches of empowerment in the literature, namely structural or relational and psychological approach (Ergeneli et al., 2007). The former defines empowerment as the transmission of power to all levels of employees within the organization. According to this approach, empowerment incorporates management practices that provide employees with power, control and authority (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). Regarding the latter, psychological empowerment emphasizes employees' experiences. In this regard, empowerment occurs only when employees perceive themselves as being empowered.

Initially, Conger and Kanungo (1988) defined empowerment as psychological enabling. They viewed it as 'a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information' (p. 474). Thomas and Velthouse (1990) defined psychological empowerment as intrinsic task motivation manifested in four cognitions: meaningfulness, competence, choice and impact.

Finally, Spreitzer (1995) slightly differentiated the four dimensions of psychological empowerment, encompassing meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. *Meaning* is perceived as 'the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards' (Spreitzer 1995, p. 1443). *Competence*, or self-efficacy, is 'an individual's belief in his or her capability to perform work role activities with skill' (Spreitzer 1995, p. 1443). *Self-determination* is termed as 'an individual's sense of having choice in initiating and regulating actions' (Spreitzer 1995, p. 1443). *Impact* is 'the degree to which an individual can influence strategic, administrative or operating outcomes at work' (Spreitzer 1995, p. 1443).

Organizational identification and Psychological empowerment

Prior empirical studies has illustrated that organizational identification predicts numerous organizational variables, such as job satisfaction and employee well being (Knight and Haslam, 2010), work adjustment (Carmeli et al., 2007), organizational citizenship behavior (Duckerich et al., 2002), intrinsic motivation (van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000), voice behavior (Fuller et al., 2006) and turnover intentions (Cole and Bruch, 2006). However, in the literature there is a dearth regarding the impact of organizational identification on employees' perceptions of psychological empowerment.

Few authors (Pratt, 1998; Ashforth et al., 2008) demonstrated that the process of identifying with an organization concerns basic human needs, namely the needs for safety, affiliation and uncertainty reduction which, in turn, may enhance self-efficacy (Erez and Earley, 1993). Moreover, according to social identity theory, the basic rationale for identifying with a group or an organization is the enhancement of one's sense of collective self-esteem (Ashforth et al., 2008). In fact, previous empirical research has showed that organizational identification is related to organization-based self-esteem (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000, Harris and Cameron, 2005).

Recently, scholars have discussed the relationship between identification and the meaning of work (Ashforth et al., 2008). In their attempt to search for meaning, individuals focus on experiences around the self, rendering the concept of meaningful work as an essential factor of self-identity and self-worth (Cartwright and Holmes, 2006). Thus, via the process of identifying with the organization, employees may also augment their feelings of work meaningfulness. Based on the above arguments we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1: Organizational Identification is positively related to psychological empowerment.

Hypothesis 1a: Organizational Identification is positively related to the meaning dimension of psychological empowerment.

Hypothesis 1b: Organizational Identification is positively related to the competence dimension of psychological empowerment.

Hypothesis 1c: Organizational Identification is positively related to the self-determination dimension of psychological empowerment.

Hypothesis 1d: Organizational Identification is positively related to the impact dimension of psychological empowerment.

3. Methodology

Sample

The research was conducted on KEPs since they are considered by the majority of Greek citizens as the most competitive and modern organization of Greek public sector. The sample of the study consisted of 159 employees working in Citizens Service Centers. Of the sample, 67% were female and 33% were male. With respect to age, the majority (43%) of the respondents ranged from 31 to 40 years old. Moreover, 42% of the sample held a bachelor degree and 21% held a degree from Technological Educational Institutes (T.E.I.). Of the respondents, 63% were married and 44% has worked for the present organization for less than 5 years. Finally, nearly 73% has a permanent employment status.

Measures

Organizational Identification

Organizational identification was assessed using the items taken from Mael and Ashforth's (1992). An example item for this scale is 'When someone criticizes Citizen Service Centers it feels like a personal insult'. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was .85.

Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment was measured using Spreitzer's (1995) scale. These measures comprises four three - item subscales for each of the dimensions of empowerment. Sample items include 'The work I do is very important to me' (meaning), 'I am confident about my ability to do my job' (competence), 'I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job' (self-determination), 'I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department' (impact). The Cronbach alpha for psychological empowerment scale was .87. Particularly, the Cronbach alpha of four measures of psychological empowerment was: .90 for meaning, .74 for competence, .90 for self-determination and .91 for impact.

4. Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables appeared in Table 1. Principal axis factoring (PAF) concluded five factors representing the four dimensions of empowerment and the construct of organizational identification. All the items loaded significantly on their respective factors with one exception. An item of competence dimension ("I have mastered the skills necessary for my job") of psychological empowerment demonstrated a low loading and, thus, excluded from the analysis. This may be attributed to the work nature of our sample. More specifically, KEP recruits employees without asking for specialized job qualifications and, therefore, this is depicted in the respective item.

Table I. Descriptive statistics and correlations

| | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|----------------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| Gender | 1.67 | .471 | | | | | | | | | |
| Age | 2.16 | .800 | .53 | | | | | | | | |
| Education | 2.34 | 1.030 | .10 | .96 | | | | | | | |
| Tenure | 3.03 | 1.217 | .04 | .26** | .14 | | | | | | |
| Meaning | 6.34 | .80 | .15 | .14 | -.06 | -.02 | | | | | |
| Competence | 6.28 | .82 | .07 | .31** | .10 | .23** | .41** | | | | |
| Self-determination | 4.91 | 1.51 | -.10 | .27** | -.11 | .17* | .15 | .33** | | | |
| Impact | 4.44 | 1.63 | -.16* | .38** | -.04 | .22** | .12 | .35** | .65* | | |
| Ps. Empowerment | 5.49 | .880 | -.10 | .39** | -.06 | .22** | .44** | .63** | .84** | .85** | |
| Org. identification | 5.85 | 1.037 | .08 | .23** | -.02 | .14 | .42** | .29** | .08 | .23** | .14 |

*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001

In order to test our hypotheses, multiple regression analyses were conducted. The control variables were also entered in the equations. These included gender, age, education and organizational tenure. The standardized betas weights for all regression models are presented in table 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. The results indicated that organizational identification was positively related to overall psychological empowerment ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$). Similarly, organizational identification exerted a significant positive effect on three dimensions of psychological empowerment. Specifically, the results showed that a positive relationship between organizational identification and meaning ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$), competence ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$) and impact ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$). Yet, a non significant relationship between organizational identification and self-determination ($\beta = .14$, n.s.) occurred. Thus, hypotheses 1, 1a, 1b and 1d were supported. Hypothesis 1c was not supported.

Table II. Results of the Regression Analysis between Organizational Identification and Overall Psychological Empowerment

| Variables | Beta |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Control Variables</i> | |
| Gender | -.14 ^a |
| Age | .30*** |
| Education | -.07 |
| Tenure | .11 |
| <i>Main effect</i> | |
| Organizational Identification | .33*** |
| Adjusted R² | .27 |

^a Standardized regression coefficients.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

Table III. Results of the Regression Analysis between Organizational Identification and Meaning Dimension of Psychological Empowerment

| Variables | Beta |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| <i>Control Variables</i> | |
| Gender | .12 ^a |
| Age | .07 |
| Education | -.07 |
| Tenure | -.09 |
| <i>Main effect</i> | |
| Organizational Identification | .40*** |
| Adjusted R² | .17 |

^a Standardized regression coefficients.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

Table IV. Results of the Regression Analysis between Organizational Identification and Competence Dimension of Psychological Empowerment

| Variables | Beta |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Control Variables</i> | |
| Gender | -.11 ^a |
| Age | .21** |
| Education | .08 |
| Tenure | .14 |
| <i>Main effect</i> | |
| Organizational Identification | .23*** |
| Adjusted R² | .16 |

^a Standardized regression coefficients.

*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001

Table V. Results of the Regression Analysis between Organizational Identification and Self-Determination Dimension of Psychological Empowerment

| Variables | Beta |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Control Variables</i> | |
| Gender | -.11 ^a |
| Age | .21** |
| Education | -.12 |
| Tenure | .11 |
| <i>Main effect</i> | |
| Organizational Identification | .14 |
| Adjusted R² | .10 |

^a Standardized regression coefficients.

*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001

Table VI. Results of the Regression Analysis between Organizational Identification and Impact Dimension of Psychological Empowerment

| Variables | Beta |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Control Variables</i> | |
| Gender | -.20*** ^a |
| Age | .30*** |
| Education | -.05 |
| Tenure | .11 |
| <i>Main effect</i> | |
| Organizational Identification | .28*** |
| Adjusted R² | .24 |

^a Standardized regression coefficients.

*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001

5. Discussion

Although many scholars have examined a plethora of factors as antecedents of psychological empowerment (Koberg et al., 1999; Dimitriadis and Kufidu, 2004;

Bordin et al., 2007; Chiang and Jang, 2008), there is a research void regarding the impact of organizational identification on psychological empowerment. Further, compared to numerous empirical studies on employees' perceptions of overall psychological empowerment, relatively few authors have focused on psychological empowerment dimensions (e.g. Dimitriades and Kufidu, 2004; Ergeneli et. al., 2007; Hancer and George, 2003; Sigler and Pearson, 2000; Spreitzer et. al., 1997). The present study aimed to fill this void by examining the influence of organizational identification on both overall psychological empowerment and its dimensions.

The results demonstrated that organizational identification was positively related to both overall psychological empowerment and its dimensions (self-determination was an exception). Consequently, the present findings offer new insights providing empirical support for the proposition that organizational identification, along with other significant organization-related variables, i.e. job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior (Duckerich et al., 2002) and intrinsic motivation (van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000) constitutes an important predictor of psychological empowerment and its dimensions.

6. Limitations and Future Research

Nevertheless, the present paper presents some limitations. This study, based on data from employees working in KEP, allow us to make limited inference to other contexts. Another limitation concerns the cross – sectional analysis of the data which cannot directly assess causality. Further, because all constructs were measured with self-report questionnaires from the same employees, relationships might be inflated due to common method variance.

The previous limitations create the ground for future research. The present results could be replicated in different, both public and private contexts. A longitudinal analysis can be used to strengthen our causal relationships examined. Furthermore, the present model might be extended in order to examine the predicting role of organizational identification to other organizational constructs, such as organizational citizenship behavior and organizational commitment. Also, the adverse relationship between the four dimensions of psychological empowerment to organizational identification can be investigated. Lastly, future surveys could explore the moderating role of demographic and organizational factors, such as age, tenure and hierarchical level in the present hypotheses.

7. Managerial Implications

If organizations wish to foster psychologically empowered human resources, then the present paper offer some constructive insights to this end. The results of this study indicate that organizational identification may enhance employees' perceptions of psychological empowerment. In this regard, managers should focus on this concept and, more specifically, on management practices that will increase employees' identification with the organization. For instance, this may be achieved by enhancing the status of the organization and exhibiting its accomplishments both internally (e.g. via e-mail) and externally (e.g. newspapers, advertising) (Fuller et. al., 2006).

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