

Social Identity Process within Organizations

Expanding and complex social realities cause new types of identity. Variety in organizations and workgroups (where people are involved), implies a special kind of social identity which can be defined as professional, organizational or managerial. The study of the social identity processes in organizations is a new interdisciplinary sphere that is presented especially commonly in European Social Psychology. The result of its theoretical comprehension is Social Identity Theory. In the article listed and analyzed, foreign theoretical elaborations and empirical studies in the area: organizational identity and organizational identification, social identity theory and leadership; labor motivation and target designation, and amalgamations and differences in organizations.

Keywords: *identity, organizational identification, leadership, goal setting, amalgamations and differences in the organizations.*

In the 21st century, strategic manpower management metamorphosized and new horizons appeared: globalization, a variety of forms and methods of management and training, information and personnel technologies, and intellectual and social capitalization. The fundamental rate of change increased, and the life-cycle of the specialists and organizations' formation and development became shorter. Organizational priorities shifted increasingly to "human measurement", and denoted managerial abilities, flexibility and responsiveness as the key competencies.

From the field of manufacturing and retail, there becomes competition in the sphere of knowledge, relations and new ideas. The individuality of the worker, his talent and capability gain the meaning of the most exclusive "good" in the world market.

What happens to the people and groups in these circumstances? How do they adapt and develop in the condition of changing over to virtual organizations, connected with the necessity of being constantly included in the network structure?

These expanding and complex social realities cause apparent new types of identities. On the one hand, it represents a problem of plurality, and quite often, even identity fragmentation, on the other hand – as the opportu-

nity of the greater freedom in choosing and self-determination of the man in the changing world.

The Organizational Identification. Social identity is one of the most studied issues in social psychology. This issue is widely presented in European social psychology. The result of its theoretical comprehension is Social Identity Theory (SIT), worked out by A. Tashfell, as well as Self-Categorization Theory (SCT), suggested by J. Turner. At present, the concept of the Social Identity Theory is widely used as explanatory instrument in various areas of social and psychological knowledge.

One area of such theory and practice is in the study of the social identity processes in the organizations. This new interdisciplinary sphere has great potential for the development of both trends – SIT and SCT, as well as organizational psychology and personnel management psychology.

Multitudes of publications, conferences (e.g. in 2000 in Amsterdam), as well as seminars and workshops (e.g. summer psychology school, organized by European Association of the Experimental Social Psychology in 2002 in Germany) on the processes of the social identity in the organizational context, are evidence the increasing scientists' attention on this issue.

Analysis of the literature (4-5, 8-15, 18-22) discovers several trends of theoretical elaboration and empirical studies in the area: (1) organizational identity and organizational identification; (2) SIT and leadership; (3) labor motivation and target designation, as well as (4) amalgamations and (5) differences in the organizations.

Tashfell defined social identity as the part of the I-conception of the individual, originating from realization of his membership in the social group, and the value and emotional meaning of the membership (1). Since the organization can be considered as a social group, it is also the basis for forming the definitive aspect of identity.

The application of the SIT in the framework of organizational psychology entailed the large quantity of research concerned with the notion of organizational identification. As is well known, A. Tashfell distinguished "the identification" as a process from "the identity" as a product of the process (1).

Ashforth and Miall define organizational identification based on the fact that it is a specific form of social identification. Organizational identification implies affiliation, which is reflected in the I-conception as membership in the social group. The self-determination of the individual in terms of the organization assures the partial answer to the question: "Who am I?" and includes three aspects: cognitive (knowledge of affiliation), value (availability of the positive and negative connotations of the organization membership) and emotional (acceptance of the organization on the basis of the previous two

characteristics).

Such self-determination affects the behavior and results in actions congruous to the Organizational identification (4).

In the decision making process an individual identifies himself with the group weighing the value of several alternatives in his choice in terms of consequences for the group (18). Accordingly, if the individual, who makes the decision, identifies himself with the organization, he strives to choose an alternative that promotes the concern of the organization in the best way (8).

Researchers of organizational identification denoted three main characteristics of the phenomenon.

First, Organizational identification is directly related to all social and psychological processes that occur in the organizations.

Second, Organizational Identification exerts strong influence on the decision-making of the organization.

Third, the Collective Organizational Identification is supported by the organizational communication and depends on the structure of the organization (12).

Many authors note that the organizations supply the staff with multiple-group membership, as the system has subsystems (subdivisions, teams, departments etc.). One of the principal hypotheses of organizational identification, introduced by the Danish psychologist Van Knippenberg is the assumption that work-group identification is stronger than organizational identification. The author offers a diversity of grounds for this assertion.

First, work-groups are smaller in size than organizations. Brewer believes that people are more inclined to identify themselves with relatively small groups than with the big groups because of the threat of individual differences.

Second, the individuals have much in common with their work-group in their attitude to work, common fate and history.

Third, Hogg and Abrams insist that the more an individual identifies himself with a particular group, the more likely he thinks and behaves in terms of that group membership. The hypothesis follows that identification with the work-group correlates more with the organizational aims and behavior than it does with identification with the organization as a single whole (21).

Van Knippenberg verified the assumption experimentally, investigating the four variables related to the organizational identification: labor motivation, involvement on the job, fluctuation of personnel, and job satisfaction.

As it showed, organizational identification negatively correlates with the fluctuation of personnel (which is not unexpected as the workers, identifying themselves with the organization, value their collectives and the organiza-

tional membership and aspire to keep it and stay in the organization), and positively correlates with the labor motivation, involvement on the job and satisfaction with the job.

Identification with the work-group has stronger positive correlation with given variables than identification with the organization as a single whole. The author concludes that this evidence demonstrates the necessity of the organizational system approach, and the consideration of the various aspects of the organization's aims and behaviors that affect the organizational identities of the workers (21).

Albert and Wetten connect organizational identification with the type of the organization. They marked out two types of organization: ideographic and holographic.

Ideographic organization is the more common form of identification of workers with the organization they work in; it demonstrates the best correlation with identification with the work-group, which was investigated by Danish psychologists. In the second case, i.e. in the holographic organization, the workers share the common identity, identifying themselves with the organization as a single whole (21).

Hennessy and West investigated the connection between identification in the organization and inter-group relations. The scientists came to the conclusion that evaluative inter-group favoritism positively correlates with identification of the work-group and negatively with organizational identification (9).

Patchen and his colleagues from the Michigan University distinguished three elements of the organizational identification: (a) perception of the characteristics shared with colleagues, (b) the level of solidarity with the organization and (c) organizational support.

Key theses of Patchen's theory of identification included concepts of similarity, membership and loyalty. Patchen distinguished similarity as the reciprocity of the perceived united aims and interests of the other organization members. He described membership as the level of connection between the I-conception and the organization; and loyalty as the workers' support for and maintenance of the organization (15).

The acknowledgment of the significance of organizational identification by many research workers resulted in the invention of different instruments to measure it.

One of the first such instruments' author is Cheney, who in 1982, on the grounds of Patchen's studies, elaborated on the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (OIQ) – the most popular and effective instrument today for the assessment of organizational identification (8).

According to Cheney, organizational identification is relevant to a wide

spectrum of organizational phenomena, including organizational behavior, individual and group decision-making, work goal-setting, motivation, satisfaction with the work, goal achievement, role conflict, staff cooperation, fluctuation of personnel and organizational effectiveness (8).

Several years ago, Johnson and Heimerg analyzed the structure of the Questionnaire repeatedly. Using factor analysis the researchers singled out several components of organizational identification, which is different from Patchen's three –loyalty, similarity and membership.

The authors described the first component in terms of the organizational work attribute, including the work context (organizational sphere characteristics) and psychological characteristics of the work (such as the image of the organization, its values and the organizational identification, itself).

The second component kept its former name – organizational loyalty, and involved devotion, faithfulness, care and respect. These characteristics are related to the first order components. The components of the second order that generalize the primary constituent of the organizational identification include two clusters: image/identity and mission/purpose (12).

Apparently, organizational identification is defined in the terms of organizational culture with such characteristics as values, image, mission and purpose. It is obvious that strength of the organizational identification depends on the degree of the acceptance of the corporate culture and its compliance with the individual characteristics of the staff and managers.

S.A. Lipatov marked out that there was a need to investigate the social factors that profoundly influence organizational devotion and identification, particularly the national and organizational cultures (2).

Allen and Mayer consider identification to be a component of a more general (in their opinion) psychological phenomenon – devotion to the organization that reflects the individual's existing imagined attraction between him and the specific organization, in which he works.

Along with the loyalty and involvement, devotion includes the identification as a firm belief in the corporation values and the given organization acceptance (2).

Social Identity Theory of Leadership. There are several approaches to leadership analysis from the SIT position. In our opinion, the work of Australian scientist Michael Hogg "A Social Identity Theory on Leadership" (10) is one of the most successful versions of this position. When much research on organizational identification was conducted in the frame of the organizational psychology, Hogg placed the emphasis not on the organizational context but on the social and psychological nature of leadership. With that emphasis, his work gives grounds for organizational leadership analysis, in the view of the

social knowledge psychology.

Many scientists (Lord, Foti, de Vader, Nye and others) adverted to the problem of leadership with relation to the social knowledge psychology before Hogg. This trend was named Leadership Categorization Theory, which contends that people have biases against the leaders' behaviors.

These biases are cognitive schemes of types or categories of leaders. When someone is categorized as a leader according to his leader-like behavior, the relevant scheme of leadership takes action for the generation of his behavior assumption.

Thus, to be a good leader means to have leader category attributes that meet the requirements of the situation (13). The given theory considers leader categories as nominal, and leadership as the product of the individual information processing. There is no such thing as a social group consisting only of leaders in real life -it is only the cognitive grouping of characteristics.

Michael Hogg views the leadership as a group process generated by social categorization and social identity-related effects. Analyzing the leadership investigations, the author notes that most of the modern methods accentuate (a) the individual cognitive processes that categorize individuals as leaders and (b) individual charismatic characteristics that are necessary for the "transforming" leader.

The first aspect is closer to the social and psychological traditions of Europe. The second one is based on "individualistic" American method that is incarnated in the Theory of New Leadership tradition (Bass, Avolio and others), which states that effective leaders must be innovation, change-oriented, capable of sharing and supporting the vision and mission of the organization (10).

The representative of Australian "third power" suggests the integrative theory of leadership and believes that it is essential to consider the social factor, meaning group membership as well as great social systems. As Hogg marks, the processes of social knowledge, namely such factors as (1) prototypicality, (2) social attraction and (3) ascription and processing of the information, which are connected with the group membership, affect the leadership dynamics strongly.

In the theory of self-categorization, the cognitive aspect of social identity is defined in terms of cause-and-effect of the social categorization of yourself and others, and by the division of social life into in- and out-groups, which are cognitively presented as prototypes.

In-group prototypes are constructed under the influence of the social context and consist of the set of attributes, which determine and add directions, feelings and behaviour, characterizing group members and distinguish-

ing the given group from another (10).

The prototype method of keeping social information is often determined as “the best example of a given category” in the cognitive tradition (1). In that way, an in-group prototype reflects a generalized figure of a model representative of the group.

Prototypicality is connected with the depersonalization phenomenon, since it implies the perception of others not as unique individuals, but in the view of group standards.

Hogg writes that members of the group have different degrees of prototypicality, i.e. closeness to the in-group prototype. Prototypicality is the foundation for the influence, and in new groups the more prototypical member is a potential candidate for the leadership.

The profundity of a leader’s effect on the followers depends on the degree of in-group prototype coordination and subjective uncertainty of the group members. It is known that man aims at positive identity maintenance and uncertainty reduction. In this case, he tends to identify himself with high status groups and organizations; and ready to follow the prototype leader (10).

There is one more foundation for having influence in the group –a social attraction process. Prototypical members of the group are more socially attractive than non-prototypical; and their ideas are accepted with more readiness than the others’.

The third factor that affects leadership perception in the group is the collection of attributive processes, called up to attach sense to the behavior of others.

Members of the group are inclined to form some charismatic personality and impute leadership character to a man, not to the prototypicality of his position. This maintains a status-based structural differentiation within the group between the leader and followers.

According to study results, regarding the crisis and organization change conditions, members of the organization are more inclined to the disposition ascription, i.e. imputing the behavior reasons to a person (in this case, to the leader) (14).

As a result of the experimental study, Hogg came to conclusion that: (a) group identification, social attraction and effectiveness of the leader, based on his perceptible competence, increase with the development of the group solidarity; (b) congruence of the leader schema becomes less influential, and group prototypicality – becomes a more effective determinant of the followers’ support for the leader, evidenced by higher identification level in more solidary groups.

According to these conclusions, the author recommends leaders of the more solidary groups to pay attention to how prototypical they are to hold their positions, and leaders of the less solidary groups to know how to blend tasks and schemes specific for a given situation.

So, prototypicality and social attraction in aggregation with attribute and information processing contribute to a perceptible change in active leadership. Hogg distinguished leadership as an influence, and power as a constraint. Prototypical leaders, personifying group standards, have relative or position power and do not have to use their personal authority.

As long as prototypicality is related to strong in-group identification and there is an emphatic connection between such a leader and his followers, any form of a leader's negative behavior directed against the in-group is turned against him as well (10).

Hogg's Theory of Leadership describes social identity processes in different forms of leadership: spontaneous (e.g. laboratory short-term group) and established (in organizations), in small (teams) and big groups (nations).

Group Motivation and Goal-Setting. One of the main questions in the Organizational Behavior investigation is - what motivates individuals to apply force at work? This question is especially related to the behaviors that contribute to the group or organization.

Wegge and Haslam made an attempt to desegregate theses of two theories – Goal-setting Theory and Theory of Social Identity (22). This brings the authors to insist that there is certain congruence in the nature of goal activation and self-categorization. Goals function as lenses that concentrate self-energy and have an influence on individual behavior. Goals, as well as the self, can be defined in individual and group terms.

Individual goals are internalized as the aspects of personal self, and promote satisfaction of the individual's interests; group goals are directed to the social self and group outcome achievement.

Drawing a parallel between goals and identity, researchers note that the process of individual goal setting actualizes personal identity, while group goal setting emphasizes social identity.

When the goal-setting process entails goals related to organizational development, organizational identity is actualized. Wegge and Haslam consider (???) the goal-setting process to be more effective when group or team discussions are led in participatory way (22).

Participative culture implies solving organizational problems by means of open interaction and thorough discussions, and by the manager acting as group collaboration catalyst (3).

The united members' search and achievement of goals are the neces-

sary conditions for creative development and the ability to change and grow. At the same time, individual charismatic leadership remains organizational absolute value and condition for its progress; but its main mechanism is not the authoritative aim “I will do it myself”, but the collective “let us do it together”.

On the basis of empirical study of organizational goal setting, the authors came to the conclusion that specific and complex goals led to higher individual productivity, than simple and unspecific ones.

Complex and specific goals motivate employees to (a) apply more force while performing a task, (b) continue their work at the task till obtaining a result, (c) focus their movement and attention to behavior and results relevant to the goal achievement, (d) use or develop a proper strategy and plan of task performance (22).

Organization Diversity and Merger. One of the crucial questions of SIT is an issue of individuals' similarity and diversity. As insists Brewer, people aim to optimal distinctions - “the happy medium” – to keep in balance the need to join in a group (inclusion) and individual diversity, the wish to be different from others (exclusion) (5).

As a number of studies indicate, the more similar people are to a group, the more likely they are inclined to identify themselves with it, as identification is based on categorizing self as similar to others within the category.

Works of Van Knippenberg and his colleagues are dedicated to these aspects of organizational life (19, 20). One of them regards identity and organizational diversity, the other – organizational merger and its effects.

As Van Knippenberg and Haslam note, diversity is a fact of organizational life, as a majority of work-groups consist of individual differences in demographic characteristics, aims, norms, values, knowledge, etc., and likewise, organizations differ from each other in their structure, purposes, culture, etc. (19)

Adverting to SIT, the body of research defines diversity as an important aspect of identity. It is interesting, that underlying this fact is group members' notion of what unites them, what makes them “a good group” – unique characteristics of each taken separately or something common, something they all have.

Members that perceive the group as heterogeneous are more inclined to identify themselves with it, and be more devoted and satisfied with their group membership.

Jenn, Northcraft and Neale marked out several types of differences: informational, social category, and value differences. They discovered that informational difference correlates with work-group efficiency positively, while

the two other types of differences correlate with it negatively (11).

Investigating organizational mergers, i.e., integration of organizations in the bigger one, Daan Van Knippenberg and Barbara Van Knippenberg came to the conclusion that a merger exerts a psychological influence on the people taking part in the process (20).

Analyzing social identity processes in the organization before and after a merger, the researches discovered that organizational identification depends on the feeling of continuity and completeness, which in turn is defined by the dominance of an organization in relation to its merger partner.

According to SIT and SCT, a merger can be determined as a formal re-categorization of two social groups into a single one—this leads to social identity changing. Employees as members of the new group have to adapt to it—this initiates a sense of interruption and the breaking of completeness, especially in the case when one organization is dominant.

In practice, a majority of organizational mergers come to absorption, when one organization is bigger and more powerful than the other. In this case, members of the dominant organization experience much less discomfort from the changes, while members of the subordinate organization perceive the fact [of the merger] as a change of group membership.

One might believe that the key factor in defining organizational identification after a merger is organizational dominance. Authors of this research separate concepts of dominance and status.

In spite of the fact that SIT uses the “status” concept and considers inter-group relations in terms of status position, instead of that of dominance (as SIT notes, high-status groups guarantee a higher level of identification), authors insist on using the term “dominance”. This is because of the fact that frequently in mergers, an organization that might be called a “subject” of the merger becomes higher-status than the dominant one.

From this point of view, dominance is closer to the “power” concept, though it does not exactly define the meaning of this difference either (20).

Regarding the dominance concept, SIT could not escape a fate of “being used”; investigations in the field of social dominance are results of this use. For example, this is the case, when one of the merger’s subjects is high-status (SIT), but not dominating.

Social Dominance Theory (SDT) - is one of the recent European social and psychological theories that was developed by American scholars Felicia Pratto and Jim Sidanius (16, 17), and includes ideas of many scientific predecessors.

Using the conceptual framework of authoritarian personality theory, double-valued political behavior theory of Rockidge, Blumer’s group positions

theory, theories of Marxism and neoclassical elitism, research of political aims and public opinion, and the previously mentioned, social identity theory, this conception is an attempt to unite the worlds of individual personality and social structure.

This theory asserts that, all human societies tend to be structured as social hierarchy systems, which are group-based. In these social hierarchy structures, dominating groups are placed “at the top” with one or several subordinate groups “underneath”.

The authors distinguish individual social hierarchy from group social hierarchy. The first implies the possession of power, prestige and wealth on the basis of personal characteristics, such as leadership ability, great intelligence, artistry, political or scientific talent, achievements, etc.

Group social hierarchy relates to the social power, status and benefits, and all that an individual has by means of ascribing himself as a member of certain socially designated groups, such as race, religion, clan, tribe, ethnic group, social class, etc. Group social hierarchy includes three stratification systems: of age, of gender, and of randomly organized groups.

The common aspiration to support group social hierarchy and to dominate over the "worst" groups, the authors referred to as social dominance orientation (SDO). SDO applies to a basic wish for having one's own in-group, which is better, more predominant and dominating in comparison with relevant out-groups.

SDO is governed by four factors: (1) membership and identification with a random, prominent and hierarchically organized group; (2) socialization factors (educational level, religion, etc.); (3) innate characteristic features (e.g., it is considered, that where there is a greater ability to empathize, there is a lower level of SDO); (4) gender (men have higher levels of SDO than women) (17).

The authors worked out a scale for measuring the level of social dominance, which consists of twenty items (e.g. “Certain groups of people are more worthy than others.” or “Victory is more important than a game's process.”). They insist that SDO essentially differs from personal dominance, which is measured by the SDO questionnaire.

In the framework of Social Dominance Theory (SDT) much research was carried out, yet since we are interested in social identity issue we will give just some results.

Pratto and Sidanius investigated the interaction amongst inter-group identifications, SDO, and differential inter-group social allocations, indicating the latter in three indexes: differential inter-group estimate, social distance and group cooperation.

Experiments conducted in the traditional minimal-group paradigm showed that there was a statistically significant correlation between in-group identification, SDO and social distance (those who strongly identify themselves with an in-group and have high SDO level, feel greater social distance from an out-group.) The differential inter-group estimation is a measure of in-group and out-group competence.

It was clarified, that in having higher levels of group identification, subjects consider more in-groups to be relatively competent; and with higher levels of self-estimation, there are more distinctions in perceived competence between in-group and out-group, and subjects wish to cooperate less with out-groups (17).

From our point of view, social organizations can be considered as group social hierarchies, which tend to compete, dominate and actively suppress each other in constantly changing aggressive environments.

Thus the aspiration for membership in any organization, especially to managerial position, partially includes orientation to social dominance.

As may be seen, Theory of Social Identity is greatly exploited by many scientists and possesses great potential in the field of personnel management and organization psychology.

Moreover, R.Brown, a modern British researcher is of opinion that there are several areas, which are the most prospective for this theory's further development: the concept of identity itself; introduction to the theory of affective components; simultaneous management of plural identities; and the inclusion of implicit processes in the analysis of identification and its effects (7).

As the author considers, it is necessary from the point of view of the expansion of the identity concept, to pay more attention to a variety of groups, which can underlie social identity.

SID does not tell the difference between different types of groups today. All groups - whether they are small associations or scaled public categories - concerning social identity processes are considered as psychological equivalents for the members. But, as a number of researches showed, various groups can promote absolutely different functions of identity (6).

Thus, variety in organizations and workgroups (where people are included), implies a special kind of social identity which can be defined as professional, organizational or managerial (if the matter concerns managers), and any given group membership provides a variety of identity functions that can be investigated for expanding both the "identity" concept and the area of its application.

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