

Investigating the Impact of Personality Traits on Expanded Model of Organizational Identification

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Received: December 16, 2013

Accepted: February 7, 2014

Online Published: February 21, 2014

doi:10.5539/ijbm.v9n3p148

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v9n3p148>

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of personality traits on the expanded model of organizational identification and to empirically address the following question: “can personality traits explain why some people identify strongly with their organization more than others?” The population of this survey included employees of the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. The research method adopted in this study was survey and the main tool for data collection was questionnaire. The results indicated that there were significant positive relationship between personality and organizational identification, significant negative relationship among personality, disidentification and neutral identification, and no relationship between personality and ambivalent identification. It was also found that highly extrovert employees with agreeableness traits, identified with their organization more than those with neuroticism trait, and neurotic employees felt more disidentification, neutral, or ambivalent identification.

Keywords: personality, expanded model of organizational identification, big five model

1. Introduction

Why some employees are not highly identified with their organizations, despite good work conditions, proper leadership style and favorable work relations? Can it be related to their personality traits?

Today, managers and researchers are aware of the impacts of organizational identification (OI) on key work outcomes (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). Generally, organizations prefer employees who are committed to the mission of the organization and contribute to the organizational goals (Gümüş, et al., 2012). The more the individuals identify with their organization, the more they try to meet its goals (Ngo et al., 2012). Employees also seek organizations which are similar to their beliefs and values (Gümüş et al., 2012). Recently, researchers, have conducted several studies on employees’ OI (Ngo et al., 2012); and as organizations become more complex, this concept is considered as a means for increasing integration and as an important factor of organizational success (Epitropaki, 2012). OI arises from the concept of social identity (Bizumic et al., 2012). It is the specific form of social identification that is defined by Mael and Ashforth (1992) as the sense of belongingness to the organization and internalizing its characteristics and goals by the employees. OI relates to individual-level results such as commitment, turnover and job satisfaction, and organizational-level outcomes such as culture and leadership (Ngo et al., 2012). Many researchers looked for the factors influencing OI. Most of these factors are categorized into organizational behavior and work conditions factors. However, these studies have not addressed personality traits adequately (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Some researchers believe that people enter the organization when their personality is well-formed and stable. So, investigating its impact on organizational variables can not be helpful. However, some others suggest that personality may have a considerable effect on the key issues of personal and organizational life; so its impact on organizational variables should be studied (Pierce & Gardner, 2009).

Despite the theoretical discussions for relationship between OI and personality, empirical evidence is insufficient. This paper tries to test how different personality traits can impact OI. Specifically, this study focuses on the concept beyond OI and puts emphasis on a broader range of possible forms of attachment to the organization.

2. Organizational Identification

Compared with many organizational behavior variables such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment, the concept of OI has not been regarded as a distinctive construct until late 1980s (Riketta, 2005). OI has been defined in many ways. In most definitions, it is considered as a cognitive construct referring to the consistency of individual and organizational values and sense of belongingness to the organization (Dutton, et al., 1994); in other definitions, it is regarded as an affective construct (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), and in the most common framework to study OI, cognitive and affective dimensions are combined (Van Dick, 2001). OI has risen from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1985) which refers to individuals' preference to become group members and define themselves based on their group (Mozes et al., 2012). OI can be considered as a specific type of social identification (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). Dutton et al. (1994) define OI as the degree to which individuals define themselves by the similar characteristics that they think define the organization. So, it can be seen as a psychological link between the employee and their organization which may decrease job turnover while increasing extra role behaviors (Dutton et al., 1994). Employees who identify strongly with their organizations, consider themselves as a part of it (Mozes et al., 2011), perceive their fate intertwined with the fate of their organization (Epitropaki, 2012) and are more likely to show supportive behaviors to their organizations (Gümüs et al., 2012). Many researchers believe that people with high social identification may show high degrees of personal self-sacrifice that usually result in altruism and citizenship and decrease turnover and absenteeism (Van Dick et al., 2004).

Mael and Ashforth (1992) noted that, researchers often confuse OI with some constructs such as organizational commitment. Although, OI means the sense of unity with organization and considering its successes and failures as one's own. When someone identifies with an organization, he/she will dissatisfy with leaving organization. But, someone may find organizational characteristics similar and consistent with his/her values and thus feel commitment. In other words, OI is a cognitive construct, while organizational commitment is an affective one (Pratt, 1998).

In an attempt at operationalizing the construct of OI, Cheney (1983) following Patchen's (1970) definition, define it by three basic elements: 1) membership or feelings of solidarity, belonging and emotional attraction which means self-reference as a member of organization and feeling honor in organizational membership; 2) loyalty or support of organization which means enthusiasm to meet organizational goals; and 3) similarity or perception of shared characteristics which means perceived similarity under shared characteristics for shared values and goals.

3. Personality and Organizational Identification

Over the last decades, many studies have been done on the impact of personality on organizational outcomes (Roberts & Robins, 2004); however, there is an intrinsic tension between personality psychology and organizational behavior (Mowday & Sutton, 1993). Indeed, creating consistency between these two concepts (behavior is simultaneously influenced by organizational factors and personal differences) is a difficult task. Based on organizational behavior studies, ideas, emotions, and behaviors are varying and organizational experiences can shape them (Roberts, 2006); while personality traits are somewhat stable patterns of ideas, emotions and behaviors which distinguish people from each other (Borghans et al., 2011). As mentioned earlier, some researchers believe that people enter the organization when their personality is completely formed. So, investigating its impact on organizational variables is not of much use. But some others suggest that personality can considerably affect the key consequences of personal and organizational life and it is important to study its impacts upon organizational variables (Pierce & Gardner, 2009). It appears that individual differences form their responses, thereby affecting their identification. In other words, an employee with certain personality may be influenced by group or organizational factors in particular ways. Some people perceive the world in 'black' and 'white', 'right' and 'wrong' terms who may distinguish strongly between their own group members and members of other social groups. So, it seems that there is a need to analyze empirically "if personality traits can explain why some people identify strongly with their organization more than the others".

There are several models to measure personality, among which Big Five personality model has been accepted widely by researchers. This model provides classification for studying individual differences and considers personality by five independent dimensions. It has been applied to examine interaction between personality traits and organizational variables such as leadership, job satisfaction, job performance (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012) as well as employee selection and performance appraisal (Gill & Hodgkinson, 2007). Most recently, there are three dominant Big Five instruments as Goldberg's (1992) Adjective Markers, Saucier's (1994) Mini-Markers, and Trapnell and Wiggins's (1990) Interpersonal Adjective Scales-Big Five each of

which having their strengths and limitations. Goldberg (1992) has provided two Big-Five instruments one of which is on the basis of adjective-anchored bipolar ratings and the other is on the basis of 100 single adjectives. Both of them overcame the limitations of the prior measures. Goldberg's Big Five model has five factors:

The first factor is extroversion contrary to introversion. Highly extrovert people are sociable, assertive, talkative, and active (Erdheim, et al., 2006); whereas less extrovert people are less talkative and less action-oriented (Migliore, 2011). Due of sociability, extroverts are likely to be trusted by others (Zimmerman, 2008). They can influence their work environment and are more motivated to achieve rewards (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012). Several studies show that extroverts reach higher work statues in long-term (George et al., 2011) and look for more success. They gain higher salaries, more promotions, and have more job satisfaction (Sanders, 2008).

The second factor is agreeableness which is related to traits such as altruism, caring, and emotional support. People with high agreeableness are more polite, adaptable, kind, cooperative, merciful and patient (Erdheim, et al., 2006). Agreeable employees can help create trusting relations and contribute to team cohesion (Zimmerman, 2008). Their behavior is warm, generous and supportive (Migliore, 2011). They accept changes more easily (Williamson et al., 2008) and can help to more person-job fit (Zimmerman, 2008). However, agreeable employees, while performing as a good team player, often have not enough venture to succeed in the workplace (Sanders, 2008). High scores in this factor show adaptability with others; while, low scores relate to competing with others, and being unwilling to participate (Migliore, 2011).

The third factor is *conscientiousness*. Highly *conscientious* people are hard-working, achievement-oriented, cautious and responsible (Erdheim et al., 2006). High scores in this factor show focus, carefulness and order; while, low scores show interruption, disorder, adjustability, and causalty (Migliore, 2011). Of the Big-Five Factors, conscientiousness has the strongest correlation to innovative performance (Collins & Cooke, 2013).

The fourth factor is neuroticism which is associated with tension, irritability, and higher anxiety levels (Sanders, 2008). Highly neurotic people are worried, depressed, angry, awkward, emotional and unconfident (Erdheim et al., 2006). They view the negative side of things more and may consider neutral events as problematic; so they have a tendency to experience lower well-being and satisfaction and more tension (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012). High scores in this factor show emotional-reactive behaviors associated with negative emotions such as anger, or low spirits; while, low scores refer to peacefulness and ability to control stress (Migliore, 2011).

The last factor is *openness to experience* which refers to change, innovation, new experience, and learning (Williamson et al., 2008). People with more openness to experience are creative, civilized, inquisitive, original, open-minded and intelligent (Erdheim et al., 2006). High scores in this factor show a broad mental inquisitiveness with creative ways of thinking, while low scores show intention to limited and cautious focus (Migliore, 2011).

Many studies indicate that individual differences may cause employees to identify with those groups which are similar to them. So, extrovert people are more likely to identify with more sociable groups or that conscientious employees are more likely to identify with organized groups. It seems that agreeable people who are conformed to group or organization norms and values are more likely to have strong sense of identification (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006); and groups with norms that value hard work and success may tend to select conscientious employees (Bizumic et al., 2012). Hence, the first hypothesis of the present study is formulated as following:

H1: employees' personality has a significant impact on organizational identification.

Organizational theorists have recently considered an expanded model of OI that includes the concept beyond OI and emphasizes a broader range of possible forms of attachment to the organization. Expanded model of OI entails three other factors besides identification: disidentification, ambivalent identification, and neutral identification (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Disidentification occurs when an individual does not have similar traits or values with those defining the organization. For example, some people strongly disagree with organizational values and mission (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Disidentification is not a coincidental action or improper trait of the organization members, but intentional separation of themselves from the organization (Kreiner et al., 2006). It differs from being neutral about the organization (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001); because it occurs when the members deliberately hate the organization and consider it as their enemy (Nguyen & Kleiner, 2003). In this respect, the second hypothesis is proposed as:

H2: employees' personality has a significant impact on disidentification.

Ambivalent identification (also known as conflicted identification) occurs when someone simultaneously identifies with some features of the organization while disidentifies with some others. In sum, an employee who

neither identifies with the organization nor disidentifies with it, has neutral identification (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Regarding what was mentioned before, the third and forth hypotheses are formulated as following:

H3: employees' personality has a significant impact on ambivalent identification.

H4: employees' personality has a significant impact on neutral identification.

4. Methodology

4.1 Sample

The population of this survey includes employees of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. It was supposed that examining expanded model of OI in numerous organizations may result in complicated findings, as it was not possible to control various work conditions in each organizations. Thus, this study was conducted in only one organization. In our college life, we went several times to this ministry for academic affairs and in dealing with its employees, we face with different belongingness to that organization. For example, some employees were talking enthusiastically about their organizations, while some others were talking reluctantly or neutrally about it. So this question came to the minds of the authors that why, despite the same working conditions, employees feel differently about their organizations.

The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology has about 800 personnel. The sample was selected through simple random sampling. The size of the sample was about 127 employees and for ensuring the return rate of questionnaires, 250 questionnaires were distributed randomly. In order to increase the accuracy of the results, the authors decided to distribute the questionnaires themselves to observe employees' attitudes and relations directly, and to understand their viewpoints which were impossible by solely using questionnaires. At the end, 202 completed questionnaires were gathered. Among these, 35 people had diploma degrees, 91 people had Bachelor degrees, 75 people had master's or Ph.D. degrees and 1 person had not mentioned his/her education level. 72 people were women, 124 people were men and 6 people had not mentioned their gender. 111 individuals have no managerial experiences, 29 people had 1–3 years of managerial experiences, 14 people 4–6 years, 9 people 7–10 years, 22 people more than 10 years, and 17 people had not mentioned their managerial experiences.

4.2 Measures

The research method in this study was survey. The main tool for data collection was questionnaire including 68 questions designed and edited after extensive studies considering the earlier works.

Personality. In this paper, personality was measured using Goldberg's (1992) Big Five personality questionnaire. This questionnaire had 44 questions and personality was measured considering Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness to experience dimensions.

Expanded model of OI. In this paper, following Kreiner & Ashforth (2004), besides identification, three other dimensions (disidentification, ambivalent identification and neutral identification) were considered. Identification was assessed using Mael and ashforth's (1992) 6-items questionnaire and to measure other dimensions, Kreiner and Ashforth's (2004) 18-item questionnaire was utilized.

To determine the questionnaire's reliability, 30 questionnaires were distributed. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for OI queries was 0.842 and for personality queries was 0.813. Validity was assessed by both content validity and factorial validity.

Construct validity of the questionnaire was evaluated using both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Exploratory factor analysis was done using SPSS 17.0 and principal component analysis with Varimax rotation. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using LISREL 8.80. KMO index for personality was 0.868 and for OI was 0.814. Results indicated that ratio chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) was 2.08 (lower than 3), GFI was 0.97, AGFI was 0.93 (more than 0.9), RMSE was 0.004 (lower than 0.001) and p-value was 0.44 (more than 0.05). These indices indicated the high validity of this research questionnaire. Some questions were allocated to gender, age, education level, and managerial experience.

4.3 Data Analyses

To describe personality traits and dimensions of expanded model of OI, Descriptive statistics including frequencies and means were applied. To examine the impact of personality traits on expanded model of OI, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed using LISREL 8.80. To compare attitudes of male and female employees, individuals with different education level and managerial experience, T-tests, analysis of variance, and mean differences were used.

5. Results

Table 1 indicates that the overall mean for employees' concerns about OI is 3.28, suggesting a high concern for valuation among sample employees. For Disidentification and neutral identification, it is respectively 2.52 and 2.14, indicating a low concern for valuation among sample employees; for ambivalent identification, it is 3.03 referring to a moderate concern for evaluation among sample employees. Results also indicate that the overall mean concerns about all personality traits except Neuroticism are higher than average.

Table 1. Mean ratings of identification and personality traits

Variable	Mean	SD	Upper limit	Lower limit	sig
Identification	3.28	0.67	0.37	0.18	0
Misidentification	2.52	0.71	-0.38	-0.57	0
Ambivalent identification	3.03	0.85	0.15	-0.08	0.59
Neutral identification	2.14	0.76	-0.74	-0.95	0
Personality	3.4	0.27	0.44	0.36	0
• Extroversion	3.19	0.54	0.26	0.11	0
• Agreeableness	3.74	0.50	0.81	0.67	0
• Conscientiousness	3.76	0.62	0.85	0.67	0
• Neuroticism	2.75	0.66	-0.15	-0.34	0
• Openness to experience	3.42	0.55	0.5	0.34	0

Results of Pearson test (Table 2) show that there is a significant and positive relationship between personality and OI, significant negative relationship between personality, disidentification and neutral identification, and there is no relationship between personality and ambivalent identification. In addition:

- Extroversion and agreeableness dimensions have significant positive relationship with OI, neuroticism has significant negative relationship with it and there is no relationship among OI, conscientiousness and openness to experience dimensions.
- Agreeableness has significant negative relationship with disidentification and there is no relationship between disidentification and other personality dimensions.
- Extroversion, agreeableness and openness experience dimensions have significant negative relationship with neutral identification and there is no relationship among it and conscientiousness and neuroticism dimensions.
- Neuroticism has significant positive relationship with ambivalent identification, agreeableness has significant but relationship with it and there is no relationship among ambivalent identification, extroversion, conscientiousness and openness to experience dimensions.

Table 2. Correlations of all measures

Variable	Personality	Extroversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness
Identification	*0.109	*0.142	**0.219	0.055	** -0.191	0.056
Disidentification	** -0.196	-0.120	** -0.350	-0.107	0.109	-0.049
Ambivalent identification	** -0.289	* -0.163	** -0.295	-0.111	0.057	** -0.193
Neutral identification	-0.118	-0.111	** -0.225	-0.137	*0.161	0.013

Notes: N=202. *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

Results of mean difference test indicated that gender, level of education and managerial experience of the employees of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology did not generate significant difference in their OI. However, some studies indicated that men are more likely to be satisfied and identified with their organizations (De Moura et al., 2009).

SEM was used to test the effect of personality traits on expanded model of OI. The NFI (0.96), NNFI (0.97), GFI (0.96) and NGFI (0.94) are all higher than 0.90, suggesting that the current model has a good fit. The p-value for Test of Close Fit (RMSEA, 0.00) is 0.089. Since the value of 0.089 is higher than 0.05, the null-model can be rejected, referring to the fact that the current model shows a good fit.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Several researches have noted that since person-organization interaction is dynamic and changeable, OI does not exist in a vacuum. For this reason, managers should seek ways of improving OI (Gümüs et al., 2012). They also have pointed out that variables such as work conditions, fair policies, good working relationships and participative leadership can influence employees' OI (De Moura et al., 2009). However, there is not adequate empirical studies to answer the question that "may some individuals' work OI, despite good work conditions, proper leadership style and favorable work relations, be related to their personality or not?"

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of personality on OI in the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology in Iran. Results showed a significant positive relationship between personality and OI, significant negative relationship among personality, disidentification and neutral identification, and no relationship between personality and ambivalent identification. It was also found that extrovert and agreeable individuals were more identified with their organizations. The findings are consistent with the results of other studies indicating that groups consisting of extrovert and agreeable personalities tend to be more cohesive (Bizumic et al., 2012). In addition, it was found that the neurotic employees were less identified with their organization and felt more disidentification, neutral or ambivalent identification.

According to social identity theory, OI includes a process of depersonalization (Hogg, 2001) that transforms the focus of attention from individual to group. When social identity becomes more remarkable, self-understandings become depersonalized and individuals are likely to define themselves according to group characteristics (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). One's identification is not only determined by personal traits; but by the membership of the groups or organizations, as well. The intensity of the norms of such groups and their significance to the individuals might shape their personalities (Reynolds et al., 2010).

6.1 Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to the present study. The participants of this study were the employees of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology in Iran. Accordingly, the information is not expected to be generalizable across all organizations in Iran but should be worthwhile in analyzing personality traits impact on expanded model of OI. However, there is no cause to conclude that the hypothesized relationships between personality traits and OI should be achieved in other organizations.

Besides, all the variables known to affect employees' OI could not be fully covered. Only, personality traits which were rarely studied empirically in other researches were focused upon. Research should continue to address the other antecedents of expanded model of OI in Iranian organizations.

Another limitation is that this research did not focus on the impact of intervening variables on the relationship between personality traits and OI. For example, an investigation of the possible intervening role of person- job fit in the relationship between personality and OI is proposed.

6.2 Future Directions and Recommendations

In terms of future directions for practice, there is a Necessity to understand how organizations can increase employee identification which may result in performance improvement. Repeating the research on other populations with a larger sample size may contribute to evaluate whether some of the variables might be important moderators. For instance, the joint condition of extroversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness should impact on employee identification, whereas this was not studied in our data.

Furthermore, it should be noticed that in strong work situations (strong interpersonal relationships), personality had weaker impacts on performance than in weak ones (Pierce & Gardner, 2009). So investigating the possible intervening role of strong work situation is recommended. Study must be conducted in a practical setting to examine how work conditions can enable a stronger sense of OI. Researchers noted that forming cohesive work teams, improving participative culture and developing team-based pay systems may enhance sense of

collectiveness, impact personality and therefore improve OI. Also, it is worth mentioning that following Millward and Haslam (2013) study, to see identification in isolation and regardless of many contextual factors, would appear to violate organizational reality. Some researchers pointed out that the personal motive for identification differs across individuals and organizational conditions (Gonzalez & Chakraborty, 2012). Researchers noted that one specific means to develop follower identification with an organization is to encourage transformational leadership across different organizational levels (Zhu et al., 2012). So, organizations, and particularly HR practitioners and researchers must work together to discover both personal and organizational factors that can contribute to the improvement of OI.

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