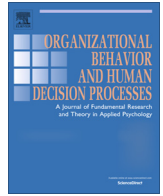




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/obhdp

Epistemic motivation and perpetuation of group culture: Effects of need for cognitive closure on trans-generational norm transmission

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 December 2012

Accepted 25 September 2014

Available online xxx

Accepted by Michael Morris, Ying-yi Hong and Chi-yue Chiu

Keywords:

Norms transmission

Epistemic motivations

Need for cognitive closure

Conformity

ABSTRACT

The role of need for cognitive closure (NFCC, Kruglanski, 2004) in the transmission of a group norm is examined in three studies carried out in both experimental and natural settings. It was hypothesized that for persons high in NFCC a greater resistance to change is produced both via the urgency tendency of newcomers and the permanence tendency of old-timers; accordingly, groups composed of high need for closure individuals should exhibit greater cultural stability than groups composed of low NFCC. The first study investigated that hypothesis in a natural setting where young adults rated their health behavior and that of their parents. Consistent with our hypothesis, results of a moderated regression analysis showed that for participants high (vs. low) in dispositional NFCC the relation between parents' and offspring behavior is stronger, implying normative continuity. The remaining two studies applied Jacobs and Campbell's (1961) paradigm wherein group norms are induced and transmitted across generations of a laboratory microculture. In the first study, NFCC was induced by means of environmental noise whereas in the second study it was varied via group composition, consisting of participants with High vs. Low scores on the NFCC Scale. Results of both studies confirmed the hypothesis that cultures under high need for closure show a greater normative stability across generations. Moreover, the experimental studies clarify that the observed, need for closure based, stability was promoted by newcomers' greater tendency to seize to the group norms in condition of high (versus low) NFCC.

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A defining aspect of culture is the shared reality and a common world view held by its members (Harding & Higgins, 1996). Culture also has a temporal dimension. It persists across generations and is transmitted to new members through the process of socialization. It is also true, however, that cultural stability is undermined by forces of change. Especially this day and age, the possibilities for intercultural contacts are considerable and steadily growing with the ever widening reach of the social media, expanding opportunities for international travel, and swelling waves of immigration that alter the cultural environments of many societies. These circumstances increase the importance of understanding the conditions under which cultural traditions are preserved and those in which the "winds of change" prevail, and the old ways and world-views give way to new realities. Our aim in the present research has been to study this process from a motivational perspective underlying the tendency toward stability versus change. A focal aspect of our perspective on this issue is the need for cognitive clo-

sure (NFCC) that members of a group may experience. In what follows, we describe this particular motivation and discuss its relevance to processes of cultural continuity and change.

The NFCC was introduced in the Lay Epistemic Theory (Kruglanski, 1989; 2004) as a stopping mechanism affording the crystallization of knowledge. NFCC was defined as a desire for a quick and firm answer to a question and the evasion of confusion and ambiguity (Webster & Kruglanski, 1998). Need for closure is assumed to vary along a motivational continuum, ranging from a high need to obtain closure to a strong need to avoid it; it was assumed that the need for closure can be induced situationally but that it also constitutes a stable trait on which persons may vary (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). The situational antecedents of the need for closure consist of circumstances that highlight the perceived benefits of closure and reduce the perceived costs of lacking closure (augmented by the experience of aversive uncertainty, time pressure, environmental noise, or mental fatigue). By contrast, the need to avoid closure is instilled in conditions that stress the costs of closure and the benefits of lacking closure (e.g., accountability, fear of invalidity, or evaluation apprehension).

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Consequences of need for closure consist of the *urgency* and *permanence* tendencies. The former refers to the inclination to quickly seize on closure promising cues. The permanence tendency reflects the propensity to freeze on a closure once it has been formed and to become impervious to subsequent information that threatens to undermine it. Permanence and urgency tendencies induced by a heightened need for closure affect a wide range of psychosocial phenomena mediated by information processing at individual, interpersonal and group levels (for reviews see Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Webster & Kruglanski, 1998).

A straightforward implication of the notion that need for closure induces the tendency to preserve existing knowledge is that it promotes resistance to change (Kruglanski et al., 2006). Several lines of evidence from field and laboratory studies converge to support this possibility. For instance, Chiu, Morris, Hong, and Menon (2000) noticed that individuals with higher need for closure are more likely to exhibit the attribution bias typical to their culture (see also Chao, Zhang, & Chiu, 2010) and, under self-esteem threats, to decrease negative evaluations of in-group members (Kosic, Mannetti, & Livi, 2014). Moreover, a meta-analytic review by Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003) found a relation between individual differences in need for closure and various measures of political conservatism, defined in part as resistance to change. Additionally in organizational settings, need for closure was found to correlate negatively with coping with change and to correlate positively with aversion to change (Kruglanski, Pierro, Higgins, & Capozza, 2007).

Recent developments in Lay Epistemic Theory applied and extended it to groups in conjunction with the MIP-G model (Motivated Information Processing in Groups; De Dreu, Nijstad, & van Knippenberg, 2008). This work demonstrated that high need for closure affects compliance and conformity especially when individuals have a pro-social rather than a selfish motivation (Bechtoldt, De Dreu, Nijstad, & Choi, 2010). Recent studies found also that high need for closure is particularly detrimental to divergent thinking both at the individual level by self-censoring of creative ideas (Rietzschel, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2007) and, at a group level, by reducing the number of original ideas generated in a brainstorming task (Chirumbolo, Livi, Mannetti, Pierro, & Kruglanski, 2004).

Overview of present hypotheses and studies

Resistance to change of newcomers and old-timers with high vs. low need for closure may affect the stability of group culture across time. Consider a new member of a group from a different cultural background than members of the host country. Such individual may experience considerable uncertainty as to whether his or her values, traditions, and ideas would be accepted by the old-timers. The influx of new members into a group could be threatening also to the old-timers. The cultural “invasion” by newcomers into the group could undermine its pre-existing worldviews and conventions, and replace them with different customs and perspectives. Thus, whether cultural change would occur may crucially depend on the ability of the newcomers to propose new ideas and solutions brought by their prior experiences and how open the old-timers are to innovations introduced by the newcomers. Specifically, openness to innovation may induce change, whereas closed mindedness may perpetuate cultural stability. In turn, members’ closed and open mindedness may stem from their motivational orientation, and more specifically from their need for closure, as discussed earlier. The relation between members’ need for closure and the perpetuation of group norm was tested in three studies described below. The first study was a field study aimed

at testing our hypothesis in a real-world setting, i.e., in family culture. The remaining two studies were laboratory studies using a *generations design* specifically suited for investigating the transmission of group norms across changing membership, thus replicating cultural evolution in a laboratory setting (Jacobs & Campbell, 1961; Kenny, Hallmark, Sullivan, & Kashy, 1993). Using this paradigm, we investigated the way in which a basic mechanism of norm transmission (conformity of newcomers and stability of old-timers) is affected by the need for closure.

Study 1

The present study used a cross-sectional analysis of natural family dynamics across two generations in order to examine the relation between offspring’s dispositional need for closure and their acceptance of familial norms. Based on our theory, we predicted a positive relation between offspring’s need for closure and conformity to norms espoused by the older generation.

Participants

A total of 195 students at the University of Rome “Sapienza,” treated here as members of the offspring generation, were recruited to respond to a family health behavior survey. A total of 62.6% of the participants were females and 38.4% were males; their average age was 21.9, ranging between 16 and 27 years of age (SD = 2.48).

Measures

The Italian version of the need for closure scale was administered to all participants (Pierro et al., 1995; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). The original scale consists of five sub-scales measuring the following dimensions of the need for closure: Need for Order, Intolerance of Ambiguity, Need for Predictability, Close mindedness, and Decisiveness. Responses were recorded on a seven-point scale with the alternatives ranging from “completely disagree” (1) to “completely agree” (7). Some of the studies (Kruglanski et al., 1997; Neuberg, Judice, & West, 1997; Roets & van Hiel, 2007), in which the structure of the scale was assessed have shown that the Decisiveness dimension is not significantly related to the remaining dimensions, leading to an alternative operationalization of this measure (Roets & van Hiel, 2011). Therefore, in the present studies, for each participant we computed a general NFCC average score using only the 35 items belonging to the four subscales with significant structural coefficients on the second-order factor referred to as NFCC (Mannetti, Pierro, Kruglanski, Taris, & Bezinovic, 2002), namely Need for Order, Intolerance of Ambiguity, Need for Predictability, and Close Mindedness. The reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) of this scale was acceptable at .79.

The norms of present interest concerned health behaviors. Specifically, participants were asked to respond to four items regarding healthy behavior. These items were: “I run to keep fit” (“Corro per mantenermi in forma”), “From time to time, I allow myself to relax” (“Mi concedo momenti di relax”), “I engage in sport in order to improve my psychological well-being” (“Faccio sport per migliorare il benessere psicofisico”), and “I carry out regular health-examinations to check on the state of my health” (“Faccio analisi per controllare il mio stato di salute”). Participants rated their own behavior and the behavior of each of their parents on seven points scales ranging from never (1) to always (7). Then a mean of the frequencies of each behavior was computed. Reliability coefficient ranged from .65 (self-valuation) to .78 (parents’ evaluation).

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