

LEADERSHIP STYLES AS A SOURCE OF EMPLOYEE ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

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Abstract

The notion that leadership styles could be a source for organizational identification have caught attention by human resource management and organizational behaviour scholars in recent years. Leadership is one of the most complex and widely studied construct in organizational studies. The purpose of this paper is to review the impact of leadership styles on employee organizational identification. Theoretical and empirical studies were reviewed and summarized. The review revealed that the general link of leadership-organizational identification has been widely accepted, and most studies focus on transformational leadership, while other leadership styles should be considered.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Leadership Behaviours, Organizational Identification, Identity

INTRODUCTION

Numerous research works revealed that leadership styles are primary source for employee organizational identification. Employees' immediate leaders play an important role in their daily work lives in an organization, and as employees picture their supervisor as an organization representative (Eisenberger et al., 2010; Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002), leaders' behaviours may shape how employees view their relationship and

social identification with their organization(He & Brown, 2013). In addition, organizational identification, based on The Social Identity Theory, provides a powerful lens to understand the relationship between leadership and organizational identification.

Organizational identification matters because it relates to identity (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Furthermore, a person must have an identity as a member with an organization in order to identify with it (Haslam & Ellemers, 2005), and that will provide an answer for the question “Who am I?”, and yet a definition of the concept of self (Ashforth et al., 2008; Loi, Chan, & Lam, 2014). In addition, organizational identification helps individuals to behave, as well as, what to expect from the surrounding physical and social environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Edwards, 2005; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Loi et al., 2014).

According to Bergami & Bagozzi (2000), and Hogg & Terry (2000) membership in a work organization is an important group affiliation a person must have, probably more important than any other group affiliation. Identifying with an organization fulfils an essential human need, and that is to identify with and be a part of a larger group (Ashforth et al., 2008). In addition, five self-related motives, that touch on fairly basic needs, were identified for organizational identification that are self-coherence (maintaining a sense of wholeness across a set of identities), self-knowledge (locating the self within a context so as to define the self), self-distinctiveness (valuing a sense of uniqueness), self-expression (enacting valued identities), self-continuity (maintaining a sense of wholeness across time) (Ashforth, 2001).

This paper reviews the literature on the relationship between leadership styles and organizational identification. In addition, this paper presents a theoretical basis for the linkage between the aforementioned constructs.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership is one of the most complex and widely studied construct in organizational studies(Denis, Langley, & Rouleau, 2010; Lussier & Achua, 2013; Probert & Turnbull James, 2011). Even after years of studies and publications, there is no one universal definition for leadership, as there is still little agreement regarding the definition. Stogdill(1974) noted there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept. In addition, according to Bass & Bass(2008), there is 221 different definitions of leadership in 587 different publications. The requirement to different definitions was due to complexity of the construct, as well as, to the fact that the construct was employed in different ways for different uses(Lussier & Achua, 2013; Yukl, 2013).

Leadership can be defined by taking into consideration the conditions that shape the interrelations between the dynamic forces. Such forces include power, individuals, values, beliefs, resources, and circumstances(Storey, 2004). In addition, leadership can be defined in terms of prescribed behaviour, physical traits and personality, the foci of group processes, the making of meaning, the initiation of structure, the exercise of influence, the art of inducing compliance, the interaction relationship between leaders and followers, or in terms of leadership effects(Bass & Bass, 2008).

Accordingly, different studies had different definitions for leadership. For instance, House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman (2002), and Robbins & Judge(2013)defines it as the ability to motivate, influence and enable individuals to contribute to the objectives of organisations of which they are members. Kwantes & Boglarsky(2007)defines leadership in terms of task facilitation whereas leadership “is aimed at aiding employees in doing their work by helping them solve problems and implement better procedures for completing work” (p.215). Moreover, leadership is guiding and directing others in the work environment(Nelson & Quick, 2013). Last but not least, leadership is a relationship whereas one person is affecting others’ behaviours(Mullins, 2011). In general, leadership contains four aspects that are (1) leadership is a process; (2) leadership involves influence; (3) leadership occurs in a group context; and (4) leadership involves goal attainment(Northouse, 2013).

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Scholars have introduced the concept of social identification to the workplace, in which they examined the way people define themselves in terms of their organizations (Ashforth et al., 2008; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Elsbach, 1999; Elstak, Bhatt, Van Riel, Pratt, & Berens, 2015; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Lee, Park, & Koo, 2015; Loi et al., 2014). Interestingly, organizational identification took an important place in the field of human resource management and organizational behavioural studies, as it has important implications on individuals, groups, and organizations (He & Brown, 2013; Lee et al., 2015; Riketta, 2005). Members identify with their organizations when they define themselves, at least partly, in terms of what the organization is thought to represent.

Organizational identification, in general, is a specific form of social identification. According to Mael & Ashforth (1992) organizational identification can be defined as “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” (p. 104). It also can be defined as “a psychological linkage between the individual and the organization whereby the individual feels a deep, self-defining affective and cognitive bond with the organization as a

social entity”(Edwards, 2005; p.227). Accordingly, identification happens “when an individual’s beliefs about his or her organization become self-referential or self-defining... [so as to] integrate beliefs about one’s organization into one’s identity”(Pratt, 1998; p.172).

The most common and widely accepted conceptualization of organizational identification is based on the Social Identity Theory introduced by Ashforth & Mael (1989). The authors proposed four principles that are;

- (a) identification is a perceptual-cognitive concept, not necessarily associated with specific behaviours or emotional states;
- (b) group identification means experiencing on a personal level the group's successes or failures;
- (c) group identification is similar to identification with an individual, in the sense that one defines oneself in terms of that social referent; and
- (d) identification is different from internalization. Identification means referring to self in terms of a social category, while internalization means incorporating the group's attitudes or values as guiding principles of one's own behaviour.

LEADERSHIP AS A SOURCE FOR EMPLOYEE ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

The relationship between leadership styles and organizational identification has been established in the literature. Employee organizational identification has been found to be positively related to a number of leadership styles such as transactional, transformational, ethical, and paternalistic (e.g., Cheng & Wang, 2015; Epitropaki & Martin, 2005; Weichun, He, Treviño, Chao, & Wang, 2015).

House(1996) noted that leaders’ behaviours complement the environment of subordinates by providing psychological structure and support, facilitate collaborative relationships between members, maintains positive relationships between the unit and the larger organizations, and enhance the legitimacy of the work unit in the eyes of other members of the organization of which the work unit is a part. According to House & Dessler(1974), one of the strategic functions of the leaders is to enhance the psychological states of subordinates that result in motivation to perform or in satisfaction with the job.

Several conceptual works have linked leadership to organizational identification(e.g., Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). Perhaps the most significant development in the leadership-identification literature, however, emerges from Hogg(2001) theoretical exploration of group prototypicality as a key variable in perceptions of leadership. Building on the Social Identity Theory, Hogg argued that as the salience of an in group increases, individuals are more

likely to judge people (themselves and others) based on perceptions of how prototypical they are of the group. This translates into “more prototypical group members emerging as leaders and being more effective as leaders”(van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; p.251).

According to the Social Identity Theory, uncertainty reduction and self-enhancement are two motives that underlay organizational identification(Hogg & Terry, 2000). The first cue from leadership is about reducing subordinates’ uncertainty. Leaders reduce subordinates’ role ambiguity in the organization by telling them what they are expected to do, scheduling and coordinating work, giving specific guidance, and clarifying policies and procedures (House, 1996), as well as, practice “path clarification”(Gibson, Ivancevich, Donaally, & Jonopaske, 2012; Robbins & Judge, 2013). By doing this, subordinates will see their role to be more clarified and stable in the organization(Loi et al., 2014), Moreover, they will understand the norms and values of respected membership, as well as, understand what the organization stands for and what is like to be a typical member for it(Çeri-Booms, 2012; Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). This knowledge make the follower identify him/herself with the organization as a result of reduction in uncertainty.

The second cue from leadership is related to a person’s self-esteem in the organization. Leaders stress pride in work and self-evaluation based on personal accomplishment, therefore, when leaders clarify subordinates role they will perform effectively(House, 1996), yet, have a better self-evaluation. House also noted that leaders encourage performance excellence, set high standards and challenging goals, as well as, show confidence and trust that the subordinates will achieve high performance. Such treatment is likely to lead those employees to believe that their employing organization is a good place to realize their self-esteem(Loi et al., 2014). Consequently, according to the self-enhancement motive, they will incorporate organizational attributes into their own self-concept and develop strong organizational identification.

Last but not least, leaders might involve their subordinates in the decision-making process, this will increase subordinates involvement, commitment, and social pressure of peers(House, 1996), as well as, identification. Furthermore, subordinates who received support from their supervisors became more identified with the organization(Gok, Karatuna, & Karaca, 2015).

Leaders supportive behaviour provides a psychological supportive work environment(House, 1996), which, in turn, makes organizational identity more attractive(Zhang & Chen, 2013), yet employees identify more with the organization(He & Brown, 2013).

Table 1: studies on the relationship between leadership styles and organizational identification

Author	Leadership Styles	Findings
(Epitropaki & Martin, 2005)	Transformational & Transactional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transformational leadership and organizational identification was stronger for individuals of low positive affectivity as well as for employees of high negative affectivity. Transactional leadership had a stronger positive effect on organizational identification for individuals characterized by a connected self-schema.
(Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010)	Transformational	Organizational identification mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and voice behaviour
(Carmeli, Atwater, & Levi, 2011)	Transformational	Leader-member exchange mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and relational identification.
(Walumbwa et al., 2011)	Ethical	Organizational identification fully mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance.
(Wang & Howell, 2012)	Transformational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal identification with the leader mediated the effects of individual-focused Transformational leadership on individual performance and empowerment. Group identification mediated the effect of group-focused Transformational leadership on collective efficacy.
(Zhu, Sosik, Riggio, & Yang, 2012)	Transformational & Transactional	Psychological empowerment partially mediated the effect of transformational leadership and active transactional leadership on followers' organizational identification.
(Çeri-Booms, 2012)	Transactional	Trust in leaders mediates the relationship between transactional leadership and organizational identification.
(Zhang, Kwan, Everett, & Zhaoquan, 2012)	Servant	Organizational identification mediates the relationship between servant leadership and work-to-family enrichment.
(Zhang & Chen, 2013)	Developmental	Organizational identification mediates the relationship between developmental leadership and organisational citizenship behaviour.
(Moriano, Molero, Topa, & Lévy Mangin, 2014)	Transformational	Organizational identification mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee entrepreneurial behaviour.
(Göncü, Aycan, & Johnson, 2014)	Paternalistic & Transformational	Trust in leaders mediates the relationship between the two leadership styles and organizational identification.
(Cheng & Wang, 2015)	Paternalistic	Ethical climate mediates the relationship between paternalistic leadership and team identification.
(Weichun et al., 2015)	Ethical	Organizational identification mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and follower performance and voice.
(Behery, 2016)	Transformational	Fellowship styles (active-passive engagement) mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational identification.

CONCLUSION

This paper has reviewed the relationship between leadership styles and employee organizational identification. The Social Identity Theory provides a powerful lens to understand the relationship between leadership and organizational identification. Therefore, this study used the social identity perspective of organizational identification to discuss the aforementioned relationship. Several leadership styles were found to positively influence organizational identification. Although an extensive research has been done to cover wide range of aspects related to leadership styles and organizational identification most research were focused on transformational leadership and other leadership styles should be emphasized. In addition, it is not clear how individual differences and situational factors affect the impact of leadership on employees' identification. Thus future studies should emphasize on the contingency nature of leadership effects by investigating the boundary conditions of the linkage between leadership styles and their outcomes, specifically, organizational identification.

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