

Effect of Organization and Workgroup Identification on Attitudinal and Behavioral Factors

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Abstract

Organizational identification refers to the phenomenon in which employees identify themselves with the organization they currently work for. Although organizational identification is an important factor that influences or is influenced by other factors, employees can have a relationship with and identify their selves with various levels of societal systems. This study empirically examines whether organizational and workgroup identifications have different effects on attitudinal or behavioral factors. A stepwise regression analysis of data collected from 312 employees in Japan revealed the significant positive impact of workgroup identification on work satisfaction and pay satisfaction and the positive influence of organizational identification on organizational commitment and pay satisfaction. Workgroup identification also impacted behaviors such as organizational citizenship behavior and in-role behaviors, but the two types of identification did not influence organizational retaliatory behavior.

Keywords: organizational identification, workgroup identification, organizational commitment, work satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, organizational retaliatory behavior

Introduction

Human beings belong to various groups in society. When they identify with the group to which they belong, it is generally called social identification, which is defined as “the perception of oneness or belongingness to some human aggregate” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21). Employees also often identify with the organization they work for by absorbing its values and thinking style and tend to experience its success or failure vicariously. Here, employees’ situation is termed organizational identification, “a specific form of social identification where the individual defines him or herself in terms of their membership in a particular organization” (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p.105). Many organizational behavior (OB) researchers have paid attention to organizational

identification as one important factor affecting employees' attitudes and behaviors.

In OB research, organizational identification is relatively new, and its differences from other related technical concepts in the discipline have become a problem. In particular, the similarity to or difference from organizational commitment, which is a more familiar concept to OB researchers than organizational identification, could be problematic. This is because organizational commitment is often defined as including the element of identification with the organization, for example, as “the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979, p. 226).

However, some researchers pointed out that organizational identification differs conceptually and empirically from organizational commitment, although they are closely related. First, organizational identification is associated with self-perception, while organizational commitment is an attitude toward the entity (the organization). Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley (2008) discussed these differences as follows: “Commitment represents a positive attitude toward the organization: The self and the organization remain separate entities. In contrast, organizational identification as defined here is a perceived oneness with the organization, necessarily implicating one's self-concept” (p. 333). Furthermore, organizational identification is related to a strong enthusiasm to share the same fate as the organization. On the other hand, employees with high commitment still regard their fate as differing from that of the organization. Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley (2008) continue that “because organizational identification involves defining oneself in terms of the organization's identity, as the organization goes, so goes the individual; conversely, because commitment lacks this very visceral connection, the individual may be somewhat insulated from the organization's fate” (p. 333).

Mael and Ashforth (1992) propose four characteristics of organizational identification. First, organizational identification is a cognitive factor, not an attitudinal or behavioral one. Second, identification is relational and comparative. Human beings identify with an entity to categorize themselves differently from others in different categories. Third, identification has a role in enhancing self-esteem. Finally, perceived identification with the organization is not a yes or no question, but a matter of degree. Some employees tend to identify with the organization more than do others.

Organizational identification begins with employees separating the organization

from the society outside it, and they perceive themselves as similar to the organization and different from society. Thus, the concept is based on the idea of a simple dichotomy between the organization and others. However, a social system is composed of many subsystems, and each subsystem consists of smaller subsystems (sub-sub systems). An organization is one subsystem of a larger organizational group such as a business group and is composed of many workgroups such as departments. Each employee is not only a member of the organization but also of this workgroup. Therefore, as employees identify with the whole organization, so they might also identify with a workgroup they belong to. However, the effect of identifying with multiple entities has not yet been sufficiently examined. This study considers the organization and workgroup as two entities employees identify with and empirically examines how this identification influences various attitudinal and behavioral factors.

Empirical Research on Organizational Identification

Empirical research on organizational identification is delineated into three groups. First, some studies focused on the difference between organizational identification and related concepts such as organizational commitment. Van Knippenberg and Sleebos (2006) empirically examined the relationship between organizational identification with organizational commitment, perceived organizational support (POS), job satisfaction, turnover intention, and self-reference. These studies empirically confirmed organizational identification as a construct different from organizational commitment by showing that organizational commitment was more related to exchange-based variables between individuals and the organization such as job satisfaction and POS. They also indicated that organizational identification was more aligned with the self-referential nature of organizational membership.

Next, some researchers paid attention to the impact of organizational identification on other factors. Stinglhamber et al. (2015) collected data on organizational identification and organizational commitment at two-time points and compared the effect of one factor at time 1 on the other factor at time 2. They found that organizational identification influences organizational commitment, rather than a reverse causal relationship. Van Dick, Grojean, Christ, and Wieseke (2006) empirically examined the causal relationship between organizational identification and OCB, finding that organizational identification at time 1 significantly influenced OCB at time 2, but

OCB at time 1 did not significantly affect organizational identification at time 2. However, Feather and Rauter (2004) revealed that the impact of organizational identification on OCB was not significant after controlling respondents' age. Furthermore, Kesen (2016) confirmed the significant effect of organizational identification on individual creativity, which was partially mediated by helping and civic virtue. Also, Ma, Liu, and Liu (2014) demonstrated that the effect of procedural justice on extra-role behavior and turnover intention was fully mediated by organizational identification.

Finally, other researchers examined the impact of dispositional and individual factors on organizational identification. Johnson, Morgeson, and Hekman (2012) assumed that neurotic people would be motivated to reduce perceived uncertainty by cognitively identifying themselves with the organization, and that extraverted people would be motivated to enhance their positive feelings about themselves and affectively identify with the organization. They empirically revealed that neuroticism positively influenced cognitive identification, and extraversion positively impacted effective identification. Tanis and Beukeboom (2011) also focused on the difference between cognitive and affective identification, examining the influence of the peripheral characteristics of organizational communication on them. Furthermore, Jones and Volpe (2010) showed that the strength and structure of employees' social network directly influenced organizational identification and that this social network moderated social identity and organizational identification. Figure 1 shows the framework of research in the second and third categories above. More fixed or basic factors such as dispositional ones were selected as the antecedents of organizational identification, and attitudinal or behavioral factors were considered to be influenced by organizational identification.



Figure 1 Organizational Identification and Other Factors

Department or Work Group Identification

The discussion on organization identification is based on the assumption that

employees perceive a society dividing the organization and something else. However, actual society is not as simple. Considering the hierarchical structure of society, the organization as one system is comprised of multiple departments and workgroups as subsystems, and a large entity like a business group is a supra-system composed of multiple organizations. Employees might consider themselves members of not one organization but a larger business group. Sometimes, they might view themselves as belonging to a specific workgroup, identifying not only with the organization but also with a larger or smaller entity (Figure 2).

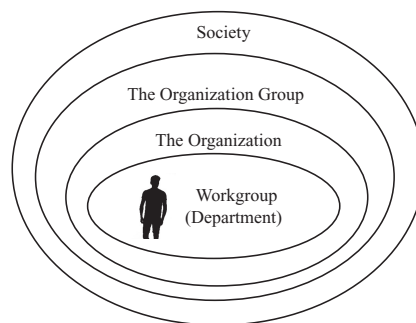


Figure 2 Hierarchical Structure of Society

For example, although their research was not on organizational identification, Benstein, Stinglhamver, and Vandenberghe (2002) conceptualized not only commitment to the organization but also commitment to the supervisor and workgroup. They showed that commitment to a local construct mediated the effect of commitment to more distal entities on OCB. Furthermore, Hui, Lee, and Rousseau (2004) noted that Chinese people tend to position themselves in a close human relationship rather than as members of the organization, explaining that “traditional Chinese people tend to approach organizations ‘thinking interpersonally’,” in contrast to the Western view of the employment relationship that is based upon ‘thinking organizationally’” (p. 233). This implies that Chinese people tend to recognize themselves as interacting with coworkers in the same workgroup and identify with this workgroup, not with those working for the organization.

Similarly, some studies simultaneously considered organizational and workgroup identification. For example, Kong and Weng (2019) distinguished organizational and workgroup identification and proposed the hypothesis that “organizational identification

played a distal role in influencing job satisfaction through workgroup identification” (p. 5). They did not, however, empirically examine this relationship. Van Dick, van Knippenberg, Kerschreiter, Hertel, and Wieseke (2008) empirically showed that job satisfaction and extra-role behavior were more enhanced when both organizational and workgroup identifications were high than when either one was high.

However, few studies have assumed and empirically examined the effect of organizational and workgroup identification on various factors. Thus, this research aimed to address this research objective.

Hypotheses

This study assumed that organizational and workgroup identification have different effects. Our hypotheses were based on the idea that organizational identification will influence employees’ attitudes and behaviors toward the whole organization, and workgroup identification will affect attitudes and behaviors toward the workgroup or department to which employees belong. For example, because the entity determining employees’ salaries is not a workgroup but the organization, satisfaction with pay is considered related to organizational identification. Similarly, as organizational commitment is an attitude toward the organization and organizational citizenship behavior for the organization (OCB-O) is behavior that contributes to that organization, it is believed they will be more influenced by organizational identification than workgroup identification.

In contrast, workgroup identification is expected to influence satisfaction with work or coworkers. Organizational citizenship behavior for individuals (OCB-I), which is behavior contributing to other members, will be more impacted by group identification because employees usually have a strong interactive relationship with others in the same workgroup.

However, it is difficult to forecast the impact of the two types of identification on organizational retaliatory behavior (ORB). Although Skarlicki and Folger (1997) developed 17 items related to ORB, they measured different aspects of these behaviors. Some items are related to behaviors toward the organization, and others measure those toward other employees. Besides, depending on organizational or national culture, some items should not be included as ORB because they are subject to formal punishment. ORB should be classified into ORB-O, which is comprised of items regarding behaviors

toward the organization, and ORB-I, which includes items relating to behaviors toward individuals. Thus, it is assumed that organizational identification will influence ORB-O, and workgroup identification will impact ORB-I.

Of the following hypotheses (H), H1 and H2 are related to attitudinal factors, and H3 and H4 to behavioral factors. Although we should assume that attitudinal factors affect behavioral factors, this study does not consider the mediating effect of attitudinal factors on organizational identification and behavior, because as noted, past studies considered the direct effect of these aspects.

H1. Organizational identification will have a positive impact on organizational commitment (H1-1) and pay satisfaction (H1-2).

H2. Workgroup identification will have a positive impact on coworker satisfaction (H2-1) and work satisfaction (H2-2).

H3. Organizational identification will have a positive impact on OCB-O (H3-1) and a negative impact on ORB-O (H3-2).

H4. Workgroup identification will have a positive impact on OCB-I (H4-1) and in-role behaviors (H4-2), and a negative impact on ORB-I (H4-3).

Figure 3 shows the hypotheses regarding the relationship of the two types of identification with attitudinal and behavioral factors. A solid line represents a positive impact and a dotted line a negative impact.

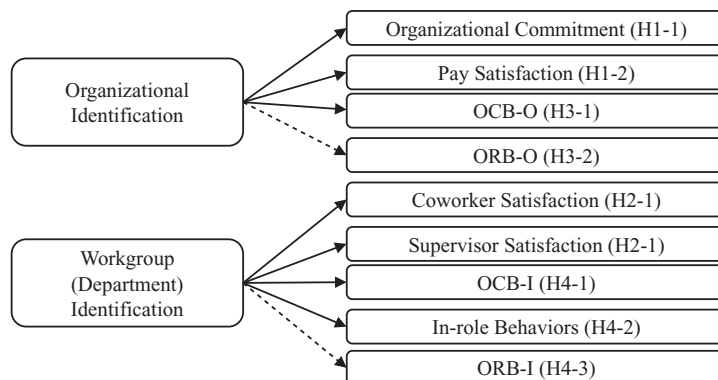


Figure 3 Hypotheses of the Study

Research Method

Sample

For this study, we utilized The Net research service of Macromill, Inc., for which

many people register as potential respondents. We asked the company to collect data from people who as regular or non-regular workers, work with someone else in their workplace. This was because we were interested in respondents' human relationships with a supervisor and coworkers, and their helping behavior in this regard. The final sample size was 312 (male: 175, female: 135). Respondents' ages varied from 20 to 65 years, and their average age was 38.23. Of the 312 respondents, 169 were married and 143 were unmarried, 178 had no children, and 134 had at least one child.

Measures

Organizational citizenship behavior for individuals (OCB-I). The seven-item OCB-I scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991) was utilized, which includes various kinds of helping behaviors toward a supervisor, coworkers, and newcomers. While we translated each item into Japanese, the expression “a personal interest in other employees” for one of the original items was changed to “empathetic to other employees,” because the former can give a false impression to Japanese. Cronbach's alpha for these 7 items was 0.825.

Organizational citizenship behavior for the organization (OCB-O). The seven-item OCB-O scale was developed by Williams and Anderson (1991). However, some items were not considered appropriate in measuring Japanese workers' contributing behaviors for the organization. First, two of the original seven items, namely “a great deal of time spent on personal phone conversations (R)” and “complaints about insignificant things at work (R)” were omitted. This was because the former was considered out of date in the current work environment, and it was considered that many Japanese workers would disagree with the latter because they would regard those who did agree with the statement as spiritually inferior. Furthermore, “take undeserved work breaks (R)” was changed to “do not take undeserved work breaks (R).” Cronbach's alpha for these 5 items was 0.704.

In-role behavior (IRB). The seven-item IRB scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991) was utilized. Cronbach's alpha for these 7 items was 0.777.

Organizational retaliatory behavior (ORB). The 17-item organizational retaliatory behavior (ORB) scale was developed by Skarlicki and Folger (1997). These 17 items can be classified into three groups. The first group is comprised of ORB toward the organization, and the second of ORB toward individuals like coworkers or a supervisor.

We termed the first variable ORB-O and the second ORB-I. The items in the third group are not appropriate for measuring the ORB of Japanese workers, because they seem punishable as a crime or subject to disciplinary action, such as “on purpose, damaged equipment or work process” and “disobeyed a supervisor’s instructions.” Therefore, ORB-O was measured using five items of the original Skarlicki and Folger (1997) scale. Exemplary items are “took supplies home without permission” and “wasted company materials.” ORB-I was measured using three items of the scale, including “gave a coworker the silent treatment” and “failed to give a coworker the required information.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.746 for the former and 0.737 for the latter.

Organizational commitment. We used the six-item overall organizational commitment scale by Marsden, Kalleberg, and Cook (1993). Considering the relatedness of Meyer and Allen’s (1997) organizational commitment classification, which is comprised of affective, normative, and continuance factors, this scale can be closely related to affective commitment. Cronbach’s alpha for the 6 items was 0.829.

Job satisfaction. Spector (1985) developed 36 items to measure 9 aspects of job satisfaction (4 items per aspect). These aspects include pay, promotion, supervision, benefit, rewards, operating procedure, coworkers, work itself, and communication. In this study, only 20 items were employed to measure satisfaction to cover the aspects of pay, supervision, co-workers, work itself, and communication. However, because good communication with coworkers is based on a good relationship with them and vice versa, eight items pertaining to coworkers and communication were combined as one variable representing coworker satisfaction. Cronbach’s alpha for each of the 4 items related to job satisfaction was 0.844 for pay satisfaction, 0.790 for supervision satisfaction, 0.743 for coworker items, and 0.755 for work itself.

Organizational identification. The six-item organizational identification scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992) was utilized. This scale, developed for teachers, used the expression “school” as the entity with which teachers identify. We changed the term “school” to “your organization” (*tsutomesaki* in Japanese) for our purposes. Cronbach’s alpha for the 6 items was 0.724.

Group identification. No study that we know of developed a scale to measure group identification. Thus, the six-item organizational identification scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992) was employed. We changed the term “school” in the original scale to “the department or team to which you belong.” Cronbach’s alpha for the 6 items was 0.799.

Gender. Although gender was not associated with our hypotheses, this important variable was added to control its effect on the regression analysis (male = 1, female =2).

Result

Basic Statistics

Table 1 shows the basic statistics (means and standard deviations) and inter-correlations among variables. As indicated, both organizational and workgroup identification have significant correlations with OCB-I and in-role behaviors as expected. However, no significant correlations between the two identification variables and two ORB variables were found. Although the reason for this unexpected result remains unclear, ORB benefits employees in some way, and their motivations to engage in these behaviors could be associated more with their attitudinal or dispositional factors than their self-perception. For example, gender has significant negative correlations with ORB-O and ORB-I, but no significant correlations with organizational and workgroup identification. This implies some relationship between dispositional factors and ORB. Finally, the relationships of the two identification variables with attitudinal factors were as expected, and all but one correlation were significantly positive.

Table 1 Basic Statistics and Inter-correlations among Variables

variables	means	std. dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Gender	1.430	0.496	—					
2 OCBI	3.609	0.671	0.128*	(0.825)				
3 OCBO	4.008	0.643	0.177**	0.559**	(0.704)			
4 IRB	3.741	0.652	0.040	0.579**	0.616**	(0.777)		
5 ORBO	1.903	0.730	-0.183**	-0.282**	-0.422**	-0.404**	(0.746)	
6 ORBI	1.968	0.821	-0.242**	-0.281**	-0.253**	-0.307**	0.580**	(0.737)
7 OC	2.684	0.793	-0.162**	-0.143*	0.027	0.182**	-0.085	-0.151**
8 WS	3.149	0.906	-0.069	0.269**	0.135*	0.388**	-0.150**	-0.179**
9 PS	2.673	0.944	-0.179**	-0.027	-0.032	-0.049	-0.029	-0.091
10 SS	3.183	0.901	-0.111	0.075	0.050	0.149**	-0.092	-0.316**
11 CS	3.203	0.665	-0.005	0.219**	0.085	0.229**	-0.161**	-0.362**
12 OI	2.904	0.736	-0.094	0.237**	0.117*	0.232**	0.053	0.073
13 GI	3.097	0.797	-0.021	0.308**	0.212**	0.320**	-0.067	-0.022

N = 312, **: p < 0.01, * : p < 0.05

OC: organizational commitment, WS: work satisfaction, PS: pay satisfaction, SS: supervisor satisfaction, CS: coworker satisfaction, OI: organizational identification, GI: workgroup identification

variables	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Gender							
2 OCBI							
3 OCBO							
4 IRB							
5 ORBO							
6 ORBI							
7 OC	(0.724)						
8 WS	0.627**	(0.755)					
9 PS	0.493**	0.347**	(0.844)				
10 SS	0.473**	0.368**	0.353**	(0.790)			
11 CS	0.548**	0.454**	0.346**	0.583**	(0.743)		
12 OI	0.372**	0.320**	0.189**	0.089	0.151**	(0.724)	
13 GI	0.334**	0.363**	0.150**	0.220**	0.228**	0.771**	(0.799)

Hypotheses Testing

In this study, simple stepwise regression analysis with organizational and workgroup identification as the independent variables was adopted to test the hypotheses. Stepwise regression analysis was considered appropriate because the correlation between the two identification variables was high ($\gamma = 0.771$, $p < 0.01$). Gender was also added to the equation as an independent factor to control its effect on the dependent variables. As dependent variables, four attitudinal and five behavioral factors were respectively considered.

First, Table 2 depicts the results using attitudinal factors as the dependent variables. Organizational identification had a significant positive impact on organizational commitment and pay satisfaction at the 0.1% significance level, supporting H1-1 and H1-2. Also, coworker satisfaction and work satisfaction were positively influenced by workgroup identification at the 0.1% significance level, supporting H2-1 and H2-2.

Table 2 Results of the Regression Analysis with Attitudinal Factors as Dependent Variables

dependent variables -> independent variables	organizational commitment			coworker satisfaction			work satisfaction			pay satisfaction		
	beta	t-value	p	beta	t-value	p	beta	t-value	p	beta	t-value	p
gender	-0.128	-0.128	0.015							-0.163	-2.943	0.002
organizational identification	0.36	6.843	<0.001							0.174	3.136	<0.001
workgroup identification				0.228	4.12	<0.001	0.363	6.862	<0.001			
F-value		28.205	<0.001		16.976	<0.001		47.088	<0.001		10.206	<0.001

Next, Table 3 displays the results of the stepwise regression analysis using behavioral variables as the dependent variables. The table shows that workgroup identification impacts both OCB-I, OCB-O, and in-role behaviors. The significant positive impacts of workgroup identification on OCB-I and in-role behaviors were as expected, supporting H4-1 and H4-2. However, although we hypothesized that organizational identification would impact OCB-O, the results indicate that OCB-O is also positively influenced by workgroup identification at the 0.1% significance level. This means that H3-1 is not supported. Unfortunately, both ORB-O and ORB-I were only significantly impacted by gender. Neither organizational nor workgroup identification affected these two ORB factors. This result was anticipated based on the correlation analysis, which showed no significant correlations between the two types of identification and ORB. As such, H3-2 and H4-3 were not supported by the results of this study.

Table 3 Results of the Regression Analysis with Behavioral Factors as Dependent Variables

dependent variables -> independent variables	OCBI			OCBO			In-role behavior			ORBO			ORBI		
	beta	t-value	p	beta	t-value	p	beta	t-value	p	beta	t-value	p	beta	t-value	p
gender	0.135	2.518	0.012	0.182	3.324	0.001				-0.183	-3.280	<0.001	-0.242	-4.395	<0.001
organizational identification															
workgroup identification	0.611	5.804	<0.001	0.216	3.958	<0.001	0.32	5.949	<0.001						
F-value	19.716 <0.001			13.091 <0.001			35.558 <0.001			10.760 0.001			19.314 <0.001		

Discussion

This study tried to examine the different effects of the two types of identification on different factors. Although hypotheses on the effects on attitudinal factors were supported, the following two points contrast our hypotheses on the effects on behavioral factors.

1. Workgroup identification always has a stronger effect on desirable behaviors such as OCB-I, OCB-O, and in-role behaviors than organizational identification.

2. Neither organizational nor workgroup identification significantly impact ORB-O and ORB-I.

Regarding the first point, although we initially believed OCB-O would be more influenced by organizational identification, this was not empirically found. This study

utilized the data collected from Japanese people employed in organizations in Japan. As Hui et al. (2004) explained regarding Chinese characteristics, the Japanese also emphasize relationships with closed coworkers in the same workgroup, not those with the whole organization, even in terms of organizational behavior.

The second point can be attributed to the characteristics of ORB. Although conceptually ORB contrasts OCB, motivation for ORB is not always opposed to OCB. Because some OCBs are emotionally or physically taxing behaviors, they must be motivated by attitudinal or perceptual factors. However, ORB is a modest wrong behavior that employees benefit from, and might not simply increase when satisfaction with something or identification with some entity is low. Rather, as with the significant effect of gender on ORB, certain dispositional or personality factors might have a greater effect on ORB. However, this is merely inferred, and a future study should confirm this relationship.

Conclusion

Organizational identification is a relatively new concept to which OB researchers pay attention as an important factor influencing or being influenced by employees' attitudes and behaviors. Employees, especially those in large-scale organizations, do not always identify with the whole organization. This study distinguished identification with the whole organization and that with a workgroup, and empirically examined the different effects of these two types of identification on various factors.

However, the dichotomy between the organization and workgroup might not be sufficient to analyze the effect of identification, as real society is more complicated. Regarding organizational groups, the organization, a department, and team, future studies should determine the effects of identification with each of these entities on various factors.

Furthermore, while all items and scales employed in this study were based on past OB studies, they were not based on the hierarchical structure of society and vary from the assumptions of this study. For example, "help a coworker in need," a typical OCB-I item does not specify who the coworker is. "Help a coworker working with you in the same team" and "help any coworker in the organization" might impact the types of identification in different ways. Establishing the items and scale based on the hierarchical structure of society is an important task for future research.

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