

What are Organization Identity and Organizational Identification?

Byron A. Ellis – September 18, 2017



Albert and Whetten (1985) defined organizational identity (OI) as those things that members believe to be central, enduring, and distinctive about their organization. According to Lin (2004), OI answers questions, such as "Who are we?" "What are we doing?" "What do we want to be in the future?" On the other hand, organizational identification (OID) is when employees see themselves as one with an employing organization and feel that they belong to it (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). When employees identify with the organization, they are often more involved and committed.

OI and OID are essential for high levels of organizational performance. However, many managers do not strive for oneness with their employees; they view employees as disposable assets. As a result, many employees do not see themselves as one with employing managers or the organization.

OID has been positively associated with employee creativity (He & Brown, 2013). Creativity refers to the introduction of innovations for improving organizational effectiveness and efficiency (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996). He and Brown believe that managers' behaviors shape how employees view their relationship and social identifications with their work organization. Thus, OID is positively related to individual leadership styles, such as transformational leadership (Carmeli et al., 2011).

OI sets boundaries on how much an organization can change because some managers and employees see themselves as one with the legacy organization and are reluctant to change. The inability of organizations to change identity can constrain adaptive capacity (Bouchikhi, 2003). Bouchikhi notes that often organizations are anchored in some combination of geographical space, nationality, strategy, core business, technology, knowledgebase, organizational design, operational philosophy, or governance structure. However, a change in the market can adversely affect a firm's identity and make its anchor a liability.

Bouchikhi (2003) gives the example of someone who works for a steel company, who identifies as a steelworker, and any attempts to de-emphasize steel is likely to trigger emotional stress for that individual. Similarly, the introduction, or suggestion, of innovations that cause employees and managers' identification to deviate from the OI can lead to stress.

OI can adversely affect organizational performance when managers and their workers define it differently. Here, OI is not about "Who we are?" but rather about "Who are they?" Thus, leading to intergroup conflicts, such as management versus union, and resentments.

OI, as well as OID, encompasses organizational culture, and if there are intergroup conflicts, cultural changes occur slowly or not at all. Therefore, it is important for management and workers to embody the same organizational culture, and this can be achieved by creating a culture of trust between managers and workers.

Communication enhances trust, and it is "the *lifeblood* of the organization," "the *glue* that binds the organization," "the *oil* that smooths the organization's functions," "the *thread* that ties the system together," "the *force* that pervades the organization," and the *binding* agent that cements relationships" (Goldhaber, 1993). Goldhaber notes that research findings showed a correlation

between effective communication and high overall organizational performance. Unfortunately, many managers fail to realize the effectiveness of communication on organizational performance, and erroneously believe that withholding communication enhances performance and trust. Others do not understand that communication is a two-way process (Figure 1) and believe that it is about command and control, where employees' feedback is irrelevant.

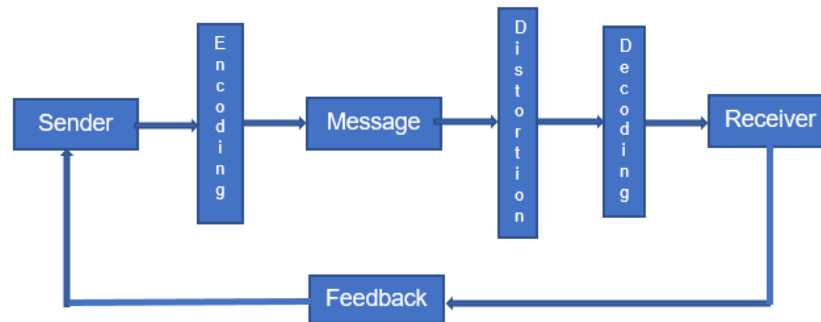


Figure 1- Process of Communication

Communication influences organizational climate and culture and facilitates OI, OID, as well as organizational change. Thus, employees' feedback is essential for achieving corporate shared values and the sense of oneness with managers and the organization.

References

- Albert, S. & Whetten, D. (1985). Organizational Identity. In L. L. Cummings & B. M. Staw (Eds.), *Research in Organizational Behavior* (Vol. 7, p. 263-295). Greenwich, CT: JAI.
- Amabile, T. M., Conti, R., Coon, H., Lazenby, J., & Herron, M. (1996). Assessing the Work Environment for Creativity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(5), 1154-1184.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social Identity Theory and the Organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 14, p. 20-39.
- Bouchikhi, H. (2003). Escaping the Identity Trap. *MIT Sloan Management Review*.
- Carmeli, A., Atwater, L., & Levi, A. (2011). How Leadership Enhances Employees' Knowledge Sharing: The Intervening Roles of Relational and Organizational Identification. *The Journal of Technology Transfer*, 36 (3), 257-274.
- Goldhaber, G. M. (1993). *Organizational Communication*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- He, H. & Brown, A. D. (2013). Organizational Identity and Organizational Identification: A Review of the Literature and Suggestions for Future Research.
- Lin Yueh-Ysen (2004). *Organizational Identity and its Implication on Organization Development*. University of Minnesota. New York: McGraw Hill.

Copyright of TJP is the property of The Jethro Project, and its contents may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserver without the copyright

holder's express written permission. Users, however, may print, download, or email articles for individual use.