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Why organizational identification ‘matters’ as a communication variable: A state-of-the-art review of past, present, and future trends

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the area of identification from an organizational communication perspective. In so doing, the author attempts to achieve three major goals. First is an examination of the concept of organizational identification, where the author examines what this concept means, how scholars have defined this concept, how both the definition and nature of identification have changed over the past several decades, and why both scholars and practitioners should be interested in issues of identification. Second, the author examines how scholars have studied issues of identification and how, methodologically, there seems to have been a shift in how one uncovers employee identification with one or more organizational targets (e.g. profession, organization, department, team). Finally, the author concludes with a detailed analysis of several gaps in the area of organizational identification as represented within the literature, as well as suggestions for future research and how the nature of organizations has perhaps forced scholars to re-think, re-conceptualize, and re-model what it truly means for an employee to “become identified.”

Nearly four decades ago Redding (1966) posed a question that has since received much attention and consideration within the literature: why does the study of organizations and organizing so often neglect the impact and power of communication? In fact, several scholars have argued that the study of organizational communication began as an attempt to provide both theoretically and empirically sound answers to this query (see, for example, Redding & Tompkins, 1987; Tompkins, 1984; Wiio, Goldhaber, & Yates, 1980). After this initial call to focus research more heavily on communication within organizations, an influx of publications accrued, as becomes evident in both reviews of the literature (e.g. Daly & Korinek, 1982; Deetz, 1997; Jablin, 1987) and meta-analyses (e.g. Allen, Gotcher, & Seibert, 1993; Greenbaum, Hellweg, & Facione, 1998). Based on the extant literature scholars are certainly in the position to argue in favor of Redding’s (1985) proposition that the field of organizational communication has, in fact, become “crystallized” (p. 50).

As the aforementioned literature explains, the field has certainly flourished over the years, especially in such areas as organizational socialization, social network analysis, superior/subordinate communication, organizational climate, organizational culture, power, decision-making, information flow, and technology (see Allen, Gotcher, & Seibert, 1993, for an extensive review of these areas). The purpose of this paper is to

describe another organizational communication phenomenon that has received noticeable attention, especially over the past two decades: organizational identification. As such, the present analysis will comprise four major sections. First, a discussion concerning the historical development of this area is presented, with particular emphasis on (a) major results and key findings from the last three decades of empirical endeavors, (b) major changes within the literature over the past 30 years, and (c) major theoretical orientations. This will be followed by a review of common methodologies used to study organizational identification, as well as how these methodologies have changed over time. Next, the current gaps in the literature are presented and future directions for the study of organizational identification research are suggested. The paper concludes with a final commentary on the study of organizational identification, promoting the importance of continued research in this area.

Historical Development

Although definitional variations exist for the concept of identification, this idea refers to “the extent to which the individual accepts the values and goals of an organization as his own and, therefore, becomes emotionally committed to the organization” (Schneider, Hall, & Nygren, 1971, p. 397). A review of the literature indicates that scholars over the years have re-defined this concept in an effort to include other salient variables. For example, organizational identification has been considered (a) the active process whereby one’s individual goals and the goals of the organization become mutually negotiated (e.g. Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Scott & Lane, 2000), (b) a way of defining oneself in terms of an organization (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Burke, 1966; Cheney, 1983), (c) a tactic to gain organizational membership (e.g. Rousseau, 1998; Russo, 1998; Sass & Canary, 1991), (d) one part of the organizational socialization process (e.g. Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Rousseau, 1998; Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998), and (e) a way of establishing organizational loyalty and commitment (e.g. Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Rousseau, 1998; Zhaniuk & Levine, 2000). No matter which definition or perspective one takes, organizational identification is most aptly viewed as the extent to which one’s individual identity and the identity of the organization mutually and positively coincide or overlap.

Despite the notion that the study of organizational identification from a communicative perspective was sparked by Cheney’s (1982) study of a Fortune 500 company (see Gautam, Van Dick, & Wagner, 2004; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Scott, 1997), the formal investigation of this area had its major spark in the latter part of the 1960s and the 1970s. This “early” research was not conducted by communication scholars. Rather, it was conducted by academics within the fields of organizational psychology, organizational behavior, administrative science, and management. As such, the focus of such research was more antecedent-based (why individuals might want to identify with their organization) and less outcome-based or process-based (the likely effects of strong identification on individual performance/organizational effectiveness and how individuals

become identified with their organization). Although Kagan (1958) clearly underscored the importance of studying the process and effect(s) of identification, as well as how individual differences might play a role in understanding both (p. 297), early studies neglect the former with a preoccupation with the latter. Several empirical investigations support this notion.

For example, Hall and Schneider (1972) found that job challenge, tenure, commitment, and need for attachment are all positively correlated with one's level of organizational identification. However, since "process" was not a key variable in this study, the authors conclude that organizational identification is likely to occur when "some 'right type' of person... enter[s] an organization (through selection and recruitment) and [is] ready to identify with it" (Hall & Schneider, 1972, p. 349). Hypothesizing that individuals will identify with an organization to the extent that certain personal needs are fulfilled, Brown (1969) found that strong identification with one's organization was a function of such variables as (a) opportunity for achievement, (b) membership in the social structure, (c) possibility for promotion, (d) participation within the organization, and (e) cohesiveness with the organization. Results from other studies conducted during this era indicate that tenure with an organization is a stronger predictor of identification than status or position (Hall et al., 1970); that organizational identification is positively correlated with job challenge and job involvement (Schneider, Hall, & Nygren, 1971); that high organizational and occupational prestige both lead to an increased level of identification with one's organization (Lee, 1969); that strong identification does not necessarily lead to increased effectiveness or creativity (Rotondi, 1975); that role conflict and feelings of alienation are likely to appear when one's occupational identification is stronger than one's organizational identification (Greene, 1978); and, finally, that one's satisfaction with his/her organization, profession, and job, coupled with the prestige of the organization, leads to greater levels of identification on behalf of the employee.

Again, this discussion indicates that scholars were initially interested in understanding the variables that predict organizational identification, rather than the process by which identification transpires or the impact that identification might have on organizational behavior. The foregoing empirical and theoretical results, however, must not be devalued nor underemphasized. The utility of these studies lies in their ability to expand upon the idea of organizational identification, especially clarifying antecedents such as prestige, tenure, cohesion, opportunity, and satisfaction. However, although this research certainly expanded both the body and wealth of knowledge, the lack of focus on both process and effect seemed to create a puzzle with many missing pieces. Kagan (1958) clearly saw the need for both process-oriented and outcome-oriented studies of identification and this call was answered, to a large extent, by organizational communication scholars. This change in focus was brought about following the realization that identification can best be viewed as communicative in nature. In other words, it is through human communication and social interaction that one creates/constructs an identity, and subsequently begins to identify with one's organization. Kuhn and Nelson (2002) support this notion when they

argue that identification “refers to communicative acts illustrative of one’s attachment to one or more identity structures” (p. 7). Because organizational identification is considered a social, rhetorical, discursive process (see Cheney & Tompkins, 1987) it is not surprising that this topic is well represented and documented within the communication literature. Whereas scholars emanating from fields such as management and administrative science consider identification as more passive (e.g. Hall & Schneider, 1972), communication researchers argue that identification is a process whereby employees purposively and actively create, recreate, and ultimately adopt an organizational identity that is congruous with their personal identity. In fact, it is this congruity that lends credence to Burke’s (1966) idea of the corporate “we.”

In his oft-cited research dealing with organizational identification, Cheney (1982) indicated that studying this phenomenon from both a process and product perspective would be most profitable. Studying process involves gaining a clearer understanding of the tactics that organizations (especially those in management positions) use to increase one’s level of identification, including “oral directives, bulletins, hand-books and house organs...and personnel selection, promotion, socialization, and training” (Cheney, 1982, p. 197). In other words, it is analyzing the process by which one’s personal identity becomes enmeshed with one’s organizational identity (see, for example, Zdaniuk & Levine, 2001). Research indicates, for example, that the process of identification occurs through organization-wide communication (Scott et al., 1999), through the realization of perceived similarity in organizational values, norms, and goals (Gautam, et al., 2004), through participation in decision-making (Sass & Canary, 1991), through affective attachment to an organization (Russo, 1998), and through the process of self categorization (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Studying identification as a product, on the other hand, involves the assessment of identification as a consequence of assimilation, adaptation, formal structure, and organizational culture. Thus, and according to Cheney (1982), this product perspective views identification as a desired end-state, or something that results from certain organizational processes and is made salient through reification. According to Cheney (1982), the product of identification can best be explained as one’s attitude or belief that his/her own set of values and the values set forth by an organization are, in large part, analogous (p. 198).

In the end, Cheney’s (1982) main thesis is that organizational identification can be viewed, concomitantly, as a product and a process, and this claim has been supported in subsequent research (e.g. Cheney, 1983; Cheney & Tompkins, 1987; Russo, 1998). According to these scholars, it is a process insofar as organizational members actively and socially identify through human interaction. It is a product inasmuch as identification is the result of, for example, a need for affiliation (see Hogg & Terry, 2000), a need for sense-making (see Scott & Lane, 2000; Weick, 1995), and a need for organizational membership (see Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Cheney and Tompkins (1987) summarize this idea quite well when they contend that “we gain greater understanding of identification as a process and as a product – how it tells its own story and how it is manifested in the

form of concrete decisions, behaviors, and commitments” (p. 6). Based on this discussion, communication scholars interested in organizational processes seemed to pick up where management scholars left off by studying not only the antecedents of identification, but also the process by which this identification occurs.

Finally, organizational communication scholars became interested in understanding the effect(s) that strong identification might have for both the individual employee and the organization at large. That is, although researchers gained a deeper comprehension of both the antecedents to, and processes associated with, organizational identification, there was a pressing need to better understand how strong identification on behalf of the employee would somehow be beneficial. As Cheney and Tompkins (1987) posit, “the individual’s linkage to organizations and institutions should be viewed and questioned both in terms of the perspective of the individual (how he/she is variously defined) and the perspective of the organization (how collectivities are related to one another and to their individual members)” (p. 12). From an organizational, macro-level perspective, organizations strive to have their employees identify with them (e.g. Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000; Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Grice, Paulsen, & Jones, 2002). In fact, prior studies have found a positive correlation between organizational identification and organizational effectiveness (Cheney, 1982; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Scott & Lane, 2000), employee motivation (Cheney, 1983; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Scott & Lane, 2000), goal achievement (Cheney, 1983; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Scott & Lane, 2000), employee satisfaction (Rousseau, 1998), and organizational commitment (Russo, 1998; Sass & Canary, 1991; Zdaniuk & Levine, 2001). From an individual, micro-level perspective, employees strive to identify with their organization in an effort to enhance self-esteem (Mael & Ashforth, 2001), to acquire an organizational personality (Cheney, 1982; Cheney, 1983), to identify themselves as part of an established institution (Scott & Lane, 2000), to define their role within the organization (Cheney, 1982; Rousseau, 1998), to decrease organizational ambiguity and cognitive dissonance (Weick, 1995), and to become part of the in-group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). One can see why there exists a desire, for both the organization and the employee, to have a strongly identified workforce.

The results from, and implications of, all of the studies mentioned so far, whether conducted by management, organizational behavior, administrative science, or communication scholars, provide the major theoretical driving force necessary for identification research. The theory behind this concept, in short, is that there are certain antecedents that are predictive of organizational identification, including, though not limited to, (a) participation within the organization (Brown, 1969), (b) increased tenure (Hall & Schneider, 1972), (c) increased job involvement (Schneider et al., 1971), (d) increased organizational prestige (Lee, 1969), and (e) membership in the organization’s internal social structure (Brown, 1969). The theory also dictates that there are certain processes that aid an individual throughout this identification process, including (a) socialization and assimilation (Cheney, 1982), (b) organization-wide communication

(Scott et al., 1999), (c) participation and active involvement in organizational decision-making (Sass & Canary, 1991), (d) the search for an organizational identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), and (e) the reconciliation of multiple, and perhaps conflicting, social identities (Grice et al., 2002). Finally, there are also a number of effects that result from strong identification with one's organization. For example, the stronger one's identification with his/her organization, the more likely this individual will be to (a) increase his/her sense of organizational belonging (Mael & Ashforth, 2001), (b) make decisions based on the best interest of the organization (Cheney, 1982), (c) act in accordance with the values and beliefs set forth by the organization (Gautam et al., 2004), (d) be committed to the organization (Sass & Canary, 1991), (e) become part of a cohesive network (Hogg & Terry, 2000), (f) act loyally toward other employees within the organization (Zdaniuk & Levine, 2001), and (g) enhance his/her self esteem (Mael & Ashforth, 2001).

The theory, therefore, can be stated as follows: certain antecedents predict that an employee will identify with his/her organization; certain internal, communication-based processes facilitate the development of such identification; and strong identification with an organization will lead to both individual-level and organization-wide benefits. Thus, this theory emanates not only from the more antecedent-based research of the 1960s and 1970s, but also from the more process-oriented and effects-oriented research that took place in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. This theory provides researchers with a useful and valid framework by which to conduct empirical investigations, and is among the reasons that organizational identification has become one of the more salient issues on the organizational communication scholars' research agenda (see, for example, Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004).

In sum, the systematic investigation of organizational identification has its main roots in the management, administrative science, and organizational behavior literatures, where scholars' main interests were in discovering antecedents to this phenomenon. Both theoretical and empirical analyses during the 1960s and 1970s increased our knowledge of, appreciation for, and interest in, what had become known as organizational (or institutional) identification. This interest/appreciation has yet to disappear and has, in fact, only grown stronger. Based on a review of material published over the past several decades, it is evident that the scholarly literature is replete with studies related to the issues addressed above. Furthermore, scholars have gained more solid and plausible answers to three important questions: why might an employee have the motivation to identify with his or her organization? What is the underlying process by which employees become identified with their organization? What are the ultimate effects, from both micro and macro level perspectives, of strong identification on behalf of the employee? Although several areas within the realm of organizational identification certainly need both theoretical and empirical elaboration, which will be discussed in the concluding section of this paper, scholars have certainly come a long way, as evidenced by the

amount of published material entering the journals since the increased popularity of this topic some 40 years ago.

Issues of Methodology

The previous discussion clearly illustrates how both issues and theoretical orientations, as they relate to the study of organizational identification, have changed over the years. However, change in direction, scope, and magnitude should not be seen as a negative attribute of the research process. Rather, it is just the opposite. It is change that ultimately allowed for the construction of a more concrete, more parsimonious, more heuristic theoretical model. It also becomes apparent, based on a review of the extant literature, that the methodologies used to empirically examine issues of organizational identification have not remained stagnant. They, too, have changed over the past several decades. The purpose of this section is to highlight the change in methodology that took place as a result of Cheney's (1982) study and how the development of a new quantitative tool has provided unprecedented results.

Early management and organizational behavior scholars made the assumption that identification could be considered a function of such variables as commitment (Lee, 1971), loyalty (Rotondi, 1975), job satisfaction (Lee, 1971) and pride (Schneider et al., 1971). This was largely a result of the original questionnaire used for the majority of research endeavors at the time, created by Patchen (1970), which was considered merely a fusion of the aforementioned phenomena. As Rotondi (1975) argues, "the items measuring organizational identification [reflect] Patchen's view of organizational identification as a composite of similarity, membership, and loyalty components, with loyalty being determined by support of organizational policies and a desire to remain with the employing organization" (p. 893). Therefore, the first major concern among scholars was whether or not identification could be considered, for both theoretical and empirical purposes, as the amalgamation of several other organizational phenomena or concepts.

A second source of confusion dealt with the relationship among organizational commitment, organizational identification, and organizational satisfaction. For example, were these different terms used to describe the same phenomenon? Are organizational satisfaction scales, for instance, concurrently measuring organizational identification as well? To illustrate this uncertainty, some scholars believed that results from Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian's (1974) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire could explain one's identification with his/her organization (see Gautam et al., 2004), assuming that commitment and identification are analogous in nature. The thinking was that a high level of commitment necessarily translates into a high level of identification. Although scholars are now convinced that commitment and identification are separate phenomena (see Gautam et al., 2004; Meyer & Allen, 1991), Buchanan's (1974) definition of organizational commitment is likely what created this confusion. According to Buchanan (1974), organizational commitment is viewed as "a partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of the organization, to one's role in relation to goals and values, and to

the organization for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental worth” (p. 533). This is strikingly similar to many of the definitions of organizational identification, especially that offered by Schneider et al. (1971). Therefore, scholars debated about whether or not identification and commitment might be considered one and the same, at least conceptually speaking. Another example is the fact that conclusive remarks relating to organizational identification are offered based on results from scales assessing organizational satisfaction (see Lee, 1969). That is, scholars also believed that satisfaction could be considered synonymous with identification, rather than a predictor or outcome of it. High levels of satisfaction, therefore, would translate directly into high levels of identification. As Lee (1969) argues, “the reason for the lack of research in organizational identification seems to be that it is assumed to be synonymous with job satisfaction” (p. 327).

It becomes evident that scholars in this area were not only perplexed about what this concept of identification entailed, but also how to best measure it. As such, several questions were ultimately posed. For example, can identification be considered a combination of commitment, loyalty, pride, and satisfaction? If so, how can one best empirically assess this phenomenon? Should identification be considered different from commitment and satisfaction? It was Patchen (1970) who provided convincing answers to these important questions.

Although numerous methodological critiques relating to identification surfaced during the 1960s and 1970s (see, for example, Brown, 1969; Hall et al., 1970; Rotondi, 1975), similar in nature to the previous discussion, it was, in the end, Patchen’s (1970) questionnaire that guided early empirical investigations. This empirical tool included such items as membership, loyalty, similarity, and attitudes not to determine certain antecedents to, or effects of, organizational identification, but rather identification itself. That is, this scholar saw the combination of commitment, loyalty, pride, and satisfaction as a fruitful tactic for assessing one’s identification with the organization. As such, Patchen (1970) created an attitude-based questionnaire that assessed similarity (employees working together toward the same organizational goals), membership (pride in being a member of the organization), and loyalty (support of the organization’s policies and desire to stay a part of the organization) (see Gautam et al.; Rotondi, 1975). The questionnaire consisted of a five-point Likert scale, ranging from favorable to unfavorable, and asked subjects to indicate similarity to (e.g. my goals and the goals of the organization seem to be one and the same), membership in (e.g. I am proud to be a member of my organization), and loyalty to (e.g. I plan to spend my career with this organization) their organization.

The major thinking was that attitude scores could combine to create an overall level of identification with one’s organization (see Patchen, 1970). This is exactly what the assessment tool enabled researchers to do and, as a result, was used to study issues of organizational identification throughout the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, until

Cheney (1982) revised and expanded it. It now becomes evident that the early management and administrative science scholars were correct in assuming that such variables as loyalty, job satisfaction, and pride could all combine to describe organizational identification, though incorrect in assuming that commitment, satisfaction, and identification are all synonymous (see, for example, Gautam et al., 2004). Patchen's (1970) questionnaire, which enables one to assess issues of similarity, membership, and loyalty, creating an overall measure of organizational identification (not commitment or satisfaction), provides such evidence.

Although Patchen's (1970) questionnaire helped to establish a way to empirically investigate organizational identification, Cheney (1982) decided to expand upon it, not only increasing the number of survey items, but also including an additional variable: attachment. Thus, as explicated well in Gautam et al.'s (2004) discussion of what has now become known as the Organizational Identification Questionnaire, Cheney's (1982) version included an assessment of "feelings of attachment, belonging, and pride in being an organizational member, loyalty to the organization and support of the organization's goals, and perceived similarity between employees and the organization in terms of shared values and goals" (Gautam et al., 2004, p. 302). Some of the statements that appear in this questionnaire include: (a) in general, the people employed by my organization are working toward the same goals, (b) I find that my values and the values of my organization are very similar, (c) I have a lot in common with others employed by my organization, (d) I really care about the fate of my organization, (e) I am proud to be an employee in my organization, (f) I become irritated when I hear others outside my organization criticize the company, and (g) I try to make on-the-job decisions by considering the consequences of my actions for the organization (Cheney, 1982, pp. 220-226). Although the questionnaire contains a total of 25 items, these seven examples illustrate the overall nature of the statements, each of which provides the subject with a seven-point Likert Scale, ranging from very strongly agree to very strongly disagree. Many studies assessing organizational identification have used Cheney's (1982) scale and scholars report considerably and consistently high levels of reliability. For example, alpha coefficients of .96 (Potvin, 1992), .95 (Cheney, 1983), .94 (Bullis, 1984; Bullis & Bach, 1989), .92 (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004), and .91 (Russo, 1998) have been reported in the literature.

Since the introduction of Cheney's (1982) Organizational Identification Questionnaire, variations have been created for studying this issue in various contexts (see, for example, Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Russo, 1998). Perhaps most notable is the scale developed by Scott (1997), which assessed multiple targets of identification within the organizational setting. The idea that an employee can identify with targets other than the macro-level organization has appealed to scholars since the "early" identification studies (e.g. Greene, 1978; Hall & Schneider, 1972; Lee, 1969). That is, these scholars were interested in understanding whether and to what extent (a) identification with multiple targets (e.g. the organization, the occupation, the work group) can occur

simultaneously and (b) identification with multiple targets creates conflict for both the individual and the organization. However, an appropriate, reliable, and valid tool to assess these multiple targets was not readily available until Scott's (1997) pioneering effort to expand Cheney's (1982) questionnaire. Scott's (1997) survey consists of 36 statements, with a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Some of the statements include the following: (a) when I make job-related decisions, I think about how my decisions will affect my profession's success (professional/occupational identification), (b) I don't like working with my area office (work group identification), (c) I am proud to be a member of my organization (organizational identification), (d) I am proud to be a member of this profession (occupational identification), (e) I am willing to put in extra effort in order to help my county office be successful (work group identification), and (f) I don't like to hear others criticize my organization (organizational identification).

The construction of this questionnaire has led to an impressive body of literature devoted to analyzing the various, and possibly confounding, targets of employee identification (e.g. Grice et al., 2002; Larson & Pepper, 2003; Pratt & Foreman, 2000). As Scott et al. (1998) conclude within their analysis, there are four prevalent targets with which organizational members can identify: the individual (consisting of one's personal interests and personal characteristics), the work group (the adoption of a team's identity), the organization (coming to identify with the organization at large), and the occupation (identification with one's job role) (pp. 311-314). Thus, employees have various targets of identification available, ranging from the micro level (individual, work group, team) to the macro level (the organization, occupation). Scott et al. (1998) truly urge scholars to incorporate this idea of multiple targets of identification into their research agendas.

Finally, a discussion about methodology would be remiss without mentioning the importance of qualitative research. As Cheney (1982) argues, in-depth interviews are necessary to gain a clearer understanding of organizational identification as a process. That is, although quantitative measures can elucidate strength of identification, as well as antecedents to and effects of identification, the Organizational Identification Questionnaire does not adequately assess the process by which an employee comes to identify with his/her profession, organization, department, or work team. As such, Cheney's (1982) use of in-depth interviewing allowed him to better understand (a) how employees come to accept the values and goals of the organization as their own, (b) how employees consider the fate of the organization when engaged in the decision making process, and (c) how employees come to identify with more than one target and the impact that multiple identifications might have on organizational communication practices. In his final write-up, Cheney (1982) argued that "although the two methods [qualitative and quantitative] were 'triangulated' in the study of a single phenomenon, the stress was on the interview as a means of 'tapping' some of the process aspects of organizational identification" (p. xiii). Thus, the results from Cheney's (1982) interviews shed light on issues that could not be assessed merely through the use of a survey.

Although some scholars have incorporated the use of qualitative methodologies to study organizational identification (see, for example, Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Russo, 1998; Scott et al., 1999), the great majority of research still relies solely on the use of the Organizational Identification Questionnaire. The dearth of research using this triangulation, despite Cheney's (1982) call to do so, is likely the reason that there still remains an extremely heavy emphasis on the product of identification rather than its process.

In sum, this section helps to explain the evolution of the methodologies used to empirically examine organizational identification. Patchen's (1970) questionnaire was created in an effort to systematically assess one's level of organizational identification (as the aggregation of similarity, membership and loyalty), as well as differentiate the idea of organizational identification from both organizational commitment and satisfaction. Cheney (1982) decided to expand upon Patchen's (1970) questionnaire to include additional items, including those that assessed organizational attachment. Cheney (1982) also argued for the inclusion of a qualitative methodology (in-depth interviews) to better understand the process(es) involved in organizational identification. Finally, Scott's (1997) adaptation of Cheney's (1982) questionnaire enabled scholars to empirically analyze multiple targets of identification, ranging from the micro-level (individual) to the more macro-level (organizational, institutional, occupational). Although researchers have since adapted the Organizational Identification Questionnaire to fit certain contexts and to test certain hypotheses (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Russo, 1998), it becomes evident that Cheney's (1982) survey instrument, based largely on Patchen's (1970) assessment tool, has been the primary method of choice for the past two decades (see Gautam et al., 2004).

As this paper has argued thus far, the study of organizational identification has certainly evolved exponentially over the past three decades. Not only have additional foci been addressed (e.g. process-based and outcome-based variables), but also newly adapted methodologies have been constructed to investigate the issue of organizational identification. However, despite the obvious progress made, both theoretically and empirically, there exist certain gaps in the literature that warrant consideration in future research. In short, additional attention should be paid to the following: (a) how identifications, and targets of identification, might change during one's tenure with his/her organization, (b) the impact of organizational transition (especially mergers and acquisitions) on identification, (c) the issue of identification as it relates to contemporary organizations, and (d) the practical, pragmatic implications of organizational identification. Each of these will be discussed in turn within the final section.

Gaps and Future Directions

One of the major gaps in the organizational identification literature is research involving longitudinal studies. Although Cheney (1982) urged scholars to consider how both strength and targets of identification might change over the course of one's tenure in an

organization, this idea has not received the attention or focus that it deserves. As Weick (1995) argued, the process of organizational identification, whereby one actively creates a certain sense of attachment, is among the seven necessary variables associated with organizational sense-making. Furthermore, research on organizational socialization (see, for example, Jablin, 1987; Van Maanen, 1975; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) indicates that strong identification with one's organization is likely to occur as a result of this process. That is, employees oftentimes enter an organization with much ambiguity and uncertainty, especially concerning job roles, and actively attempt to alleviate these feelings of equivocality. Thus, identification with one's organization, or defining oneself as part of the "in-group" (see Tajfel & Turner, 1986), is among the ways that organizational members begin to make sense of organizational life (see Weick, 1995).

However, it is possible that once an employee assimilates to the organizational culture, and engages in what Jablin (1987) calls the stage of "metamorphosis," either (a) the strength of one's identification with an organization might decrease or (b) one might decide to identify with targets other than the macro-level organization (e.g. a team, a division, a work group). Research to date, unfortunately, has not addressed identification longitudinally so there exists a dearth of information available to help explain how identification might be affected by one's tenure in the organization, why employees might shift their identification foci, what this process of identification transition entails, and how these changes might affect both the individual (e.g. motivation) and the organization (e.g. goals and values). Thus, there is certainly a need to conduct more longitudinal studies of identification not to determine whether or not individuals identify with various and possibly conflicting targets (the research already addresses this issue), but rather whether, how, and why targets of identification might change as one's tenure in the organization increases. The time has come to answer Cheney's (1982) call for a longitudinal assessment of organizational identification.

Another gap in the existing literature is the relationship between organizational identification and organizational transition and change. According to Beck (2001), organizations have recently and swiftly moved from what he calls the "first modernity" to the "second modernity," the latter of which views organizational practices in the context of technological advances, such as the increased utilization of virtual teams and non-collocated work groups. Among his main arguments, however, is the idea that the "successful" organization not only internalizes the need to change with changing times, but also knows how to implement and manage such change. Whether two organizations merge together, one organization acquires another, or an organization merely makes minor modifications to the internal structure, one thing becomes apparent: it is likely that the only constant aspect of organizational life is change. That is, without change organizations probably would not (and could not) survive, especially given today's corporate environment (see, for example, Beck, 2001). However, when an organization engages in such change, be it minor or major alterations, management must consider how the employee base will be affected. For example, there now exists a plethora of

investigations attempting to elucidate the impact of mergers and acquisitions on individual employees (see Cusella, 2000; Giffords & Dina, 2003; Trompenaars & Wooliams, 2003). Using Weick's (1995) ideas, these scholars are primarily interested in understanding how employees begin to "make sense" of a new organizational culture after a merger or acquisition takes place.

Thus, it seems necessary to conduct empirical investigations that examine the impact of such organizational change on issues of identification. For example, does one's strength and/or targets of identification shift when a merger or acquisition takes place? Is there a difference in identification change based on whether or not an organization merges or is acquired? Do employees engage in a process of "re-identification" with the new organizational entity? If so, what does this process of "re-identification" entail? What are some of the possible antecedents and consequences of this "re-identification" process? How can management facilitate "re-identification" as a result of organizational change? Although these are only a few possible research questions that might provide the impetus for such investigation, the main point is that studying issues of identification in light of organizational change and development is crucial and must receive increased attention in the not too distant future.

A third noticeable gap in the literature, which is loosely related to the previous discussion, is research dealing with identification in what Beck (2001) calls the "risk regime." According to Beck (2001), nearly everything that once characterized traditional organizational life has changed. For example, no longer is it expected that employees will spend their entire occupational tenure with the same organization (the "lifelong contract" has become somewhat of an antiquity). Furthermore, there has been a recent influx of temporary, contingency-based employees who are not hired full-time, but rather as part-time help. The question, therefore, is whether or not individuals within this temporary, somewhat "commissioned," workforce want to identify with the organization despite their transient tenure in it. From an organizational perspective, management certainly wants any employee associated with the organization to strongly identify with it, maximizing the probability that the individual will make decisions based on the best interest of the institution. From an employee perspective, however, strong identification with the organization might lead to affiliation, on one hand, though feelings of grief and sorrow on the other. That is, the stronger one is identified, the more difficult it will likely be for them to detach from the organization when their "transient tenure" has reached its limit. Thus, researchers need to examine issues of identification in this new corporate regime to determine (a) whether and to what extent management and employees strive to have strong levels of identification, (b) what the process of identification for a part-time, contingent workforce entails, (c) the different targets of identification that a contingent workforce might adopt, and (d) the antecedents and effects of strong identification on behalf of this type of employee base. It is likely that organizational identification does occur within these contexts, at least to some degree (see Gossett, 2002; Scott, 2001), though more empirical work is needed before this claim can be made with certainty.

Finally, it is important that organizational communication researchers remember that they have a dualistic responsibility when conducting academic research: providing knowledge for the field and also providing recommendations or suggestions for organizational management and employees. Although the extant literature provides pragmatic implications for practitioners regarding why employees might identify with the organization and the effect(s) that such identification will likely have for both the employee and the institution, there is much less evidence of process-oriented advice available for these practitioners. That is, what are some tactics that management can use to maximize the likelihood that employees will see the utility of identification and, hence, engage in this salient process? Unfortunately, and quite surprisingly, this issue has not been addressed in the literature to the extent that it should. After all, providing management with possible suggestions relating to the foregoing inquiry appears to be extremely profitable. It is not enough that management knows the antecedents and consequences of organizational identification. They must also be equipped with the knowledge necessary to get an employee base to actively and willingly identify (a process-oriented approach). This lack of knowledge regarding the process of organizational identification might be a function of (a) the relatively little attention afforded to studying identification as a process, (b) the neglect, on behalf of scholars, to turn process-oriented results into pragmatic implications or suggestions, or (c) a combination of both. Be that as it may, it is important that researchers begin to provide more useful implications regarding the process(es) by which employees come to identify with their organization. Without this necessary information, management will likely understand why employees might identify (antecedents) and the effects of such identification (implications), but will not know how to create an identified workforce (process). Future research must address this issue.

Conclusion

Many literature reviews, handbook chapters, and state-of-the-art-reviews published in the 1980s both praised the field of organizational communication for its emergence and success, and also posed questions of doubt regarding the field's continued achievement or accomplishment (e.g. Daly & Korinek, 1982; McPhee, 1985; Pacanowsky, 1988). This doubt or hesitation might be a reflection of Redding's (1979) assertion that:

If we really know anything at all about the 'field' of organizational communication (adopting the hazardous assumption that there exists a reasonable area of agreement on what the field is), our knowledge, it is said, could be summarized as follows: we don't know much at all. Why? Because we have failed to develop acceptable scientific theory (or theories). (p. 309)

In the 30 years since this assertion, however, it becomes evident that the field of organizational communication has made great strides, and it is likely that scholars have certainly entered into the era of maturity and innovation, which Redding and Tompkins

(1987) describe as “[the] proliferation of empirical research, accompanied by innovative efforts to develop concepts, theoretical premises, and philosophical critiques” (p. 7). Therefore, the doubts and hesitations communicated in the 1980s concerning the future of the field have been (at least somewhat) assuaged.

Looking at the progression of organizational identification over the past 30 years, one can conclude that this topic of inquiry has grown at an exponential rate, both empirically and theoretically. Based on a review of the literature from the past three decades, it becomes evident that management, administrative science, organizational behavior, and communication scholars have devoted much time and energy to the study of organizational identification. Not only have new perspectives been addressed, but also novel methodologies for studying these various perspectives have been created. What began merely as an examination of the antecedents leading to organizational identification on behalf of the employee has, over the years, turned into a multi-conceptual, multi-theoretical, multi-methodological area of organizational communication. The trajectory since the late-1960s has led to an impressive body of knowledge and organizational researchers are much more informed about the antecedents to, effects of, and processes associated with, what has become collectively known as organizational identification. Although there are certainly gaps in the existing literature, especially considering the demise of “traditional” organizational life, this should not be considered in a negative light. In fact, these gaps should (and likely will) provide the impetus necessary for continued investigation of identification in the years to come.

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