

# Relationships between organizational justice, identification with organization and work unit, and group-related outcomes

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Received 13 July 2004

Available online 20 October 2005

## Abstract

This research examined the differential antecedents and consequences of organizational identification and work-unit identification. Specifically, we hypothesized that organization-focused procedural justice and distributive justice would be positively related to organizational identification, whereas supervisor-focused interactional justice would be positively related to work-unit identification. A further hypothesis was that organizational identification would relate to organization-focused outcomes (turnover intentions and extra-role behavior toward the organization), and work-unit identification to work-unit-focused outcomes (extra-role behavior toward the work unit). Our results from a sample of 160 employees of a research institution supported these hypotheses. In addition, we found some evidence that organizational identification and work-unit identification differentially mediated the relationships between organization-focused and supervisor-focused justice, and organization-focused and work-unit-focused outcomes. We discuss our findings in terms of their implications for social-identity research on organizational identification, and for research on organizational justice.

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**Keywords:** Multiple organizational identifications; Social identity; Organizational justice; Extra-role behavior; Turnover intentions

## Introduction

Since the late 1990s, psychologists have expressed widespread interest in organizational identification, which is generally defined as “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to” the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 34; see Riketta, 2005, for a recent review). One reason for this interest is certainly the positive effects that organizational identification has been shown to have on various work outcomes. It has been linked with lowered turnover intentions (Abrams, Ando, & Hinkle, 1998; Tyler & Blader, 2000), increased extra-role behavior (Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002; Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2001) and increased job satisfaction

(Van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000), for instance. Recently, however, researchers have begun to note one significant limitation in the literature. While previous research has predominantly taken the organization as a whole as the focus of identification, the workplace context also suggests multiple other foci such as the work group and the department (e.g., Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Christ, van Dick, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2003; Van Dick & Wagner, 2002; Van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher, & Christ, 2004; Van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000). It thus appears that organizational identification is, in fact, a multi-foci construct.

This notion of multiple organizational identifications, in turn, has led to the emergence of two new research areas. The first focuses on the consequences, and specifically on whether different identifications are differentially related to work outcomes. A few studies have already addressed these issues with promising results

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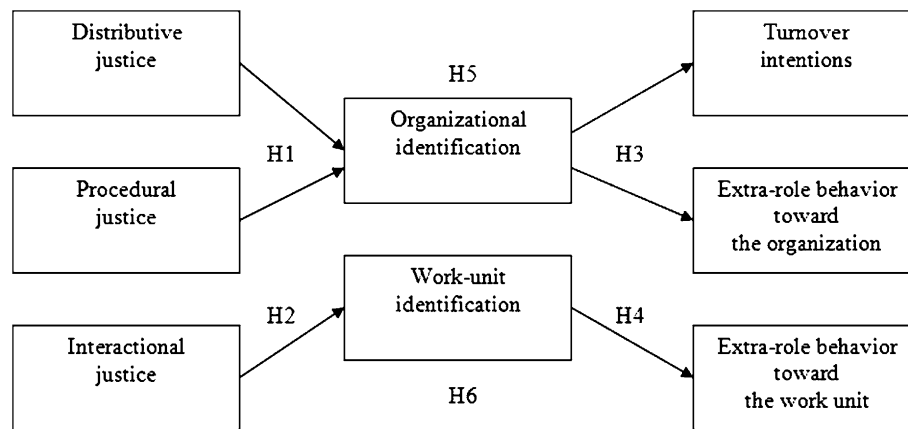


Fig. 1. Summary of the hypothesized pattern of relationships.

(Christ et al., 2003; Van Dick et al., 2004). However, given the potential implications in terms of fostering positive work outcomes, further research is still needed. The second research area concerns the antecedents of multiple identifications, and specifically whether different identifications have different sets of predictors. Indeed, we cannot assume that the factors found to influence organizational identification would similarly influence identification with other foci. Further, establishing the differential antecedents of different identifications may shed more light on the strategies that organizations should employ when fostering employee identification. Yet, these issues have been largely neglected in previous research.

The aim of the present study was therefore to extend the research on multiple organizational identifications by examining the differential antecedents and consequences of organizational identification and work-unit identification. First, given the premise of the group engagement model that perceived organizational justice is positively related to organizational identification (Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003), we consider employees' perceptions of procedural justice, distributive justice, and interactional justice (Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005) as the key antecedent. Specifically, we wanted to find out whether organization-focused perceptions of procedural justice and distributive justice are related to organizational identification, and whether, on the other hand, supervisor-focused perceptions of interactional justice are related to work-unit identification.

Second, we investigated whether organizational identification was further related to organization-focused outcomes (turnover intentions and extra-role behavior toward the organization), and whether work-unit identification was related to work-unit-focused outcomes (extra-role behavior toward the work unit). Finally, we looked at whether organizational identification mediated the relationship between organization-focused justice perceptions and our organization-focused outcomes, and whether work-unit-identification mediated the rela-

tionship between supervisor-focused justice perceptions and our work-unit-focused outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

The specific pattern of relationships tested in our study is summarized in Fig. 1 and the literature on which they are based is reviewed below. First, however, we will introduce our theoretical framework for examining multiple organizational identifications.

#### *The social-identity approach and multiple identifications*

According to the social-identity approach, which comprises the theories of the social identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), people define themselves, to a large extent, in terms of their social-group memberships. This group-based definition of the self forms an individual's social identity: "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his 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). The importance of social identity, in turn, is reflected in the degree of identification with the group in question. Specifically, identification refers to "a relatively enduring state that reflects an individual's readiness to define him- or herself as a member of a particular social group" (Haslam, 2001, p. 383).

The social-identity approach also holds that social-group memberships have significant effects on an individual's perceptions, emotions, and behavior. More specifically, social identity leads to a tendency to act

<sup>1</sup> Note that throughout this paper we treat perceptions of organizational justice as antecedents and turnover intentions and extra-role behavior as consequences of organizational identification and work-unit identification. However, given that we analyze correlational and cross-sectional data, we are not able to answer questions of causality on the basis of our findings. Thus, by using the terms antecedents and consequences for certain variables, we merely want to emphasize that these variables may be antecedents and consequences of organizational identification and work-unit identification.

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