

16. A Framework Positioning Informal Managerial Influence and Employee Identities

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SAMMENDRAG Tidligere forskning når det gjelder innflytelse og makt i sosialpsykologisk litteratur har i stor grad anlagt et konfliktsentrisk perspektiv på organisasjoner. Andre studier har vist viktigheten av at ledelsen bekrefter gruppe-medlemmers sosiale identitet, men for det meste innenfor en kontekst der ledelsen forventer formell ettergivenhet. Dette paperet legger fram et rammeverk for lederadferd som postuleres å ha en modererende effekt på individuelle så vel som sosiale identiteter innen organisasjoner, og som uformelt påvirker arbeidstageres forventninger til å bli mer i samsvar med ledelsens forventninger.

ABSTRACT Earlier research on influence and power in social psychology literature has mostly taken a conflict-centric view within organizations. Other studies have shown the importance of leadership's affirmation of group member social identity but mostly in the context of formal compliance. This paper proposes a framework positing that managerial acknowledgment has a moderating effect on individual self as well as social identities within organizations, informally influencing employee expectations to be more conformant to managerial expectations.

KEYWORDS self-identity | social identity | managerial influence | acknowledgment | expectations

REMARKS

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16.1 INTRODUCTION

Studies on managerial influence and competence have tended to revolve around the roles and traits of managers themselves. Gunawan, Aunguroch, and Fisher (2018) identified that factors influencing managerial effectiveness fall into three main categories: organizational factors, managerial characteristics and personality factors, and role factors. Organizational factors involve formal training and development, while role factors are comprised of work complexity, demand, etc. Personality variables consist of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. Ilciuc (2017) states that managers aim to influence employees so their manifest behavior is in consonance with their desires; the leader must be a collaborator who behaves closely in accordance with the expectations of the employees in order to motivate them. This shifts the focus away from managerial personalities to employee expectations and the congruence thereof as the influencers of motivation. Moreover, this appears to put the manager in a passive role, conforming to employee expectations to drive motivation. In contrast, we may look to Alvesson and Willmott (2002), who view managerial roles as more interventionist; acknowledging and influencing employee self-construction in order to gain more coherence, distinctiveness, and commitment from them. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) viewed identity as a focus for exercising organizational control. We will adopt a similar perspective.

This paper looks into informal managerial influence that is independent of power and proposes managerial acknowledgment of employee self and social identity as a key moderating factor that can shape employee expectations, whose alignment with managerial expectations may lead to more effective employee engagement.

We interpret and limit the scope of our deliberation to managerial influence as a means of organizational control that is manifested in elevated employee engagement. In doing so, we accept the position that social power and influence are separate constructs. In his seminal paper “An analysis of Social Power”, Bierstedt (1950) contended a close relationship between social power and influence, and drew an important distinction that succumbing to the exertion of influence is voluntary, whereas power requires a submission. Bierstedt (1950) postulated that power and influence can arise in isolation from each other and can act as relatively independent variables. However, Bierstedt (1950) did not explicitly state whether social power and influence are intertwined to different degrees when it comes to an organizational context vis-à-vis a social one. French, Raven, and Cartwright (1959) claimed social power to be present among qualitatively different processes of social influence, and indeed defined power in terms of influence, and influence

in terms of psychological change, where psychological change is measured through the alteration of the state of a system over time. Thus, power may permeate within influence over time, but influence can be viewed as a precursor to power. The framework posited in this paper concerns itself with informal managerial influence exercised through its relationship with agent identities within organizations, but stops short of examining formal power and related influence. French et al. (1959) define the strength of social power as the maximum potential ability of the social agent or the norm-setting person (i.e. the manager) to affect the individual (i.e. the employee). Thus, a nomological net binding managerial intervention through acknowledgment and organizational member identity will still be valid and complete without power.

16.2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUALIZATION

16.2.1 ON THE POSITIONING AND SALIENCE OF IDENTITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

Cobb (1980) observed that studies following French et al. (1959) have been preoccupied with compliance with supervisory directives or means of production, rather than informal influence and utilization of power. Others have stressed a dependency framework where the extent of power is linked to the dependency of one on the other (Emerson, 1962). Brass (1984) identified two principal streams of research on power and influence; one that focused on structural sources of power while the other on behavior and personal traits. His study empirically connected individuals, informal communication and friendship networks to influence, operationalized through reputational measures. However, his view of influence stays within the dependency framework (Emerson, 1962), and the ability to bring about desired outcomes through the control of resources (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). Principal works of research on power and influence have not focused on the relationship between influence and identity, even when they have taken individual behavior into account.

This lack of focus does not suggest that the identity paradigm is not worthy of scrutiny. Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft, and Thomas (2008); and Alvesson and Willmott (2002) stated that while identity was an important dimension of organizational control, it has not been explored enough. To clarify, we do not focus on organizational identity in this paper, rather we are concerned with employee self and social identity. We make this choice because we wish to explore organizational control as exerted through managerial intervention, and not how an organizational identity takes shape. It may well be asked whether such delineation or isolation is

advisable. Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) observe that images of one's work organization do shape the strength of their identification with it. The more the organizational image preserves the continuity of the employees' self-concept and self-esteem, the more attractive the organizational image becomes. However, Dutton et al. (1994)'s conceptualization is pre-occupied with the influences of the "self" on the attractiveness of organizational internal and external images. Conversely, in this paper, we focus on the managerial influences, or rather interventions, on the "self". Our postulations and Dutton et al. (1994)'s conceptualization may well be complementary, but not inseparable.

Recent research efforts regarding identity in organizational contexts have mostly revolved around studying organizational identity however, and not so much around employee level identities. There has been some peripheral focus. Pfeffer and Fong (2005) proposed focusing on self-enhancement and psychological processes to explore power and influence phenomena. Haslam, Powell, and Turner (2000) in particular highlight that need theories, when applied in an organizational perspective, have mostly considered the personal need for challenge and development as antecedents of motivation. Haslam et al. (2000) instead propose that lower-level needs such as security, existence, etc. are not inherently more relevant to motivation than higher level needs of self-actualization or growth. Rather, any impact of need (and of its fulfillment) changes as the norms associated with employee self-categorization change. For instance, they suggest group-based needs to be important for motivation where social identity is salient. As such, we may extend this argument and contend that individualized needs, as well as their cognizance and fulfillment, will be important in situations where self-identity is key. Instilling employee motivation is one of the goals of managerial influence, and Burke and Stets (2000) posit that identity and social identity theories proffer roles and self-categorizations of individuals or employees, leading to processes including motivational processes once an identity is activated. This relevance of self-identity is reflected in Haslam et al. (2000)'s work as well, where it is echoed that people categorize themselves both as individual selves or as having personal identities as well as being members of social groups. In this paper, we refer to the former as self-identity, and the latter as social identity. Unlike Haslam et al. (2000) however, we are hesitant to associate self with what they term a lower-level identity, and social with a higher-level identity. In the absence of clarification of such by Haslam et al. (2000), one might presume that lower-level identity refers to it having lower-level needs, and vice versa; such an equalization between identity and needs is not supported by the definition.

16.2.2 SOCIAL IDENTITY

Brown (2015) understood identities to be people's subjectively construed understandings of who they were and who they desire to become, implicating them in all that happens in and around organizations. Brown (2001) further stated identity to increasingly be the key concept in any study of human relations. Thus identities are both inherent (self) as well as shaped by who they happen to be among (social). Ybema et al. (2009) echo this notion, stating that the pursuit of identities by social agents draws from a multitude of discursive sources, and the variety of the "self-other" talk is the critical ingredient in identity formation. Hogg, Terry, and White (1995) highlight that identity theory and social identity theories are both taken as perspectives on the social basis of self-concept, sharing many similarities. Hogg et al. (1995) further state that they both interpret the social nature of self as constituted by society, and neither posit the idea of self as independent of it. McCall and Simmons (1978); Stryker and Serpe (2016); Stryker (1968) identify that identities are reflexive and are sensitive to expectations with regard to other as well as own behavior, setting standards that guide behavior (Burke & Reitzes, 1980, 1991). Abrams and Hogg (1988)'s work frames roles and social identities, bringing forth the presence and influence of in-groups vs. out-groups based on shared values within organizations.

In this paper, we rely on the conceptualization as offered by Hogg et al. (1995) which in turn is based on the earlier seminal work on intergroup relations by Tajfel and Turner (1979). Social identity defines an individual based on which social categories the individual feels he or she belongs to, self-defining the characteristics of such categories (Hogg et al., 1995). This self-categorization is part of an overall self-concept, and categorical memberships of the self can vary in their importance within the overall self-concept. Tajfel and Turner (1979) recall a "realistic group conflict" theory to propose that as individuals self-categorize themselves into groups, opposed group interests that compete for shared (but limited) resources can lead to overt social conflicts, whereas positive interdependent goals facilitate cooperation. It is our view that acknowledging and affirming the self-concepts manifested through group memberships, in other words, the "social identities", informal managerial influence can promote a positive interdependent goal across groups, averting conflict.

16.2.3 SELF-IDENTITY

As Gleason (1983) stated about self-identity, "Its very obviousness seems to defy elucidation!" Taking a psychological approach, self-identity would be likened to

what remains consistent through a person's phases of existence, a continuity of his personality, a matter of retaining a "sameness" (Nath & Saha, 2017). Gleason (1983), while equating identity to an integrity of the self, vacillated in his discussion of self-identity between the sense mentioned above, and other forms of identity such as political, ethnic, and others. We, however, consider these to belong to social identity. In our view, self-identity is a quest for retaining a consistent thread in one's life, by which one interprets and anchors the self (Nath & Saha, 2017). Conner and Armitage (1998) viewed self-identity to be distinct from a person's moral values. They viewed the construct as more aligned to an individual's own values, leading to personal norms and alternating with moral values in dictating behavior.

Sociological and psychological literature have both underlined the influence of self-identity on behavior (Biddle, Bank, & Slavings, 1987b; Turner, 1982). Moreover, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje (2002) state that group cohesion which may contribute to social identity often stems from interpersonal ties between individuals within the group, and that groups in turn affect people's self-definitions, leading to reassessments regarding whether to distance the self from the group. Thus, employee expectations as a function of group identity dynamics must also account for the employee's self-identity. The inextricability of the presence of self-identity from social identity is also remarked upon by Conner & Armitage (1998), who claimed self-identity "to reflect the extent to which an actor sees him or herself as fulfilling the criteria for any societal role". Self-identity as self-concept may stand alone, but social identity must co-exist with self-identity.

Biddle et al. (1985); Biddle, Bank, and Slavings (1987) identified self-referent identity labeling, or the concept of self, being one of the three different drivers (the other two being norms or personal standards and preference or attitude) influencing behavior. Falk, Heimlich, and Bronnenkant (2008) stress that identities are malleable and continuously constructed. Falk et al. (2008) propose that there are big and enduring identities that are innate – the self-identity of the individual. Sparks and Shepherd (1992) have linked the construct self-identity to a sense of belonging. Biddle et al. (1987) contend that a person's self-identity is conceptually distinct from his or her evaluative attitude in predicting behavior when the behavior is non-utilitarian. As such, conversely, in utilitarian (such as organizational) circumstances, it may thus be posited that an individual's self-identity is akin to an evaluative attitude. How utilitarian informal managerial interaction is with regard to employees could thus determine whether employee self-identity takes on an evaluative form, as it is capable of assuming both. Falk et al. (2008) refer to the identities that respond to the needs and realities of specific moments and situations

as little “I” identities or situated identities. This latter set, activated as responses to social situations, is likened to the social identity of the individual. Organizations through interaction are certain to be social situations, and individuals working within the confines of an organization need to assume situated identities while carrying forth innate identities. As Burke and Hoelter (1988) argued, social structures influence people’s identities, and identities in turn influence behavior. Internal stakeholder-facing organizational processes are inherently social structures, and Burke and Hoelter (1988) point out that any production or reproduction of status systems within social structures involves social psychological processes relating to people’s identities.

16.2.4 INFORMAL MANAGERIAL INFLUENCE AND EXPECTATION CONFORMATION

Peabody (1961), in his study of attitudes, determined four types of authority that drive a subordinate superior interaction; legitimacy, position, competence, and person. Of these four, legitimacy and position are the formal authority types more effective within stringent bureaucratic structures. However, Leonard-Barton and Deschamps (1988) note that in complex and competitive organizational environments characterized by decentralized decision processes, freer communication, and looser structures, persuasive messages coming from a competent person in position of authority will be more effective in influencing the attitude and behavior of subordinates (Fidler & Johnson, 1984; Leonard-Barton & Deschamps, 1988). For our purpose, we are more interested in informal means of exerting managerial influence, that we believe stems more from the latter components of employee perceived competence and persona rather than legitimacy and position, the more formalized components.

We have previously raised the notion of the need for managers to acknowledge identities; we place this managerial support in the forms of acknowledgment akin to what Alvesson et al. (2008) dubbed managerial intervention, or soft control. For this purpose, managerial acknowledgment may be defined as recognition of the individual, taking note of, and if needed, reinforcement, of self-concepts. If we are to postulate employee expectations as a function of employee self and social identity, then depending on whether the emergent expectations align with that of managerial expectations, this managerial support could then be extended or withdrawn to encourage or dissuade certain behaviors. We have argued social identity to be inextricably linked to, and composed of, self-identities. Thus, positive reinforcement of desired attributes and the steerage thereof may lead to desired social iden-

tity formation. The resultant employee expectation is postulated to have a higher conformity to managerial expectations.

Deetz (1995) alluded to effective management as managing what is inside – the hopes, fears, and aspirations of the employees, rather than striving for direct control of their behavior. We postulate that acknowledgement of the attributes that compose the identities which employees alternately find themselves in (the self and the social) may lead to the formation of desirable employee expectations. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) posited that better organizational control could be achieved when employees can identify and self-position themselves within “managerial inspired discourses”, leading to better commitment. We furthermore acknowledge the identity attributes as the starting point of any such discourse, begun informally, which in turn influences employee expectations. The managerial intervention in the form of acknowledgment is viewed to take a moderator role rather than being an antecedent. If such emergent expectations are in alignment with the formally set managerial expectations, it may lead to higher employee engagement. Thus, we view that the role of managerial intervention that affects identity attributes through acknowledgment will primarily be to steer these expectations.

This is not an entirely new notion. As Smircich and Morgan (1982) observed, “...successful acts of organization are often seen to rest in the synchrony between the initiation of action and the appeal for direction; between the actions of leaders and the receptivity and responsiveness of followers.” It is our contention that this initiation of managerial action begins by acknowledging identity attributes, in turn providing direction that is more palatable to the employee.

Based on the discussion so far, the contentions are summarized in the following propositions:

P₀₁: Managerial intervention by way of acknowledgment of employee self-identities influences employee expectation formation.

P₀₂: Managerial intervention by way of acknowledgment of employee social-identities influences employee expectation formation.

P₀₃: Increased conformity between managerial and employee expectations leads to higher employee engagement.

The propositions are illustrated in the proposed Acknowledgment-Identity-Expectation framework.

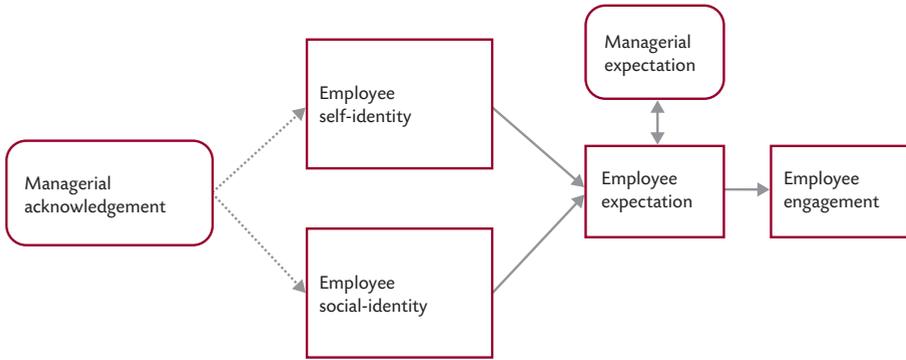


FIGURE 16.1 Acknowledgment-Identity-Expectation (AIE) framework.

16.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper is an attempt to renew a discussion regarding the need to focus on self and social identity as constructs open to managerial intervention. While Brown (2001) picked identity as a burgeoning central theme in organizational studies, subsequent research has increasingly occupied itself with organizational identity; in the last ten years or so, surprisingly little research has focused on the self and social aspects of individual or employee identity. This paper moves away from a conflict and domination-centric view of authoritative management and focuses on informal managerial influence where effective influence is exerted through acknowledgment of internal stakeholder identities, in turn directing the desired course of employee expectations.

The paper makes a conscious choice to focus on informal influence rather than formal influence and power. Simon and Oakes (2006) highlighted that any analysis of social life must inevitably account for how some people may decide what needs to be done and induce others to do it. They dubbed this an exercise of social power. Any exercise of social power will be reflected through the wielding of managerial influence. On the other hand, Haslam (2001) claimed domination and forced compliance to be hallmarks of situations involving social power. However, this appears to be a rather sweeping position, especially when framed within an organizational context. In effect, his own work appears to go beyond such a generalization. Haslam and Platow (2001)’s work on leadership shows that successful stewardship or leadership positions need to affirm the identities of their followers as part of a bigger group, and that leadership’s affirmation of social identity of group members takes precedence over equitable treatment. Collective interests are

promoted when a shared in-group identity, i.e. social identity, is formed and encouraged. Thus, within organizational settings, strengthening social identity can lead to an increase in managerial influence. We have attempted to refine this understanding further, positing that managerial acknowledgment can have a moderating effect on both employee self and social identities in nudging employee expectations toward the desired managerial expectations.

Consequently, this research is an attempt to offer a general framework that proposes managerial acknowledgement of employee self and social or in-group identity for effective exertion of influence manifested through expectation conformation. Identity is a malleable, and as Brown (2001) mentioned, cacophonous notion; yet it remains a fascinating and not fully charted territory. It is hoped that this paper can help rekindle some interest in people's identities as separate from organizational ones. While future research by the author will attempt to develop and refine operationalizations of said constructs for empirical validation, it is fervently hoped that the paper prompts interest in, and scrutinization of, the ideation presented leading to further refinement.

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