Process-orientation versus outcome-orientation during organizational change: The role of organizational identification

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Summary

In this paper we argue that organizational identification is predictive of employee interests and concerns during periods of organizational change. More specifically, we assert that organizational identification may largely determine whether employees may be focused upon the change related outcomes (e.g., salary, expenses, etc.), or on the change processes (e.g., procedures, voice and participation options, etc.). Data of both a scenario experiment and a survey are presented indicating that high and low identifiers indeed are differentially interested in process and outcome information. The results suggest that people who identify less with the organization are more likely to be focused upon the change outcomes then on the change process, while people who identify highly (i.e., deep structure) with the organization are more likely to be focused upon the change processes then on the change outcomes. The benefits of awareness of organizational members' level of identification for organizational change management are discussed. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

The pace at which organizations go through changes has increased tremendously (Piderit, 2000). Yet, although organizations change frequently in an attempt to enhance organizational viability, the reality is that most organizational change programs fall short of expectations. Estimations are that about half of the organizational changes are successful (Fay & Luhrmann, 2004). Thus, the need for a better understanding of organizational change processes is evident. The successful implementation of organizational changes hinges largely on employees' willingness to drastically change their behaviors, attitudes, goals, and values (Ashforth & Mael, 1998; George & Jones, 2001; Whelan-Berry, Gordon, & Hinings, 2003). Change processes typically raise several concerns among employees, however, and a better understanding of these concerns seems required to successfully implement change processes. Therefore, the present study focuses on employees' concerns about two core dimensions of

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organizational change, change outcomes and change processes (Barnett & Carroll, 1995). Employee *outcome orientation*, or the focus on *what* may be affected by the organizational change in terms of personally relevant outcomes (e.g., salary, expenses, work hours, etc.), is compared to employee *processes orientation*, or the focus on *how* the change will be realized (e.g., procedures, voice and participation options, etc.). We assert that organizational identification, the extent to which people define themselves in terms of their organizational membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), is an important determinant of the extent to which employees focus on change outcomes or change processes.

The extent to which change agents succeed in enhancing the success of organizational change is affected to a substantial degree by the extent to which organizational communication about the change (i.e., information given to employees about the change; management-employee dialog opportunities, strategic planning sessions, etc.) addresses employees' concerns and interests (cf. Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). By studying the extent to which employee concerns zoom in on change outcomes or change processes, the present study may offer important leads that may help shape effective organizational communication in times of change. In addition, the present study adds to theorizing about the role of organizational identification during periods of change (e.g., Rousseau, 1998) by analyzing the relationship between employee identification with the organization on the one hand and employee's concern with change outcomes and processes on the other hand.

In the following we will first introduce the concept of organizational identification, and then discuss its importance to organizational change processes and its proposed relationship to employee process orientation and outcome orientation during change. Thereafter we will present and discuss the results of a scenario experiment and a cross-sectional survey that were used to test our hypotheses.

Organizational Identification

Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory explain how an individual's conception of the self is affected by his or her membership of social groups, such as organizations (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Hogg, 2003; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). This conception of the self as a group member provides the basis for the perceptual, attitudinal, and behavioral effects of group membership. The more one conceives of oneself in terms of the membership of a group, that is, the more one identifies with a group, the more one's attitudes and behavior are directed by this group membership (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987).

Following this, organizational identification reflects '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' (Mael & Ashforth, 1992 p. 104). It is important to distinguish identification from related constructs like commitment and person-organization fit (van Knippenberg & Sleebos, in press). Organizational identification implies a psychological merging of self and a specific organization. It refers to a self-concept that has the individual and the organization integrated into one entity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, de Cremer, & Hogg, 2005). Concepts like commitment and person-organization fit lack the self-defining component and/or could refer to any organization with a certain set of characteristics (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). The self-defining implication of identification leads

employees to see the self as similar to other employees of the organization, to ascribe organization-defining characteristics to the self, and to take the organization's interest to heart (e.g., de Cremer, 2003; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001; Turner et al., 1987; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). In addition, organizational identification involves psychological attachment to the organization. It is therefore for instance positively related to satisfaction and job involvement (van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000) and negatively related to turnover intentions (Van Dick et al., 2004) and actual turnover (Mael & Ashforth, 1995). Also, organizational identification implies a relatively high level of positive in-group affect (Harris & Cameron, 2005).

Because identification leads to activities that are congruent with that identity, higher levels of organizational identification are usually associated with a higher probability that employees will take the organization's perspective and will behave conform organizational norms, values and attitudes (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Haslam, van Knippenberg, Platow, & Ellemers, 2003; van Knippenberg, 2000). Higher identification may, for instance, lead to more organizational citizenship behavior, increased effort, and support for and loyalty towards the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Tyler & Blader, 2000; van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher, & Christ, 2004).

A more recent development is that some researchers study the role that organizational identification has in organizational change processes. The core theme in this work evolves about the idea that identification may sometimes hinder the successful implementation of change processes. Through identification processes employees come to understand who they are, because they see themselves reflected in the organizations' identity (Hogg & Terry, 2000). As people come to value this conception of the self, they may resist change when they believe that the change entails an identity transformation (Fiol, 2002; Fiol & O'Conner, 2002). Indeed, one may argue that organizational change calls for dis-identification with previous organizational attributes, the forming of a new identity, and a re-identification with it (Chreim, 2002; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Fiol, 2002; Pratt, 2000), a process that may be more difficult for the highly identified. Indeed, Jetten, O'Brien, and Trindall (2002) showed that employees react more negatively to restructuring of their organization and their work, the more they identify with their organization and work. Several researchers argue that for the (re)establishment of identification in transitional periods it is of importance to ensure a sense of continuity of identity (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, & Bobbio, in press). For instance, identification with a merged organization is easier the more that employees believe that the identity of their former organization is carried over to newly formed one (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, Monden, & de Lima, 2002). In addition, change efforts that are framed in terms of identity continuity over time (i.e., projected continuity; Ullrich, Wieseke, & Van Dick, 2005) may be more readily accepted and may ensure more stable identification levels (Rousseau, 1998).

Evidently, the importance of the role of identification in organizational change processes is being recognized and finds empirical support. Yet, one of the more fundamental effects of identification has received little empirical attention so far. Because identification is self-definitional it assumed to influence that what is of importance to a person, what a person is uncertain about, or what a person is interested in. Although the relationship between identification and focus or orientation may have been assumed to exist, it has not been explicitly studied in change contexts before. We will do so in the present study and expect to find that employee identification indeed influences what employees deem to be of importance during periods of change. We specifically assess individuals' interest in change processes and change outcomes. Our reason to focus on outcomes and processes is twofold. First, change processes and change outcomes may be regarded core dimensions of organizational change (cf., Barnett & Carroll, 1995). Second, we expect that the effect of identification on what is of importance to individuals may be clearly demonstrated by its effect on process and outcome orientation.

Process Orientation

Evidently, when people are highly identified, organizational membership is important to them. As a consequence, they will strive for certainty about this aspect of their life, and they will thus seek confirmation of their organizational membership. In organizational contexts this confirmation may be provided by (information about) processes and procedures.

Recent procedural fairness models (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1998; Tyler & Blader, 2000; Tyler, Degoey, & Smith, 1996; Tyler & Lind, 1992) assert that people care about procedural justice because it communicates to them whether they are respected and valued by the group and its representative authorities. Moreover, it conveys whether the group, as a whole, is a worthy group of which to be a member (e.g., Smith & Tyler, 1997). In organizational contexts the enactment of fair procedures and treatments thus implies that an employee is worthy of respect and is seen as a significant and valued organizational member (Kickul, Lester, & Finkl, 2002; Tyler, 1999). Confirmation of being valued as an organizational member (by fair processes and procedures) should be more relevant for employees whose conception of the self is highly determined by their organizational membership. Indeed, Tyler (1998) describes how individuals attach more meaning to the way that they are treated by authorities in organizations (i.e., management, supervisors, advisors) when they draw more of their social identity from their work organization. Ergo, the more people identify with their organization, the more they will strive for certainty about being a significant and respected organizational member, and the more attentive they will be to process considerations.

Interestingly, change literature also stresses the importance of giving attention to processes and procedures as a means to ensure employee cooperation during change. It is suggested that employees may respond more positively to organizational change when they are granted the opportunity to have some control over their own work situation, and when they are under the impression that change processes and enacted procedures are fair and just (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Brockner, Wiesenfeld, & Martin, 1995; Daly & Geyer, 1994; Folger & Skarlicki, 1999; Kernan & Hanges, 2002; Kickul et al., 2002; Konovsky, 2000; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002). Attention to processes and procedures is expected to make employees feel less apprehensive about an uncertain future. Organizational representatives are thus encouraged to explicitly communicate their willingness to listen to employees' wishes and concerns, and to provide information about the opportunity of voice (Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991). Additionally, employees may be encouraged to actively participate in the decision making process, or may be stimulated to help out in the change implementation (Wanberg & Banas, 2000). In sum, the change literature likewise suggests that it is essential to do justice to employees' need for certainty regarding voice in and information over the change processes.

However, we as we argued in the above, it will be especially the highly identified that are concerned about procedural aspects of the envisioned change: they will be more focused on information about how the envisioned change will be realized and on whether possibilities for voice and participation in the change process exist.

Outcome Orientation

Organizational change implies the transformation of the organization in two points in time. Indeed, the reason to engage in organizational change is usually the belief that it will have positive outcomes for the organization. Prospective outcomes thus often stand at the onset of organizational change. Of course,

organizational change may have personally relevant consequences as well. These more individual outcomes of organizational change may especially be of importance to employees. Indeed, people's attachment to social groups and organizations is not only related to relational concerns, but it is also dictated by the need and the desire to gain outcomes (such as financial benefits, promotion possibilities, etc.). People thus are also motivated by resource based, or instrumental concerns.

During organizational change employees may feel apprehensive about job security, promotion chances, and changing task requirements. It has been suggested that open and realistic communication about the proposed change and its consequences is of the essence for managing resistance to change and maintaining agreeable relationships with employees (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Kernan & Hanges, 2002; Kickul et al., 2002; Kotter, 2000; Wanberg & Banas, 2000), presumably because it reduces uncertainty (Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991). Communication about the proposed change preferably should contain information about the tangible outcomes of the change for the organization, and especially about the employee-relevant consequences (in the area of, for instance, salary, retirement funding, or possible lay-offs). In sum, the change literature suggests that it is essential to cater to employees' need for certainty regarding the results of the change, especially its consequences for individuals, or, in other words, to be clear about the *outcomes* of the organizational change.

It has been argued that when people perceive themselves as unattached to others their motivations have a primarily egocentric character (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). This implies that the less identified, with their lack of attachment to the organization, would be more prone to focus on personal outcome information. Yet, one may wonder whether the *relative* importance of outcomes versus processes may be equal for all group members or employees. More specifically, the perceived significance of outcomes versus procedures and processes may be tied to social evaluation concerns (Tyler et al., 1996), and thus, as we will argue, also to identification.

Our Hypothesis

There is some evidence that shows that responses are more affected by outcome considerations, relative to process considerations, the less the individual is concerned with how he or she is socially evaluated by others, and vice versa. For instance, Vermunt, van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, and Blaauw (2001) argue that individuals with low self-esteem have a greater concern with how they are seen and evaluated by others, and as such, are more responsive towards information about the quality of their social relations (like group memberships). Indeed, as predicted, Vermunt et al. (2001) found that the reactions (e.g., judgments) of individuals with high self-esteem were more strongly related to outcome considerations than to procedural considerations, whereas judgments of individuals with low self-esteem were more strongly related to procedural considerations than to outcome considerations.

The moderating effect of concern with social evaluation was also evident in a study by Brockner, Chen, Mannix, Leung, and Skarlicki (2000). This study revealed that cultural differences in people's tendencies to view themselves as interdependent or independent (their self-construal) moderated the interactive relationship between procedural fairness and outcome favorability.

Perhaps for our purposes the most relevant study is a study conducted by Huo, Smith, Tyler, and Lind (1996) that focused on the relationship between identification and procedural versus outcome fairness. This study revealed that employees who identified strongly with their organization placed greater weight on the quality of their treatment by their supervisors when deciding whether to accept supervisory decisions or not. In contrast, employees who identified less strongly placed greater weight

on the personal favorability of the decisions. Thus, individuals who identify strongly focus more on *how* a decision has been made (process issues), than on *what* decision has been made (outcome issues), while the opposite holds true for individuals who identify weakly (compare Tyler, 2000). The Huo et al., (1996) study differs from the present study in a couple of ways. For instance, they did not directly assess outcome and process concerns of the high and low identified but only assessed the influence of processes and outcomes on decision acceptance. Moreover their study is limited to justice concerns and does not address a change context. Yet, we believe that the above has some important implications for the role of identification during organizational change. When we try to translate the theoretical arguments and the empirical findings to the present study, we may expect that in a context of organizational change, high identifiers will be highly concerned about procedural aspects of the envisioned change: they will therefore be focused on information about how the envisioned change will be realized and on whether possibilities for voice and participation in the change process exist. At the same time, high identifiers will be relatively less concerned about the outcomes of the change, and they will thus also be relatively less interested in information about the outcomes of the envisioned change. In contrast, we may expect low identifiers, whose looser ties to the organization will make them less apprehensive about the relational aspects of group membership, to be relatively more focused on the tangible outcomes of the proposed change, such as changes in salary and fringe benefits or the assignment of tasks. They will, in other words, be more interested in (information about) personal outcomes, than in aspects of the organizational change process. In sum, we test the following hypothesis:

> *General Hypothesis*: High and low identifiers will have a differential interest in process and outcome information.
>
> *More specifically*: Individuals who identify less with the organization are more focused upon the change outcomes then on the change process, while individuals who identify highly are more focused upon the change processes then on the change outcomes.

This hypothesis is tested first in a scenario experiment (Study 1). The advantage of this controlled experimental set-up is that it yields results with high internal validity that makes conclusions concerning causality possible. In addition, a scenario experiment allows us to maintain a high degree of mundane realism in the study, thereby bringing the test of our hypothesis closer to existing processes in changing organizations. To determine whether the predicted relationships may be observed in natural settings as well, we also conducted a cross-sectional survey (of members of two large professional associations; Study 2). In addition, the field study may have the advantage of a less narrow restriction of range for level of identification as may be expected in a scenario setting. Although an experimental manipulation of identification may produce differentiated levels of identification, it may be more difficult to instigate a deep-structure sense of identification (Rousseau, 1998), a fundamental and enduring change in the way people conceptualize themselves. This kind of identification may require a longer exposure to the organizations' norms, values, and routines across a variety of situations (Rousseau, 1998), and may be more likely to be found in a field setting.

Organizational Context

The study was conducted at the Rotterdam School of Management. The Rotterdam School of Management is part of one of the major universities in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands about 28

per cent of the population finishes higher education. About 30 per cent of these people graduate from university. As a consequence, the Netherlands is one of the higher educated countries in the world. The business school where we conducted our study is one of the highest ranked business schools in Europe. Every year approximately 600 new students enter as freshmen. Relative to students from other disciplines in the Netherlands, business schools students find jobs after graduation relatively easily. The business students who participated in the present study were undergraduate students. All students received payment for their voluntary participation in the study.

Method Study 1

Participants and design

One hundred seventy two students (64 per cent male; mean age 21.74 years, $SD = 2.27$) participated in the study. The design was a 2 (Identification: low vs. high) $\times$ 2 (Change Information: processes vs. outcomes) between subjects factorial design, with participants randomly assigned to conditions.

Procedure

Participants were seated behind computers that were used to present stimulus information and questions, and to register reactions. Participants were asked to imagine being member of a student sports association, the ASEUR. Some background information about the association was provided. For instance, we told participants that the ASEUR has grown to become a professional organisation that offers an attractive and varied sports program, and that the ASEUR promotes the possibility to combine a university study with top-class sport. As a typical student organization, the ASEUR relies to a large extent on volunteers for its functioning.

Identification manipulation
All participants were asked to imagine that they were one of the volunteers of the ASEUR, and that they usually work in a team in close collaboration with other people (mainly students). In the identification manipulation the participants were to imagine their bond with the organization. We used key aspects of identification but made sure we refrained from using jargon. In the *high identification* condition we told participants that these students are basically people like themselves and that these students have similar attitudes as they have. Participants were to envision a very good match between themselves and the organization in general: they felt comfortable and at home there. In the *low identification* condition we told participants that these students are people who are quite different from themselves and that they have different attitudes than they have themselves. Participants were to envision a very poor match between themselves and the organization in general: they felt uneasy and alienated there.

Hereafter, participants were informed that as all organizations and associations the ASEUR was faced with the consequences of the economic setbacks experienced all over the world and with cuts on the budget as initiated by the Dutch government. To combat the consequences of these setbacks, the executive committee decided to drastically reorganize the ASEUR. This meant that changes in the ASEUR's culture, structure, processes, and administration were to be expected. Participants were told that the executive committee decided to make a brochure about the upcoming organizational change,

and that, for the time being, this brochure would hold all the information about the change that would be communicated to volunteers and other members. This brochure then would be the main source of information. After some discussion, the executive committee decided on the topics that would be discussed in the brochure.

Change information manipulation

In the *process* condition participants were told that the executive committee decided on topics like the procedures that would be used for change related decision making, the opportunities of voice, the possibilities for volunteers to be actively involved in the change, the volunteers' participation in the change related decision making, and the envisioned time line of the change process. In the *outcome* condition, participants were told that the executive committee decided on topics like the effects on student subscription fees, the effects on the quality of the sports facilities, the consequences for the possibility to work with professional trainers, the desired end-state of the change, and alterations in the opening hours of the ASEUR.

Dependent measures

The main dependent variable, *interest in informational topics*, was measured by four items (e.g., 'How much attention will you devote to the brochure?' and 'To what extent does this brochure hold information that interests you?'). Responses were given on 7-point scales ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very much so* (7). Cronbach's coefficient revealed good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.88$). To check the successfulness of the Identification manipulation, we used the Dutch translation (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, & van Knippenberg, 2000) of the Mael & Ashforth scale (1992). The scale has six items. An example of one of the items is: 'When someone criticizes the ASEUR, it feels like a personal insult.' Responses on this scale ranged from 1, *strongly disagree*, to 7, *strongly agree*. Cronbach's coefficient was very high ($\alpha = 0.97$). To check the effectiveness of the Change Information manipulation we asked participants to indicate which topics would be discussed in the brochure ($1 = the\ procedures\ that\ would\ be\ used\ for\ change\ related\ decision\ making,\ the\ opportunities\ of\ voice,\ etc.,\ etc.;\ 2 = the\ envisioned\ outcomes\ of\ the\ change,\ the\ effects\ on\ student\ subscription\ fees,\ etc.,\ etc.$). We also used a 2 item scale that comprised of the items 'The brochure is mainly focused on information on processes,' and 'The brochure is mainly focused on information on outcomes.' Both items had 7-point scales that ranged from 1, *strongly disagree*, to 7, *strongly agree*, and the last item was reverse coded ($\alpha = 0.91$). When all questions were answered, participants were debriefed, paid, and thanked.

Results

Manipulation checks

As intended, participants in the low identification condition scored significantly lower on the identification scale than participants in the high identification condition ($M = 2.18$ vs. $M = 5.89$; $F(1, 168) = 735.10$; $p < 0.0001$, $\eta^2 = 0.79$). No other effects were significant. Testifying to the success of our Change Information manipulation, 95.4 per cent ($N = 164$) of the participants answered correctly to the question which topics would be discussed in the brochure ($\lambda = 0.90$, $p < 0.0001$). In addition, participants in the process condition believed that the brochure was more focused on process topics than participants in the outcome condition ($M = 6.22$ vs. $M = 1.74$; $F(1, 168) = 650.87$; $p < 0.0001$, $\eta^2 = 0.79$). Again, no other effects were significant.

Interest in informational topics

A 2×2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the extent to which participants were interested in the topics in the brochure showed a main effect of Identification ($F(1, 168) = 80.58$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.32$): Participants in the low identification condition were less interested in information about the organizational change than participants in the high identification condition ($M_{low} = 4.27$ vs. $M_{high} = 5.61$). We also found a main effect of Change Information ($F(1, 168) = 38.68$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.19$), showing that participants were generally more interested in information about outcomes ($M_{outcome} = 5.42$) than on information about processes ($M_{process} = 4.66$). As expected, we found a Change Information $\times$ Identification interaction; $F(1, 168) = 41.64$, $p < 0.001$. Indeed, participants in the low identification condition were more interested in information about outcome aspects of the organizational change ($M_{outcome} = 5.23$) than on process aspects ($M_{process} = 3.42$; $F(1, 168) = 55.36$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.25$). In contrast, participants in the high identification condition, although more interested in process aspects than low identifiers ($M_{high} = 5.62$ vs. $M_{low} = 3.42$; $F(1, 168) = 96.07$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.36$), were not significantly more focused on process aspects of the change than on outcome aspects of the change ($M_{process} = 5.62$ vs. $M_{outcome} = 5.58$; $F(1, 168) = 0.43$, ns).

Discussion Study 1

The simulation experiment showed that there is merit in the idea that identification affects the desire for process and outcome information during organizational change. First, we found that in general low identifiers were less attentive to organizational change information as compared to people that identified more strongly. This result coincides perfectly with theoretical ideas and empirical findings related to the effects of identification. We believe that in the essence it reveals that the merging of self and organization leads to more care and consideration for the organization and a higher willingness to take the organizations' perspective. People that identify highly are therefore more interested in information that may be of importance for organizational functioning than people that identify less.

Importantly, we also confirmed our general hypothesis stating that high and low identifiers will have a differential interest in process and outcome information, as was evident from the interaction between identification and interest in informational topics. However, the exact pattern of the interaction deviated partially from what we had anticipated. Low identifiers were indeed more outcome-oriented than process-oriented. However, high identifiers were not significantly less focused on outcome information than on process information, although they were indeed more focused on process information than low identifiers were. We may provide two reasons for this deviant pattern of results. First, in the scenario study we confronted participants with an already made decision from the executive committee. However, it may be that especially high identifiers may have difficulty in expressing a less than enthusiastic reaction to a decision that the organization's representative apparently already made. Indeed, high identifiers usually have positive attitudes towards the organization, and are supportive and loyal (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; van Vugt & Hart, 2004). It may be that respondents' sense of loyalty interfered with the expression of their genuine interest in outcome and process information, which may explain why we did not find that high identifiers were indeed significantly more interested in process information than in outcome information in the scenario study. Second, our experimental manipulation of identification resulted in differentiated levels of identification as intended, but it may not have resulted in a deep-structure sense of identification (Rousseau, 1998). This deep-structure identification may be more easily found in a field setting. Our second study therefore is a survey of members of two large associations on the verge of a major

organizational change. Also, we decided to assess peoples' process and outcome orientation after the announcement of an upcoming major change was made, but before they actually received any change information.

Our second study, then, tests the same hypotheses and is set up to replicate and extent the major findings of the first study. However, it relies on with a different sample and it employs a different method.

Organizational Context

To test our hypotheses, we surveyed members of two large Dutch professional associations (henceforth to be called association A and association B). Both associations aimed to serve the professional interests of their members and strived for upholding high quality levels of occupational practice. In addition, the associations worked on marketing the occupation. The data for this study were collected at the outset of a major organizational change project that was a joint initiative of the boards of directors. The boards of directors opted for closer collaboration that was to lead to a complete merger between the two associations in the course of 2004. Both associations depended equally on each other for survival and the merger partners are approximately the same size (cf. van Knippenberg et al., 2002). At the time of the survey association A had 994 regular members, and association B had 874 regular members. The members of both associations were informed about the envisioned collaboration by an official mailing. No other official announcements were made in the period between the mailing and the data collection. The complete merger was realized in July 2004. The merged organization now represents about 2000 members divided into 23 regions of the Netherlands.

Method Study 2

Respondents

The regular members of the two associations received a questionnaire at their home address as part of a larger mailing. The members were asked to return the questionnaire within 30 days for which they could use the enclosed pre-addressed, non post paid envelope. A total of 627 questionnaires were returned, (representing 33.5 per cent of the regular members). Three hundred and thirty five members of association A returned the questionnaire (which is 53.4 per cent of the total response, and 33.7 per cent of the number of regular members of association A), and 292 members of association B returned the questionnaire (which is 46.6 per cent of the total response, and 33.4 per cent of the number of regular members of association B). There was no significant difference in the number of respondents that came from association A or B (χ^2 (1) = 2.95, $p > 0.08$), nor was there a significant difference in the response rate per association (χ^2 (1) = 1.59, $p > 0.10$). All respondents have similar academic background and status. The average age was 37.9 years, and the average number of years of work experience was 13.7.

Measures

Identification
Identification with the organization was, just as in Study 1, assessed using the Dutch translation (van Knippenberg et al., 2000; van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000) of the Mael and Ashforth scale (1992). Responses on this six item scale, and on all other scales were assessed on rating scales ranging from 1, *strongly disagree*, to 5, *strongly agree*.

Process-orientation
Process-orientation was measured by eight items. Sample items include: 'During the entire process aimed at closer collaboration between association A and B, I want to be informed about procedures'; 'I want to be asked about my opinion regarding the manner in which the collaboration between association A and B will be constructed.'

Outcome-orientation
This was measured using an eight-item scale. Examples of the items are 'I am particularly interested in information on the personal material benefits that result from the collaboration between association A and B'; 'I consider it important that the collaboration results in lower member subscription dues.'

Results

We submitted the items comprising the variables of process-orientation and outcome-orientation to a Principal Components Analysis with OBLIMIN rotation. Note that these analyses were done after we removed some items from the original outcome orientation scale. This analysis showed, as intended, that the process and the outcome-orientation scales we constructed represent distinct variables. As shown in Table 1, all items loaded highly on the intended factor, and there were no cross-loadings (all other loadings were lower than |0.15|). The eigenvalues of both factors are greater than 1, explaining a total of 49.78 per cent of the variance. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for all variables are displayed in Table 2.

Testing the hypothesis

The hypothesis calls for an analysis that enables us to test for the interaction between a within subjects variable (i.e., orientation on outcomes vs. process) and a between subjects variable (i.e., identification level). Our analytical strategy started with an analysis that included identification as a continuous variable. The variable Orientation (process/outcome) was included in the design as a within-subjects variable. The main dependent variables were the scores on the process scale and on the outcome scale. The results of the ANOVA indicated that the main effect of the continuous variable ($F(1, 618) = 16,47$, $p < 0.001$) was qualified by a Orientation by Identification interaction ($F(1, 618) = 16,63$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, as expected, we found an interaction between Identification and Orientation. However, we realize that this analysis leads to a suboptimal transparency in the presentation of the results. With this analysis the exact pattern of the interaction results has not been made visible. However, we need to establish whether or not the low identified are more focused on outcomes than on processes, and whether the high identified are more focused on processes than on outcomes.

Table 1. Results of the principal components analysis

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2
Process orientation		
During the entire process aimed at closer collaboration between association A and B, I want to be informed about procedures	0.75	−0.03
I value information about the development of the collaboration	0.76	−0.10
I would like to know who is going to determine when and how the integration between association A and B is going to take place	0.72	0.07
I want to be asked about my opinion on the creation of a collaboration between association A and B	0.82	0.07
I would like to have a word in the partnership between association A and B	0.79	−0.02
I find it important to ventilate my ideas about how the alliance between association A and B has to look like	0.78	0.03
Members should be given voice in the choice for a specific form of collaboration between association A and B	0.52	−0.01
I think it is important that members are actively involved in the development of the relationship between association A and B	0.65	0.00
Outcome orientation		
I am particularly interested in information on the personal material benefits that result from the collaboration between association A and B	0.00	0.53
I think it is important to receive information on the effect of the collaboration between association A and B on the cost and profits of my membership	0.13	0.62
I consider it important that the collaboration results in lower member subscription dues	−0.13	0.80
I consider it important that the collaboration results in longer opening hours of the secretariat	0.03	0.56
I consider it important that the collaboration results in cheaper brochures	−0.05	0.79
I consider it important that the collaboration results in a bigger supply of courses	0.06	0.46
I consider it important that the collaboration results in cheaper courses	−0.05	0.74
I consider it important that the collaboration results in lower costs and higher venues for the members	−0.06	0.79

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliabilities

Scale	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Identification	2.88	0.77	(0.80)		
Process orientation	3.38	0.74	0.22**	(0.87)	
Outcome orientation	3.41	0.70	0.01	0.04	(0.82)

Note: N varied between 619 and 622; Cronbach's alpha coefficients are provided along the diagonal in parentheses.
**$p < 0.001$ (two sided)

Therefore, for ease of presentation, we decided to transform the identification variable into a factor that we could use as a between subjects factor in the ANOVA. As we explained in the discussion of Study 1, we expect that a higher process orientation than outcome orientation may be especially found for those people that identify at a deeper level. We thus opted for a three-level factor, because it would allow us to create a relatively high identification group (cf. Rousseau, 1998) and two groups of people with lesser identification (intermediate and low identification). To be precise, the between subjects factor Identification was obtained by splitting up respondents into a high (identification at a deeper level), a medium and low identifier group (both lesser level identifications), based on their score on the identification scale. Three approximately equal size groups were formed. The low identifier group consisted of people with an average score between 1 and 2.60 ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 0.44$, $N = 211$), the medium identifier group consisted of people with an average score between 2.60 and 3.17 ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.19$, $N = 206$), and the high identifier group consisted of people with an average score that was 3.17 or higher ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.35$, $N = 207$).

We conducted a 3 (Identification: high/medium/low) $\times$ 2 (Orientation: process/outcome) factorial. The last variable was again included in the design as a within-subjects variable. A main effect of the factor Identification ($F(2, 615) = 5.67$, $p < 0.005$) showed that both low and medium identifiers were less interested in process as well as outcome aspects of the organizational change than high identifiers ($M_{low} = 3.32$, $M_{medium} = 3.37$ vs. $M_{high} = 3.49$; p's respectively <0.001 and <0.05). No other mean differences between the identification conditions were significant. As expected, this effect was qualified by an Orientation $\times$ Identification interaction; $F(2, 615) = 14.47$, $p < 0.001$ (see Figure 1). Indeed, low identifiers were more focused on outcome aspects then on process aspects of the organizational change ($M_{process} = 3.23$ vs. $M_{outcome} = 3.41$), and the same was true for medium identifiers ($M_{process} = 3.29$ vs. $M_{outcome} = 3.46$). In contrast, high identifiers were more focused on process aspects then on outcome aspects of the organizational change ($M_{process} = 3.63$ vs. $M_{outcome} = 3.35$). Planned comparisons revealed that the difference in orientation towards outcome versus process aspects of the envisioned change was significant for low identifiers and medium identifiers ($F(1, 615) = 6.77$, $p < 0.01$, and $F(1, 615) = 6.34$, $p < 0.05$, respectively), and significant in the opposite direction for high identifiers ($F(1, 615) = 16.23$, $p < 0.001$)[1]. Note that both analytical strategies (i.e., with Identification a continuous variable and with Identification as a three-level factor) lead to the same conclusions.

Discussion study 2

The results of this study confirmed our hypothesis. Surely, in periods of organizational change high and low or intermediate identifiers differ in terms of what type of change information caters to their needs.

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[1]The results lead to the same conclusions when age, sex, work experience, and year of graduation are added as covariates. Hence, these variables do not explain the effects of identification on process and outcome orientation.
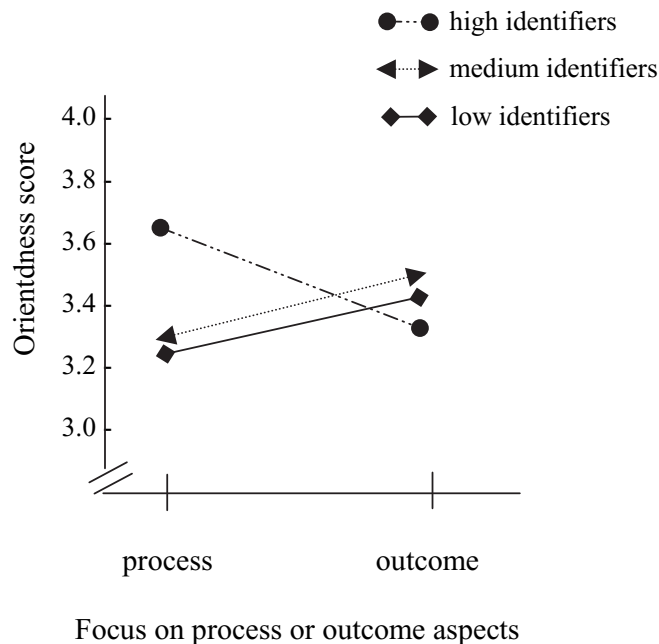
Figure 1. Interaction between identification and orientation

First, low and intermediate identifiers appear to be less interested in both outcome and process aspects of the organizational change then individuals who identify highly with the organization. Moreover, and conform our hypothesis, we found that the low and medium identified are more focused on information about opportunities relating to possible personal gains (i.e., the change outcomes) than that they are focused on information about how the organizational change is going to take place and on whether voice and participation opportunities exist (i.e., the change process). In this study we found the expected reversed pattern of results emerging for individuals who identify highly. The highly identified are relatively more focused on process aspects of the organizational change then that they are interested in the potential personal benefits of the change. As we discussed earlier this latter effect failed to reach significance in the scenario, perhaps because the respondents in this scenario study were confronted with information decisions that were already made. Additionally, it may be that for process-orientation to surpass outcome-orientation a high level of identification (i.e., a deep-structure sense of identification; Rousseau, 1998) is indeed needed.

General Discussion

Overall, the results of both the scenario experiment and the survey indicate that identification affects organizational members orientation on change process and change outcome. We found that higher identification was associated with a greater interest in organizational change information. We believe that this result corroborates the more general finding that the people identifying more with the collective are more likely to take the collective interest to heart (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003).

Because organizational changes potentially have a great impact on an organization's future effectiveness, high identifiers should, in general, be more likely to take an interest in change information than employees with lower levels of organizational identification. We also found that the relative interest in change outcomes and change process is affected by identification. Both the scenario experiment and the survey showed that individuals who identify less focus more on change outcomes than on change processes. Furthermore, the survey also showed that high identifiers focus more on change processes than on change outcomes.

The results of this study add to theorizing about the role of identification in organizational change processes. Researchers are increasingly recognizing the significant role of organizational identification plays in change processes. A number of studies revealed that identification is related to employees' attitudes towards the change, the likelihood of intergroup conflict, and the psychological state of the employee after the implementation of the change (Ashforth & Mael, 1998; Buono, Bowditch, & Lewis, 1985; Cartwright & Cooper, 1992; Haunschild, Moreland, & Murrell, 1994; van Knippenberg et al., 2002). The present study extends this list of consequences by showing that identification also determines the extent to which people are concerned with processes or outcomes during organizational change.

Earlier research (Huo et al., 1996; Tyler, 1994, 2000) revealed that group members who identified highly with their group valued an honest, participative decision making procedure more than that they valued the favorableness of the decision. The present study extends and specifies these earlier findings by showing that the effects of identification are not limited to justice concerns, but apply more broadly to process and outcome considerations. Moreover, the present results would implicate that a reversed pattern of results may be found for low identifiers (i.e., they would place more value on the favorableness of the decision than on the decision making procedure). Lastly, we showed that identification does not only influence the role of processes and outcomes on decision acceptance, but already affects the extent to which a person is focused on change processes and change outcomes prior to any decision making process taking place.

Lastly, our study implies that a closer fit between the provided change communications and employee needs and whishes as reflected in their process and outcome orientation would have positive consequences for employee attitudes and behaviors during change. Yet, although this implication seems warranted by the results of our study, it awaits direct empirical testing. We hope that future research may focus on the extent to which a differential orientation affects satisfaction, perceived organizational justice, resistance to change, or attitude towards the organization in reaction to provided change information.

Limitations

The present study is not without its limitations. The scenario study relied on a student sample and described behavior in a hypothetical situation. The survey had a mono-source, mono-method design. Thus, although we have no specific reason to expect students to behave differently from other populations, and although common source and method bias cannot account for statistical interactions (Evans, 1985; McClelland & Judd, 1993), both methodologies clearly have weaknesses. Yet, by combining a scenario experiment and a cross-sectional survey the strengths of one method may compensate for the weaknesses of the other (Dipboye, 1990). The scenario makes conclusions about causality possible, whereas the field study shows that the hypothesized relationships may also be observed in natural settings using non-student samples. Also note that the scenario and survey focus on *members* of organizations. A replication of the results in a survey of *employees* of organizations may eliminate uncertainty regarding generalizability in this respect.

Implications for practice

An important practical implication of this study pertains to the change communication that organizational change agents may supply. First, the results indicate that members of organizations, especially the ones that identify highly, are interested in organizational change information. Thus, providing sufficient communication and information about the proposed change may help to address employee needs and whishes. Second, change information that is given often focuses primarily on outcome information. This practice probably originates in the focus on the desired organizational end-state, and in the intuitive notion that people are primarily motivated by self-interest (cf. Tyler & Blader, 2000). However, our study suggests that when employees identify highly with the organization these practices may be unsuccessful. Change agents and other organizational authorities may benefit from giving due attention to process issues when dealing with (highly identifying) employees.

Additionally, it may be useful to vary the form and content of the change communications and other intervention techniques (i.e., management-employee dialog opportunities, etc.) for groups of employees with high and low identification levels in order to fit employee needs and wishes as closely as possible. For instance, depending on identification level, information about the outcomes of the change may be provided, or information about decision making procedures during the change process may be offered. Another possibility is to invite some groups of employees to participate actively in the change process (i.e., teams with low identifiers), and to offer other groups of employees the opportunity to map the personal outcomes that are affected or endangered by the envisioned change (i.e., teams with high identifiers).

Of course, managers must take care not to foster intergroup hostility by differential treatment of employees. Providing different groups of employees with different opportunities and information may only be possible under particular circumstances. Such circumstances may arise when identification level and functional structure create a faultline (i.e., when identification levels coincide with functional structures). The impact and consequences of an envisioned change often varies per functional subdivisions. The specific content of change communications therefore already often varies to some degree per functional subdivision. We suggest that change information or participation opportunities may be further differentiated depending on identification level.

Another important practical implication of this study pertains to the conditions under which the stimulation of identification may be useful. Organizational changes are often accompanied by personal losses for numerous employees (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989; Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004). In fact, some types of organizational change are more or less inevitably associated with substantial costs for individual employees (i.e., de-layering results in lesser opportunities for promotion to a higher hierarchical level, and downsizing is often realized through employee lay-off). In situations were change implies negative outcomes for individual employees, and organizational authorities are willing and able to provide sufficient process information and opportunities with an eye for organizational fairness, the organization may benefit from a highly identifying workforce. A highly identifying workforce is likely to place more weight on change processes than on change outcomes. Thus, change agents and other organizational authorities may want to boost identification levels at the onset of this kind of high-impact change processes. Of course, raising identification levels may require careful planning and may not be easy to realize.

In sum, organizations may want to carefully think about the attention they will give to process and outcome aspects of organizational change. For instance, by making a reasoned choice between a focus on outcomes or a focus on processes the organization may prevent information overload and employee annoyance caused by confrontation with unwanted information or opportunities. In addition, a reasoned choice for the one or the other may help the organization to save time, employee energy, and money—all of which are aspects that are of prime importance in periods of change.

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Author biographies

Barbara van Knippenberg's current research interests include the role of self and identity in organizational contexts, leadership, (group) emotions; organizational change, and power and influence.
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