

2010

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Recommended Citation

Mullins, Morrie; End, Christian M.; and Carlin, L., "Validating Kreiner and Ashforth's Organizational Identification Measure in an Engineering Context" (2010). *Faculty Scholarship*. Paper 238.

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Validating Kreiner and Ashworth's Organizational Identification Measure in an Engineering Context

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Due to its complexity, Kreiner and Ashforth's (2004) assessment of organizational identification may provide more comprehensive and therefore more useful measures of the nature and strength of employee-to-employer attachment than traditional measures of identification. However, this assessment remains relatively untested. The present research investigated the correlation between Kreiner and Ashforth's identification measure with a more traditional OID measure (Bartel, 2001), the change in OID scores over time, and whether differences between employees in OID state strength might be related to location-based differences. The two measures were correlated .48. Expected location-based differences in OID state did not emerge.

Organizational identification (OID) describes individuals' identities based on their group memberships, specifically their sense of belonging to a group and the processes by which belonging is determined and changes (Ashforth, 2001; Tajfel, 1974). Similarly, OID can describe the changing quality of employee attachment to the employer across the span of an employment relationship (Mael & Tetrick, 1992).

According to the expanded model of OID there are four OID states (Elsbach, 1999) (identification, disidentification, ambivalent identification, and neutral identification), with each OID state having unique consequences for employers.

Identification

Strongly identified employees think and act congruently with their organization's mission. Identification is thus positively associated with fulfillment of expected responsibilities, motivation, performance, OCBs, job satisfaction, and tenure (Ashforth, 2001; Bartel, 2001; van Knippenberg, 2000), benefiting both employee and organization.

Ambivalent identification

Ambivalent identification is a condition of balancing tensions. An individual simultaneously embraces some aspects of an organization and rejects

others (Ashforth, 2001). Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) found intrarole conflict, organizational identity incongruence, and psychological contract breach to be antecedents of ambivalent identification.

Disidentification

Disidentification is defining oneself by what one is opposed to (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Important aspects of an employee's identity are opposed to some or all of their organization's defining characteristics (Ashforth, 2001). Disidentification correlates positively with substance abuse, absenteeism, tardiness, poor attention span, and sabotage (Ashforth, 2001). Poor attitude and performance are likely to accompany these correlates, implying that the longer a highly disidentified employee is retained, the more adversarial the employment relationship will be.

Neutral identification

Neutral identification is a disinterest in the organization (Elsbach, 1999), perhaps resulting from a failure to attach (Pratt, 2000). Neutral identification may have job-related consequences such as the contribution of fewer OCBs (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) reported that neutral identification was strongly correlated with disidentification, warning that a high level of employee detachment may have more negative than neutral outcomes on job performance.

Because the four OID states have unique consequences for the employees and their employers, the ability to assess these constructs would be invaluable. The present research investigated the correlation between Kreiner and Ashforth's identification measure with a more traditional OID measure (Bartel, 2001), the change in OID scores over time, and whether differences between employees in OID state strength might be related to location-based differences.

Method

Participants

Population characteristics. Participants were full-time, permanent employees of a distributively-owned, Midwest engineering company who were eligible for pension benefits. Employees were distributed between business units at two different locations. The business units located at the company's original location comprised the parent company (Parent Co.). The second location housed a newer, separate business unit (New Unit). White males were the predominant demographic cohort of both populations.

Sample data (Time 1). Of the 91 Parent Co. employees at Time 1, 41 responded. Thirty-one of 38 New Unit employees responded. The sample consisted of 89.1% males and was predominantly Caucasian (90.1%), with 5.6% of the sample identifying as being African American, 2.8% Hispanic, and 1.4% as Asian. A *t*-test confirmed that Parent Co. respondents ($M = 38.85, SD = 10.17$) were significantly older than the New Unit respondents ($M = 31.87, SD = 9.65$), $t(67) = 2.89, p < .01$. Likewise, Parent Co. respondents' tenure ($M = 4.88, SD = 4.00$) was significantly greater than New Unit respondents' tenure ($M = 2.87, SD = 2.91$), $t(70) = 2.36, p < .05$.

Sample data (Time 2). Nineteen of a possible 41 Parent Co. employees completed the Time 2 survey materials. Of the Time 1 New Unit employees, 23 of a possible 31 completed Time 2 survey materials. In regards to the Time 1 dependent variables, a series of *t*-tests indicated that the employees who did not complete the study were not significantly different from the participants who did complete the study.

Design and Procedure

A mixed design with a between-groups factor (Location: New Unit and Parent Co.) and a within-groups factor (Time: Time 1 and Time 2) was used to compare the two samples and examine potential change in organizational identification (OID) scores after four months. The between-groups factor functions as a contrasted groups approach to validation (Whitley, 2002). Specifically, because the demographic make-up of the two locations differed in terms of age and tenure (see Table 1), both of which are potentially related to OID (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Pratt, 2000), observed differences in OID states could be interpreted as evidence of validity of the measure. With regard to the within-groups factor, prior to Time 2, a proposed pension plan change was announced. Because this simple announcement of change had the potential, as a breach of the psychological contract between the organization and its employees, to alter OID, measuring before and after the change was announced allows a further means to validate Kreiner and Ashforth's (2004) OID measure.

Criterion variables

Participants completed a six-item measure for each of the four OID states; identification, disidentification, ambivalent identification, neutral identification. Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) concluded from confirmatory factor analysis that the states were discrete from one another. Higher values indicated stronger levels of that state. All response scales were 5-point Likert with response ranging from 1

(*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) adapted their six-item agreement scale for identification from Mael’s unpublished dissertation (also see Mael & Ashforth, 1992). A typical item read, “This organization’s successes are my successes.” Kreiner and Ashforth’s (2004) disidentification scale was specifically applicable to employees who have distanced themselves cognitively and emotionally from their employer while retaining employment status. A typical item read, “I am embarrassed to be part of this organization.” The ambivalent identification scale reflected the mixed feelings that characterize ambivalence. A typical item read, “I have contradictory feelings about this organization.” The neutral identification scale reflected a stance that embraced neither identification nor disidentification. A typical item read, “I give little thought to the concerns of this organization.”

Table 1
Comparisons of the Populations’ Age and Tenure Between Locations

Location	Parent Co.	New Unit
Age	40.51 (10.25)*	32.68 (9.29)
Tenure	5.21 (3.75)*	3.36 (3.36)

Note. Table includes means and (standard deviations).

* $p < .01$.

Time 1 and Time 2 surveys also included Bartel’s (2001) two-item cognitive measure of organizational identification which is used as an assessment of superordinate organizational identification. Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) suggested the use of this two-item measure in determining the convergent validity of their own assessment’s six-item identification measure. Both items read: “To what extent does your own sense of who you are (i.e., your personal identity) overlap with your sense of what *Company Name* represents (i.e., *Company Name*’s identity)?” Responses to the first item were depicted visually, employing eight Venn-like diagrams with descriptive labels. The second item was presented textually. Responses to both items were made on 8-point Likert-type agreement scales with response options anchored by 1 (*Not at all*) and 8 (*To a great extent*). The higher an individual’s average score, the greater the degree of organizational identification.

Results

Correlations between participants' responses to the OID measures at Time 1, as well as measure reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas) are reported in Table 2.

Table 2
Intercorrelations and Reliabilities of Kreiner and Ashforth's (2004) OID State Subscales and Bartel's (2001) Traditional Identification Measure at Time 1

Subscale	1	2	3	4	5
1. Identification	(.69)				
2. Ambivalent Identification	-.41**	(.94)			
3. Disidentification	-.47**	.83**	(.86)		
4. Neutral Identification	-.51**	.36**	.34**	(.79)	
5. Traditional Identification	.48**	-.25*	-.25*	-.40**	(.84)

Note. * Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). Values in parentheses are Cronbach's alphas.

Convergent Validity

A bivariate correlation between Bartel's (2001) two-item measure and Kreiner and Ashforth's (2004) six-item measure of organizational identification was computed to test for convergent validity. The correlation between the two measures was $r = .48$, $p < .001$, and may be construed by convention as providing moderately strong evidence for the convergent validity of the two measures for this sample. When corrected for attenuation due to unreliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), the correlation between the two measures was $r = .63$. Inter-item correlations are presented in Table 3.

Time 1 comparisons. Independent-samples *t*-tests compared Parent Co. and New Unit participants on each of the four OID states at Time 1 and Time 2. The difference in means for identification, $t(69) = 1.41$, $p = .16$, ambivalent identification, $t(70) = -1.83$, $p = .07$., disidentification, $t(70) = -1.76$, $p = .08$, and

neutral identification were not significant, $t(69) = -1.03, p = .31$. OID state means and standard deviations can be found in Table 4.

Time 2 comparisons. Independent-samples t -tests evaluating the mean degree of change between New Unit and Parent Co. participants for the various OID states from Time 1 to Time 2 found no statistically significant differences: for identification, $t(40) = .74, p = .46$, for ambivalent identification, $t(40) = .57, p = .57$; for neutral identification, $t(40) = -.94, p = .35$; and for disidentification $t(40) = -.85, p = .40$. OID state means and standard deviations are listed in Table 4.

Table 3
Inter-Item Pearson Correlations for Identification Scales

Subscale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. K&A ID 1	--							
2. K&A ID 2	.46**	--						
3. K&A ID 3	.21	.25*	--					
4. K&A ID 4	.10	.24*	.38**	--				
5. K&A ID 5	.45**	.51**	.31**	.42**	--			
6. K&A ID 6	.29*	.10	.15	.09	.22	--		
7. Bartel ID 1	.19	.42**	.34**	.31**	.29*	.21	--	
8. Bartel ID 2	.31**	.30*	.33**	.35**	.29*	.27*	.72**	--

Note. * Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Time 1 to Time 2 comparisons. Paired-sample t -tests found no significant differences in OID strength for New Unit participants from Time 1 to Time 2. For Parent Co. participants, increases in disidentification and neutral identification were both significant, $t(19) = -2.25, p < .05$ and $t(19) = -2.21, p < .05$ respectively (See Table 4).

Table 4
Comparisons of OID State Means at Time 1 and Time 2 Within and Between Locations

Location	Time 1		Time 2	
	Parent Co.	New Unit	Parent Co.	New Unit
Identification	4.38 (.43)	3.97 (.51)	4.32 (.74)	4.01(.44)
Ambivalent Identification	1.54 (.68)	1.96 (1.09) ^{a+}	1.68 (.96)	2.26(1.19)
Disidentification	1.18 (.35)	1.62 (.85) ^{a+}	1.55 (.83) ^{b*}	1.82(.82)
Neutral Identification	1.26(.34)	1.43 (.43)	1.45 (.64) ^{b*}	1.51(.54)

Note. Table includes means and (standard deviations).

^a indicates differences between Parent Co.- New Unit (between participants) at Time 1 comparison.

^b indicates differences over time (Time 1 – Time 2 comparison) at the specified location (within participants).

⁺ $p < .1$. * $p < .05$.

Conclusions

The present research investigated aspects of validity and reliability with regard to Kreiner and Ashforth's (2004) OID measures with two groups of employees. In addition, differences between employee groups' OID states were explored. The design of the study thus allowed specific comparisons to be made of distinct groups of employees whose OID states would be reasonably expected to differ as a function of an announced change, and further allowed an examination of changes in OID states over time. The design and sample therefore provide an excellent opportunity to validate the OID scale.

With regard to convergent validity, Kreiner and Ashforth's (2004) and Bartel's (2001) identification measures converged (but only moderately). The dimensionality of the identification construct needs continued exploration, including the possibility that the use of one measure may be better than another based on situational or organizational factors. Likewise, further investigation of the overall dimensionality of OID is needed to define potential situational factors that might affect Kreiner and Ashforth's assessment.

Regarding a change in scores for Kreiner and Ashforth's (2004) measures over time, small but statistically significant increases in disidentification and

neutral identification means of Parent Co. participants from Time 1 to Time 2 exemplify the potential utility of this new assessment as a monitor of employee attachment. These results indicate that the actions of an organization may impact OID states whether or not a negative outcome has actually occurred. In the present case, a decision to merely consider changing a promised benefit may have increased disidentification and neutral identification. Because previous research has shown that organizational identification is dynamic and sensitive to alterations in the employee/organization relationship (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994), future investigators might target organizational actions with greater potential to affect employee OID. Such organizational actions include plans to downsize or outsource, transition leadership, or make a corporate acquisition that could affect individuals' employment status. However, further research is needed to establish the sensitivity of the four OID state measures as to whether the present outcome is normative for a dynamic construct such as OID.

Finally, given differences between the company's two locations, we expected that the means for OID states would also differ between the locations. These expected effects did not emerge. However, response patterns obtained were consistent with a conceptualization of OID as a multi-state construct (Elsbach, 1999; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). The lack of expected differences between the locations may be due to factors such as the timing of the assessments relative to the proposed change, and should not be treated as definitive evidence of a lack of validity for Kreiner and Ashforth's measure. Future research should continue to critically examine and further validate this potentially useful tool.

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