

Summary of Research Project – Peter Lee

Research Motivation & Question

My main area of interest is social identification and disidentification within organizations and work groups. Researchers have defined organizational identification in several ways but they all agree that organizational identification involves an integration of the identity of a social referent into an individual's self-concept. Organizational identification is a dynamic process that asks "How do I come to know myself in relation to the organization?". But what happens when an individual disengages from some or all of an organization's identity claims? For organizational members, disidentification may take the form of an outright rejection of the organization's mission, values, or culture. An organizationally-disidentified member would engage in an active separation of her/his organization and her/himself. S/he may withhold the name of the organization at social gatherings. For example, a non-smoker working for a tobacco company may find that she discusses aspects of her job, but not necessarily the company; alternatively, she may fail the "pronoun test": whether she uses "we" and "us" versus "they" and "them" to describe the organization. Furthermore, there may be situations where an individual disidentifies with an organization but still continues to remain with the organization, not due to continuance or normative commitment, but due to identification with a lower-level social referent, such as the work group. For example, an accountant who works for a marketing company may identify more strongly with her fellow accountants than with other co-workers.

Group-level identification provides a fruitful area to extend organizational disidentification research. While many early researchers took the group into account, recent research has ignored the group, focusing instead on the organization as the key target for identification. Many studies conducted in social psychology view the group as the social referent when investigating identification; indeed, the terminology used indicates the importance of the group, i.e. “in-group”, “out-group”. Thus, bringing the work group back into the research question will generate new insights, particularly in the area of disidentification.

Thus, my research aims to explore possible moderating effects of work group identification on organizational disidentification while also paying attention to cross-level effects on these cognitive processes. This will build on my paper which will be presented at this year’s Academy of Management conference in Atlanta.

Propositions

The following propositions are based on the paper to be presented at AOM 2006. In that paper, I have developed a cross-level model exploring the moderating effects of work group identification on organizational disidentification and organizational commitment. They are as follows:

Proposition 1	All other things being equal, organizational disidentification will have a negative effect on organizational commitment.
Proposition 2a	The greater the perceived deterioration in an organization’s reputation, the higher the likelihood of organizational disidentification.
Proposition 2b	The more an organization sends mixed messages about itself to its various stakeholders, the higher the likelihood of organizational disidentification.
Proposition 2c	The greater the incongruence between an organization’s espoused values and beliefs and the focal individual’s values and beliefs, the higher the likelihood of organizational disidentification.
Proposition 3	The higher the level of work group identification, the lower the

	likelihood that organizational disidentification will reduce organizational commitment.
Proposition 4a	Higher need for affiliation by an individual will strengthen work group identification.
Proposition 4b	Higher need for self-enhancement by an individual will strengthen work group identification.
Proposition 4c	Higher need for self-distinctiveness by an individual will strengthen work group identification.
Proposition 4d	Higher need for self-continuity by an individual will strengthen work group identification.
Proposition 4e	Stronger work group identification, facilitated through higher needs for affiliation, self-enhancement, self-distinctiveness, and self-continuity, will have a stronger moderating effect on the relationship between organizational disidentification and commitment.
Proposition 5a	Greater task interdependence among work group members will strengthen work group identification.
Proposition 5b	Greater goal interdependence among work group members will strengthen work group identification.
Proposition 5c	Work groups that better balance the opposing needs for assimilation and differentiation (i.e. optimal distinctiveness) will strengthen work group identification.
Proposition 5d	Work groups that better balance issues between coordination and resource availability through optimal group size will strengthen work group identification.
Proposition 5e	Stronger work group identification, facilitated through greater task interdependence, greater goal interdependence, balanced optimal distinctiveness, and optimal group size, will have a stronger moderating effect on the relationship between organizational disidentification and commitment.
Proposition 6	Incongruence between an organization's espoused values and beliefs and those of the individual will strengthen work group identification.

Proposed Method(s)

The conceptualization of the model lends itself to following a positivist orientation. Therefore, surveys will comprise the main data collection method. However, other data collection methods, such as scenario studies and experiments, have not been ruled out. Surveys were chosen because it was my aim to study these phenomena in an organizational setting that incorporates the extensive use of cross-functional teams.

Moreover, studying work group and organizational identification in an organization provides greater external validity and hence, generalizability of my results. My hope is to test my model in several organizations. Lastly, creating a work group and organizational setting in an experiment may prove to be wrought with difficulties.