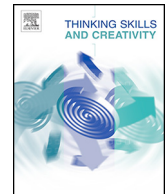




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The impact of three kinds of identity on research and development employees' incremental and radical creativity

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ABSTRACT

Employee creativity is thought to be a source of organizational innovation which in turn is a source of competitive advantage for organizations. Little research has examined what employees' identities are correlated with their creativity. In a sample of 383 research and design (R&D) employees and their supervisors from aerospace research and design organizations in China, we found that 241 employees' highest identification scores were team identity, 11 employees' highest identification scores were expertise identity, and 120 employees' highest identification scores were family identity. Findings demonstrated that team identity and expertise identity positively affected radical and incremental creativity. Family identity did not exhibit an effect. But for the 120 employees whose family identity was the highest among the three identities, none of the identities had an effect on creativity. Implications of the findings to the employee identity and creativity management areas are discussed.

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Creativity and, in particular, radical creativity is thought to be a source of competitive advantage for organizations in the technology field (Teodorescu, Stăncioiu, Răvar, & Botoș, 2015; Amabile, 1996; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). In the innovation research area, researchers have distinguished between incremental innovations and radical innovations. Radical or "breakthrough" innovation entails bringing about a high degree of new knowledge (Forés & Camisón, 2016; Dewar & Dutton, 1986) whereas incremental innovation involves improvement rather than invention (Gilson & Madjar, 2011). Similarly, researchers have distinguished between two kinds of creativity: radical creativity and incremental creativity (Gilson & Madjar, 2011; Madjar, Greenberg, & Chen, 2011). Radical creativity involves doing paradigm breaking or revolutionary work, whereas incremental creativity involves doing adaptive or development work (Ekvall, 1997). These two kinds of creators are thought to consider information in different ways. For example, research has found that radical creators combined outer stimuli with inner, personal material in their construction of their perceptions and interpretations in the Creative Function Test (Smith & Carlsson, 1990). In contrast, incremental creators were bound to reality and were not able to integrate original factors into their ideas.

In studying personal and contextual factors of employee creativity at work (Shin & Zhou, 2003; George & Zhou, 2002; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Woodman et al., 1993), as well as the environmental, organizational, and process factors of incremental and radical innovation or creativity (Koberg, Detienne, & Heppard, 2003; Madjar et al., 2011), the influence of employee identity has received little attention. Social identity is an important part of the concept of the self (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000). Whereas some research has begun to address the relationship between employees' identification with their

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leaders and their creativity (Gu, Tang, & Jiang, 2015; Yoshida, Sendjaya, Hirst, & Cooper, 2014), little research has examined how employees' social identities affect creativity. In the research and design (R&D) field, the team is the basic employee organizational unit. Working in this field also involves professional expertise; thus, team identity and expertise identity are two main identifications for R&D employees.

Identification is critical in motivating employees to do their utmost for the social group to which they belong (Pearsall & Venkataramani, 2015; Foote, 1951), which might influence two kinds of creativity. In the case of team identification, some research has shown that it evokes creative behaviors at work (Carmeli, Cohen-Meitar, & Elizur, 2007). Team identity might enhance incremental creativity, in particular, through improving work efforts. However, the conformity that often accompanies high team identity might hinder radical creativity. In groups with a high level of team identity, maintaining group cohesion may be viewed as so important to the group that they do not act in ways that would disrupt the harmony of the group by considering radical ideas.

Expertise identity refers to the extent to which an individual defines him- or herself by that aspect of personal identity associated with expertise in a certain field (Herndon, 2009). It has been regarded to be helpful for individual creative task performance (Polzer, Milton, & Swarm, 2002), because it encourages individuals to exhibit more effort in investing in enhancing creative self-efficacy (Tierney & Farmer, 2002) and allows them to establish themselves in the professional community.

A third 'identity' strand is that of identity with the family, which has historically operated as a key kind of identity in Chinese society. Fei suggested that family was the basic social organizational unit of Chinese society (Fei, 1998; Fei & Liu, 1985). It may be that family identity decreases employee creative motivation for one of the critical components of radical creativity: being curious about an unknown area and taking risks. Spending time on exploring an unknown area and taking risks might cause conflict with an individual's family role (Lingard & Francis, 2006).

These three strands of identity and their impact on creativity have not been examined together in the existing literature. In this paper, we examine R&D employees' team identity, expertise identity, and family identity and their creativity. The aim of this paper is to determine the differential effects of the three kinds of identity on two kinds of creativity. An understanding of the relationship between these variables should identify ways organizations might enhance the incremental and radical creativity of their employees.

1. Team identity and employee creativity

An individual's social identity is the "knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). This view suggests that we categorize ourselves into social groups and that we use different self-identifications in different circumstances (Fisher, 1997). In 1985, Albert and Whetten published their seminal work about organizational identity (OID) (Albert and Whetten, 1985). OID offers a kind of 'self-referential meaning' (Corley et al., 2006), describing, in general terms, the extent to which an organizational member defines himself/herself with reference to his/her organizational membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). OID has been identified as comprising psychological and social realities phenomena with antecedents and consequences for other social processes and outcomes (Haslam, Postmes, & Ellemers, 2003), such as organizational culture (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). OID has the potential to generate a range of positive employee and organizational outcomes, such as low turnover intentions, organizational citizenship behavior, and employee performance (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994).

Recent research has examined how employee OID is relevant in explaining employee creativity. Madjar et al. (2011) and Hirst, van Dick, and van Knippenberg (2009) respectively have shown that OID motivates employees to engage in a higher level of work and/or creative efforts, and doing so aligns their self-interest with the interest of the organization. A second explanation for an OID-creativity relationship involves employees' intrinsic motivation. Creativity involves using a new approach to generate new ideas. It is thought to be difficult for an organization to control the employee's creative process because it is driven by employees' level of motivation, especially their intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1993). Intrinsic motivation was observed in previous research as a key determinant of creative behavior (Tierney, Farmer, & Graen, 1999). Individuals who identify with their organization are likely to be motivated to display creative behavior as part of their sense of belongingness to a distinct group by which they enhance the self.

Now that the team has been viewed as a key organizational unit, scholars have studied identification with work units, work groups, or work teams (Solansky, 2011; Olkkonen & Lipponen, 2006). There is some research suggesting identification with a group motivates group members to be more creative. For example, in a lab study, Haslam, Adarves-Yorno, Postmes, and Jans (2013) manipulated group members' social identity by their level of involvement in group goal setting. The researchers found that groups who were involved in the group goal-setting process (i.e., the high team identity condition) exhibited greater levels of creativity.

In contrast to the positive relationship between team identity and incremental creativity, we would not expect a positive relationship with radical creativity. Radical creativity often necessitates a rejection of pre-existing schemas and a more bottom-up search for better ways of doing things and new ideas which has been found critical for employees' creativity. But in groups with higher team identity, a team member's cognitive, emotional and behavioral bond with the other team members would be high (Henry, Arrow, & Carini, 1999), and individuals' conformity to their group's norms would also be high (van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000). In this context, employees' unique ideas are more likely to be discouraged, and this

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