

Relations between organizational identity, identification and organizational objectives:

An empirical study in municipalities



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The achievement of organizational objectives largely depends on employee behavior. Employee behavior in turn, is influenced by the strength of the organizational identity and employee identification. In this study, the relations between organizational identity, identification and organizational objectives were investigated among the employees of five municipalities. Centrality and continuity of the identity and employee identification appeared to influence employees' knowledge, attitude and behavior; however the influence of continuity was negative. Employee identification was affected by centrality, behavior and perceived external prestige. Managers should focus on articulating the central values of the organization and the objectives, stimulate dynamic and create high levels of identification.

Keywords: Organizational identity; Organizational identification; Organizational objectives; Municipalities

Organizational identity and identification have a profound impact on many organizational behaviors and therefore on the functioning of an organization and the achievement of its objectives. As Albert, Ashforth and Dutton (2000) state: "The beauty of the identity and identification concepts is that they provide a way of accounting for the agency of human action within an organizational framework."

Organizational identity is taken to mean the internal, that is, employees' view of the organization, following Albert and Whetten's (1985) notion of "How do we see ourselves." Albert and Whetten (1985) argue that organizational identity is (a) what is taken by employees to be the *central* attributes of the organization; (b) what makes the organization *distinctive* and therefore unique from other organizations in the eyes of the employees; and (c) what is perceived by employees to be enduring or *continuing*, regardless of objective changes in the organizational environments. The three characteristics described above suggest that organizations with a *strong* identity have central attributes, are distinctive from other organizations and remain the same for longer periods.

Organizational identity is seen as a basis for employee identification with the organization (Dutton, Duckerich and Harguail, 1994; Hatch and Schultz, 2000). Organizational identification is concerned with the question "Who am I in relation to the organization?" (Pratt, 1998). Tajfel (1978) sees social identification as the cognition of membership of a group and the value and emotional significance attached to this membership. Following Patchen's (1970) identification theory, organization identification includes three components: (1) feelings of solidarity with the organization; (2) attitudinal and behavioral support for the organization; and (3) perception of shared characteristics with other

organizational members. Organizational identification can affect both the satisfaction and behavior of employees and the effectiveness of the organization (Albert et al., 2000; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hall and Schneider, 1972; Lee, 1971; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986).

In this study we focused on organizational identity, organizational identification and organizational objectives for one specific type of organization: municipalities. Municipalities function as producers and suppliers of welfare on behalf of their citizens, visitors, companies and investors (Buursink, 1991; Kriekaard, 1993; Van den Berg, Klaassen and Van der Meer, 1990). Given the importance of municipalities for communities, insight in possibilities to improve their functioning is of importance. Though municipalities can be seen as organizations producing services and products like any other organization, they are different in the sense that they are governmental, service organizations with a nonprofit character. In addition, the service delivery of municipalities became more output-oriented and customer focused in the past decade (Robertson and Ball, 2002). Whereas financial measures of success are central in for-profit organizations, success in nonprofits is largely measured in relation to achievement of their objectives (Kanter and Summers, 1987). Since a key factor in achievement of the objectives is employee behavior, insight in the extent to which organizational identity and identification influence employee behavior can be valuable to municipal organizations. Knowledge on this subject can help organizations in improving their efficacy and efficiency through measures pointed at organizational identity and identification.

The purpose of the present study was twofold. First, it was to answer the question how the concepts of identity, identification and organizational objectives relate to each other. Second, we defined independent variables that may have an impact on organizational identity and identification. On the basis of previous research, we developed a model that will be presented in the next section. To test this model, we formulated seven specific hypotheses. We tested these hypotheses and the model in five municipalities in the Netherlands.

2 Model and hypotheses

In Figure 1 the conceptual model is shown. According to the model, organizational identity, identification and the knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the organizational objectives are variables that affect each other. Within the concept of organizational identity, three components are distinguished that define the strength of the identity: centrality, distinctiveness and continuity (Albert and Whetten, 1985).

A review of the literature suggests three variables that may have an impact on organizational identification: (1) the perceived external prestige of the organization (Dutton et al., 1994; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Smidts, Pruyn and Van Riel, 2001), (2) value congruence (Boxx, Odom and Dunn, 1991; Chatman, 1991) and, (3) length of tenure (Hall and Schneider, 1972; Hall, Schneider and Nygren, 1970; Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Length of tenure is also expected to influence organizational

identity (Dutton et al., 1994; March and Simon, 1958). Below, the theoretical rationales for the relationships in the conceptual model are presented and hypotheses are formulated.

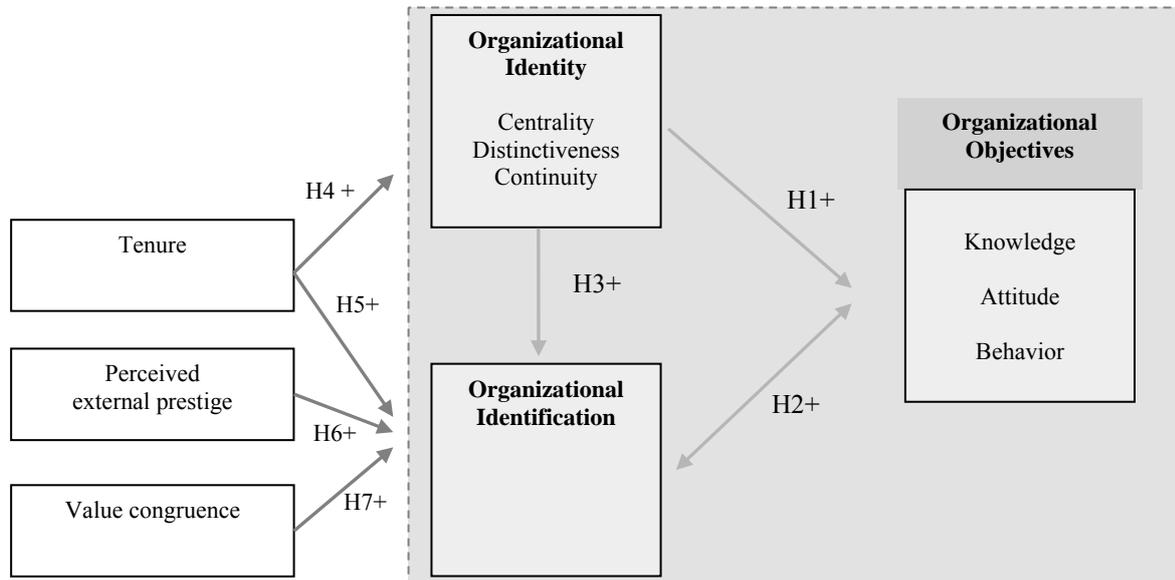


Figure 1. A model of the relationships between organizational identity, identification and objectives

2.1 Organizational identity and organizational objectives

It is hypothesized that the strength of the organizational identity is related to the knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the objectives of an organization. On the organizational level, if an organizational identity is the central, distinctive, and continuous core of a shared organizational scheme, it can improve the organizational effectiveness and performance (Stimpert, Gustafson and Sarason, 1998) and can act as a framing mechanism for organizational decision making (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Barney and Stewart, 2000). These effects help the organization in achieving its objectives. Barney and Stewart (2000) see organizational identity as a device to facilitate the conception and implementation of strategic action. This will eventually lead to more value for the organization. On the individual level, organizational identity influences the premises which underlie employees' choices regarding strategic, organizational, and operational issues (Dutton and Duckerich, 1991).

In line with the above, it can be expected that a strong organizational identity affects the employees' view of the organizational objectives. Therefore, we assume that a strong organizational identity has a positive influence on knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the organizational objectives. Thus,

Hypothesis 1. The stronger the organizational identity the better the knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the organizational objectives.

2.2 Organizational identification and organizational objectives

Organizations can greatly benefit from inducing employee identification with the organization (Cheney, 1983). Organizational identification has been linked to a variety of work attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes which support the organization, including individual decision making (Cheney, 1983) commitment to common goals (McGregor, 1967) and employee interaction (Patchen, 1970). Because of the importance of identification for organizations, we considered how organizational identification influences the knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the organizational objectives.

As employees identify more strongly with the organization, their beliefs about the organization are likely to become more positive (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). For example, they believe that the organization is producing valuable outputs (Dutton et al., 1994). Lee (1971) found that scientists with a high organizational identification demonstrated more favorable attitudes toward their job, organization and profession than those with a low organizational identification. Organizational identification can also directly influence members' behavior. When an individual identifies with the organization, he or she will make decisions that are consistent with the organizational objectives (Barney and Stewart, 2000; Patchen, 1970), will self-consciously direct his or her efforts towards the organizational objectives and gain intrinsic satisfaction through the perception of movement toward relevant objectives (McGregor, 1967). Lee (1971) also found that scientists with a high organizational identification were generally more productive, better motivated and rewarded, more satisfied, and had less propensity to leave the organization than employees with a low organizational identification.

We also propose that knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the organizational objectives will positively influence organizational identification. In general, an organizational mission and vision can provide an overall unifying theme for both motivating and focusing all employees (Collins and Porras, 1994; Cornelissen and Elving, 2003). Smidts et al. (2001) found that the adequacy of information received about the organization, for example the organizational objectives, leads to greater employee identification. In addition, they stress that a perceived lack of information will not contribute to one's feelings of being taken seriously and therefore will have a negative impact on identification.

Overall, we expected a positive reciprocal relationship between organizational identification and employees' knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding organizational objectives, suggesting the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. A positive reciprocal relationship exists between organizational identification and knowledge, attitude en behavior regarding the organizational objectives.

2.3 Organizational identity and organizational identification

Organizational identity can serve as a cognitive and emotional basis for identification with the organization (Hatch and Schultz, 2000) and can be very motivational (Pratt, 1998). Employees' beliefs about the distinctive, central, and enduring attributes of the organization can serve as a powerful image

influencing the degree to which employees identify with the organization (Dutton et al., 1994). Adoption of this organizational identity scheme, will lead to a strong identification with the organization (Barney and Stewart, 2000). For example, organizational employees who believe their organization has a distinctive culture, strategy, structure, or some other configuration of distinctive characteristics in relation to those of comparable groups, are likely to experience strong levels of organizational identification (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Mael and Ashforth (1992) found that alumni who perceived their university as distinctive in attitudes, values and practices had high levels of organizational identification. Following from the above, we assume that a strong identity will have a positive influence on organizational identification. Thus,

Hypothesis 3. The stronger the organizational identity the greater the organizational identification.

2.4 Antecedents of organizational identity and organizational identification

We assume that three antecedents are positively related to identification in organizations: length of tenure, perceived external prestige and value congruence. It is also expected that length of tenure is related to the organizational identity.

Length of tenure. The attractiveness of the organizational identity varies with a member's length of tenure (years in the organization) (Dutton et al., 1994). In line with this, we assume that employees who work in the organization for a longer time will perceive the organizational identity as stronger. In addition, Dutton et al. (1994) assume that an attractive organizational identity will strengthen organizational identification, and therefore mediates the relationship between tenure and identification. March and Simon (1958) propose that the longer an individual remains in an organization, the more his interactions occur within the organization, the more his needs are satisfied within the organization, and, therefore, the more he identifies with the organization. Other researchers confirm this direct impact of length of tenure on organizational identification (Hall and Schneider; 1972; Hall et al., 1970; Mael and Ashforth; 1992). We propose two direct relationships between length of tenure, and organizational identity and identification. Thus,

Hypothesis 4. Length of tenure has a positive influence on organizational identity.

Hypothesis 5. Length of tenure has a positive influence on organizational identification.

Perceived external prestige. Perceived external prestige represents how an employee thinks outsiders view his or her organization (Smidts et al., 2001) and influences employees' identification (Dutton et al., 1994). Employees may feel proud of working in an organization with a good prestige, as it strengthens their feelings of self-worth. The more prestigious the organization the greater the

potential boost to self-esteem through identification (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). The opposite is also true; if employees interpret the external organizational image as unfavorable, they may experience negative personal outcomes, such as depression and stress (Dutton et al., 1994). This in turn, could lead to undesirable organizational outcomes, such as increased competition among employees or reduced effort on long-term tasks. Perceived external prestige may result from various sources of information, such as the opinions of reference groups, worth of mouth, publicity, external company controlled information, and even internal communication about how the company is perceived by outsiders (Smidts et al., 2001). Hence, the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6. Perceived external prestige has a positive influence on organizational identification.

Value congruence. Value congruence is the fit between professed organizational values and the values deemed appropriate by employees. High levels of fit between organizational climate and people's preferences for them have been found to have a positive impact on the individual and the organization. A good fit is associated with high levels of satisfaction and organizational commitment and cohesion (Boxx et al., 1991; Chatman, 1991), low levels of turnover and intentions to quit (Chatman, 1991; O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell, 1991), prosocial behaviors (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986), and work performance (Downey, Hellriegel and Slocum, 1975). These results show that a greater value congruence leads to attitudes and behaviors consistent with stronger identification. An organization's performance should therefore be greatly enhanced if the cultural values are congruent with the desired beliefs and values of its employees (Boxx et al., 1991). It is assumed that value congruence has a positive relation with organizational identification. Thus,

Hypothesis 7. Value congruence has a positive influence on organizational identification.

3 Method

A questionnaire accessible through Internet was developed to collect information for measuring identity, identification, knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the organizational objectives, perceived external prestige and value congruence. Data were collected in five municipalities (Apeldoorn, Assen, Deventer, Dordrecht and Leeuwarden) in the Netherlands. To test the model, the results from the municipalities were combined to form a collective result.

3.1 Respondents

Respondents in the present study were employees from five municipalities in the Netherlands. The questionnaire was sent by email to 1218 employees. A follow-up mail was sent in all organizations to

augment the response. A total of 297 usable questionnaires was received, resulting in an overall response rate of 24%.

Most respondents worked at the municipality of Assen (47.8%, response rate: 18.5%) and Dordrecht (30.0%, response rate: 31.6%). The rest of the respondents worked at the municipality of Apeldoorn (9.1%, response rate: 52.0%), Deventer (8.4%, response rate: 33.3%) and Leeuwarden (4.7%, response rate: 46.7%). Respondents ages ranged from 19 to 61 years ($M = 42.3$, $s.d. = 9.36$). The participants' mean tenure at the municipalities was 11.4 years ($s.d. = 8.28$), and the majority of the participants worked fulltime (65.3%).

3.2 Measures

Organizational identity. The measure of identity was based on the three criteria defined by Albert and Whetten (1985), namely centrality, distinctiveness and continuity. It was assumed that the stronger an organizational identity, the more central the organizational values are, the more distinctive the organization is from other organizations, and the longer the identity remains the same.

Centrality was measured with a list consisting of 36 values. We started with 100 values based on the brand personality scale developed by Aaker (1997) and a self conducted content analysis of mission statements from municipalities. There has been some use of the brand personality scale to measure image (Aaker, 1999) and to measure the internal view or identity of organizations (Davies, Chun, Vinhas da Silva, 2001). A pretest was used to select values that were relevant to measure organizational, specifically municipalities, values. A final set of 36 items was chosen to assess centrality. A seven-point scale ranging from (1) "fits not at all" to (7) "fits very well" was utilized. We measured centrality by creating a top ten of values that had the highest mean scores for each municipality. Values that were present in the top ten of at least four municipalities were assumed to be the central values of the municipalities. This resulted in six central items. This construct of these six items was highly reliable ($\alpha = .80$). A composite score was formed by summing the individual scores on these central values.

Organizational distinctiveness was assessed by five items, measured on a Likert scale ranging from (1) "I disagree very strongly" to (5) "I agree very strongly." The items describe various issues which may vary among organizations (e.g. way of working, way of handling each other). Sample items are: "The way we work at municipality of X makes us different from other municipalities" and "The municipality of X is unique to work for." This construct was reliable ($\alpha = .65$). A composite score was formed by averaging these items.

Continuity was assessed by six items and measured on five-point disagree/agree scales. Sample items are: "Since I work for the municipality of X much has changed in the way we handle each other" and "The municipality of X maintains her traditions." After deletion of two items the construct was still low in reliability ($\alpha = .52$). Because factor analysis of the remaining items indicated it was one-dimensional, we decided to make a composite score for this construct.

Organizational identification. An organizational identification scale was developed, consisting of 10 items measured on five-point disagree/agree scales. We used items that were based on a short version of the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (Cheney, 1983; Gautam, Van Dick and Wagner, 2004). The scale included three items measuring membership, four items measuring loyalty and one item measuring sameness. Two items based on identification with the municipality and the unit, were included. This scale appeared to be reliable ($\alpha = .75$). A composite scale was formed.

Organizational objectives. To measure knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the objectives of the municipalities 15 items were developed. Five-point disagree/agree scales were utilized.

The scale measuring knowledge included three items. Sample items are “I know which way I can contribute to the realization of the objectives of the municipality” and “I do not know what the municipality of X wants to reach in the future.” This scale appeared to have a sufficient reliability ($\alpha = .60$). A composite scale was formed.

Attitude was assessed by six items. Sample items are “The municipality of X has formulated its organizational objectives too optimistic” and “I expect that the municipality of X will achieve a lot in ten years.” This scale also appeared to be reliable ($\alpha = .65$). Again a composite scale was formed.

Finally, perceived behavior regarding the organizational objectives was assessed by six items. Sample items are “What I want to achieve in my work, is the same as what the municipality of X wants to achieve” and “When making decisions in my work, I always consider the consequences for the municipality of X.” This scale appeared to have a high reliability ($\alpha = .79$), therefore a composite scale was formed.

Length of tenure. Length of tenure was measured by one question, asking the number of years an employee is working in the organization.

Perceived organizational prestige. Perceived organizational prestige was assessed by one item, measured on a five-point disagree/agree scale. This item was based on Mael and Ashforth’s (1992) organizational prestige scale. The item was “The municipality of X has a good reputation among external stakeholders.”

Value congruence. To measure value congruence, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt each value to be important within their work environment. The same list that was used to measure centrality was also used to measure value congruence. Commensurate measurement is often recommended for assessing fit because it ensures mutual relevance of the characteristics under investigation (Kristof, 1996). A seven-point scale ranging from (1) “not important at all” to (7) “very important” was utilized. Each respondent’s normative values were compared to the actual values assigned to the organization. This procedure has been used in earlier research on organizational values (Boxx et al., 1991). The difference scores were summed to form an indication of fit.

4 Results

4.1 Initial analysis

Table 1 provides the means, standard deviations, inter-correlations and internal consistency alphas for all of the variables. In the municipalities, six central values were assessed that appeared the most frequently in the top ten of the highest values. These central values were: focus on consultation, friendly, expert, diligent, responsible and honest. On average, individuals score on these values was 5.23 (s.d. = 0.76). The strength of distinctiveness of the organizational identity was slightly under the midpoint of a five-point scale ($M = 2.87$, s.d. = 0.60). This suggests that employees do not perceive their organization as unique and very different from other organizations. The continuity of the organizational identity was perceived to be slightly negative ($M = 2.91$, s.d. = 0.65). In sum, it appears that the strength of the organizational identity was reasonably low, except for the variable centrality.

Further, employees' knowledge of the organizational objectives was positive ($M = 3.59$, s.d. = 0.75). Their attitude regarding the objectives was neutral ($M = 3.15$, s.d. = 0.56). Interestingly, employees had the feeling that their behavior was supportive in reaching the organizational objectives ($M = 3.78$, s.d. = 0.68).

On average, the strength of identification in the studied organizations was slightly positive ($M = 3.44$, s.d. = 0.60). Perceived external prestige scored around the mid-point of a five point scale ($M = 3.13$, s.d. = 0.89). Finally, the sum of the difference scores between "present" values and "should be" values was -43.07 (s.d. = 28.23). On average, for each of the 36 measured values, incongruence existed of just over one point on a seven point scale ($M = -1.20$, s.d. = 0.78).

The correlation analysis provides support for most of the hypotheses. However there are some exceptions. First, distinctiveness of the organizational identity did not correlate significantly ($p > .05$) with any of the components of the objectives and organizational identification. Secondly, continuity and the components of the objectives correlated negatively, whereas we assumed a positive correlation. Thirdly, distinctiveness and continuity did not significantly correlate with organizational identification. Fourth, length of tenure did correlate with centrality and continuity. However, contrary to Hypothesis 4, the correlation was negative. Finally, length of tenure was unrelated to organizational identification.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Pearson Correlations and Scale Reliabilities for Composite Variables ^a
(N = 207)

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Organizational identity											
1 Centrality ^b	5.23	0.76	(.80)								
2. Distinctiveness	2.87	0.60	-.06	(.65)							
3. Continuity	2.91	0.65	-.16*	-.08	(.52)						
Organizational objectives											
4. Knowledge	3.59	0.75	.29**	-.04	-.34**	(.60)					
5. Attitude	3.15	0.56	.49**	-.04	-.23**	.45**	(.65)				
6. Behavior	3.78	0.68	.30**	.11	-.21**	.51**	.35**	(.79)			
7. Organizational identification	3.44	0.60	.47**	.06	-.11	.30**	.41**	.39**	(.75)		
8. Tenure	11.4	8.28	-.16*	-.07	-.17*	.04	-.02	-.01	-.05		
9. Perceived external prestige	3.13	0.89	.29**	.06	-.18*	.04	.28**	.16*	.34**	-.05	
10. Value congruence ^c	-1.20	0.78	.63**	.01	-.09	.29**	.47**	.18*	.38**	.13*	.29**

^a Reliabilities for each scale are indicated in the brackets

^b Based on the individual scores on the central values

^c Based on the difference scores between “present” values and “should be” values

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

4.2 Test of the hypotheses

In Table 2, the standardized regression coefficients are presented together with the squared correlation coefficients (R^2 s). The relative importance of the variables is reflected by the magnitude of the coefficients.

Hypothesis 1 concerned the influence of organizational identity on employees’ knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the organizational objectives. Since distinctiveness did not correlate significantly ($p > .05$) with the knowledge, attitude and behavior; this variable was not entered in the regression analyses. The findings show that centrality significantly affects knowledge and attitude ($p \leq .001$) regarding the objectives, but not employee behavior. In addition, continuity has a significant negative influence on knowledge, attitude and behavior ($p < .05$). These negative relations between continuity and the components of the objectives were not in agreement with Hypothesis 1. In addition, the lack of a significant correlation between distinctiveness of the organizational identity and the components of organizational objectives also does not offer support for the Hypothesis. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 can only be confirmed with respect to the influence of centrality on the knowledge and attitude regarding the organizational objectives. This means that only an increase in the strength of the organizational identity caused by an increase of centrality will positively influence the knowledge and attitude regarding the organizational objectives. Employee behavior is not influenced by an increase of centrality.

In Hypothesis 2 it was proposed that a positive reciprocal relationship would exist between organizational identification and knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the organizational objectives. The first step in testing this prediction was analyzing the influence of identification on

knowledge, attitude and behavior. The findings suggest that organizational identification contributed significantly to the knowledge of the objectives the attitude regarding the objectives and employee behavior ($p < .05$). Step 2 in testing Hypothesis 2 was analyzing the influence of knowledge, attitude and behavior on organizational identification. Table 2 shows that only behavior contributed significantly to organizational identification ($p \leq .001$). Employees giving more behavioral support for the organizational objectives stronger identify with the organization. Knowledge and attitude regarding the objectives did not contribute significantly to organizational identification, although these correlations were significant ($p \leq .001$). In sum, Hypothesis 2 is confirmed only with respect to the reciprocal relationship between employees' behavior regarding the organizational objectives and organizational identification and the positive influence of identification on employees' knowledge and attitude.

In Hypothesis 3 we proposed a positive relationship between organizational identity and identification. The results show that centrality of the organizational identity contributed significantly ($p < .01$) to organizational identification. The more employees perceive the central values to be present in their organization, the more they identify with the organization. Since the correlations between continuity and distinctiveness of the organizational identity and identification were not significant ($p > .05$), the results offer only marginal support for Hypothesis 3. Only an increase in the strength of the organizational identity caused by an increase of centrality will positively influence the identification of employees with their organization.

Hypotheses 4 and 5 concerned the relationships between length of tenure and organizational identity and identification. As can be seen in Table 2, length of tenure negatively affects the centrality and the continuity of the organizational identity ($p < .05$). This indicates that the longer employees work in the organization, the less they perceive the central attributes to be present in their organization and the less they perceive the organizational identity to remain the same over time. The contribution of length of tenure is very small though, with 2% (centrality) and 4% (continuity) of the variance explained. These findings do not support Hypothesis 4, since we expected a positive relation between length of tenure and the components of the organizational identity. In addition, the lack of a significant correlation ($p > .05$) between length of tenure and the distinctiveness of the organizational identity also offers no support for Hypothesis 4. Since we did not find a significant correlation between length of tenure and organizational identification ($p > .05$), Hypothesis 5 is rejected.

It was expected that the perceived external prestige would be positively related to the organizational identification (Hypothesis 6). Confirming this expectation, the results show that employees' perceiving their organization as positively evaluated by external stakeholders stronger identify with their organization. Thus, Hypothesis 6 is confirmed. Hypothesis 7 concerns the effect of value congruence on organizational identification. The results show that, although the correlation was significant ($p \leq .001$), value congruence does not significantly ($p > .05$) influence organizational identification. This suggests that the congruence between the actual values in the organization and the

values that should exist in the work environment does not affect employees' identification with their organization. Therefore, Hypothesis 7 is rejected.

Table 2. Regression analysis of the hypotheses

Dependent variable	N	R ²	Independent variables	β	P	Hypothesis
Knowledge ^a	263	.19	Centrality	.21	.001***	1
			Continuity	-.26	.001***	1
			Organizational identification	.16	.012*	2
Attitude ^a	246	.30	Centrality	.38	.001***	1
			Continuity	-.16	.004***	1
			Organizational identification	.21	.001**	2
Behavior ^a	240	.18	Centrality	.13	.051	1
			Continuity	-.13	.030**	1
			Organizational identification	.30	.001***	2
Organizational identification ^b	212	.34	Knowledge	.02	.730	2
			Attitude	.11	.128	2
			Behavior	.26	.001***	2
			Centrality	.21	.006**	3
			Perceived external prestige	.18	.003**	6
			Value congruence	.08	.276	7
Centrality	295	.02	Tenure	-.13	.024*	4
Continuity	287	.04	Tenure	-.20	.001***	4

Note. Since length of tenure did not correlate significantly with distinctiveness, we did not enter these variables in a regression analysis

^aSince distinctiveness did not correlate significantly with this variable, it was excluded from the regression analysis

^bSince distinctiveness, continuity and length of tenure did not correlate significantly with this variable, they were excluded from the regression analysis

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

To summarize: results marginally confirm Hypothesis 1, showing that centrality has a positive influence on knowledge and attitude regarding the objectives. However, contrary to our expectations continuity negatively influences the knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the objectives. Hypothesis 2 is confirmed with respect to the reciprocal relationship between behavior and identification and the positive influence of identification on employees' knowledge and attitude regarding the objectives. Hypothesis 3 is confirmed with respect to the positive influence of centrality on identification. Hypothesis 4 is not confirmed, since length of tenure has a negative influence on centrality and continuity, whereas we expected a positive relationship. No support was found for Hypothesis 5 concerning the relationship between length of tenure and organizational identification. Hypothesis 6 is confirmed, showing that perceived external prestige has a positive influence on

organizational identification. Finally, Hypothesis 7 is rejected, since we did not find an influence of value congruence on organizational identification.

5 Conclusions and Discussion

Several conclusions concerning the hypotheses can be drawn. A first conclusion is that the strength of the organizational identity has only a marginal impact on the knowledge and attitude of the employees. Centrality was the only component that positively affected employees' knowledge and their attitude but not their behavior. The more employees perceive the central values to fit their organization, the greater their knowledge of the objectives and the more positive their attitude towards the objectives. Surprisingly, distinctiveness of the organizational identity did not correlate with any of the components of the objectives. Furthermore, contrary to what we expected continuity related to the components of the organizational objectives in a negative way. This finding suggests that discontinuity of the organizational identity leads to an increase in knowledge and attitudinal and behavioral support for the organizational objectives. From this it follows that organizational change and dynamic, that foster discontinuity (Lewis, 1999), can be adaptive in facilitating the knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the organizational objectives. These findings complement the results of other studies on the positive effects of organizational changes. Daniel (1992) and Gioia, Schultz and Corley's (2000) state that organizations should manage instability and change since this makes the response of organizations to its changing environment more effective. Organizational change also nourishes organizational cultures that define the legal, moral, professional and ethical boundaries within which employees flexibly manage resources, processes and outcomes (Ott and Dicke, 2001).

Furthermore, the study illustrates the influence of organizational identification on employees' knowledge, attitude and behavior. As employees identify more strongly with the organization their knowledge, attitude and behavior are likely to be positively influenced. This result is consistent with other research that found positive relations between identification and employees' beliefs and behaviors (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Barney and Stewart, 2000; Dutton et al., 1994; Lee, 1971). In addition, behavioral support for the organizational objectives also fosters organizational identification. Employees' who support the organization in their behaviors will identify themselves more with the organization. This suggests that employees gain intrinsic satisfaction when they realize that they are making a behavioral contribution to the organizational objectives. In other words, behavioral support is self-rewarding; it gives employees a sense of personal control. Contrary to what was expected, employees' knowledge and attitude regarding the objectives did not influence their identification. An explanation for this result might be that having knowledge of the objectives or a positive attitude does not directly lead to visible results, and therefore is less rewarding than behavior.

Employee identification was also influenced by the centrality of the organizational identity. Employees who perceive the central values to fit the organization, identify more with the organization.

This finding contradicts the notion of Ashforth and Mael (1989) that the distinctiveness of the organization in relation to those of comparable organizations increases members' tendency to identify with the organization.

Contrary to our expectations, length of tenure negatively related to the centrality and continuity of the organizational identity. From the fact that continuity of the identity decreases with length of tenure, it can be inferred that employees who work in the organization for a longer time, experience more organizational changes and reorganizations than employees with a shorter length of tenure. Keeping those organizational changes in mind, employees might perceive the organizational identity as discontinuous. In addition, employees who work in the organization for many years appear to have a worse perception of the fit of the central values for their organization. This might imply that during organizational change, also a change in the value set takes place. In contrast with other research (Hall and Schneider, 1972; Hall et al., 1970; Mael and Ashforth, 1992) we did not find a positive relation between identification and the number of years an employee is working in the organization. An explanation for this result might be that any positive effect of an increase of the length of tenure on identification is compensated by a resulting decrease of centrality (Hypothesis 4) which, in turn, will cause a decrease of identification.

As predicted in Hypothesis 6, a positive effect of perceived external prestige on organizational identification was found, confirming the results of other studies (Mael and Ashforth, 1997; Smidts et al., 2001). Enhancement of organizational identification will occur when employees think that the outsiders positively evaluate the organization. Finally, organizational identification is not enhanced when the organization values match better with the values which employees believe should exist. This does not match the results of other researchers (Boxx et al., 1991; Chatman, 1991), who found that value congruence positively affected employee commitment and satisfaction. The present data therefore indicate that perceived external prestige, centrality and employee behavior do contribute to organizational identification, whereas value congruence does not.

5.1 Management implications

For organizations, the achievement of their objectives is the main reason for their existence. To stimulate employees to work towards the achievement of the organizational objectives, the objectives and the organizational values should be more than a sign on the wall. Managers should constantly use practices which focus on articulating the central values of the organization and the organizational objectives, stimulate dynamic in the organization and create high levels of identification.

The study has demonstrated that the centrality of the organizational identity positively influences employees' knowledge of the organizational objectives and their attitudinal support for the objectives. Continuity of the organizational identity has a negative impact on knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the objectives. This finding suggests that interventions designed to improve the knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the organizational objectives should focus on increasing the centrality

and discontinuity of the organizational identity. Therefore, managers should recognize the importance of changes and dynamic in the organization, since this facilitates employees' knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding the organizational objectives. Apart from stimulating change and dynamic in the organization, articulating the central values of the organization, provides another tool for fostering employees' knowledge and attitude.

Organizational identification was found to influence employees' knowledge, attitude and behavior in a positive way. Therefore, fostering identification will contribute to the long-term success of an organization. Again, managers can influence organizational identification by exposing employees to the preferred values of the organization. Furthermore, managers should keep the organizational objectives living, and constantly communicate them to their employees. Feedback on employees' behavior and performance and their role in the achievement of objectives can be used to influence organizational identification.

Finally, managers should focus on improving the prestige of the organization, instead of decreasing the differences that may exist between the organization's value system and the values deemed important by employees. Perceived external prestige can be improved by an external communication strategy that projects images that highlight and emphasize the desirable aspects of the organization. This could positively influence perceptions of external stakeholders. To foster organizational identification, an internal communication strategy may be directed towards making visible the positive prestige of the organization.

5.2 Limitations and further research

The results of this study should be considered in the light of the limitations of the methods used. First, the use of self-report measures to assess all variables is a limitation of the current study. With self-reported data, respondents might have misreported their knowledge and behavior. Objective measurement of employee knowledge and behavior, using a new sample, is useful to validate the impact of organizational identity and identification on organizational functioning.

Secondly, the use of regression analyses, in itself, cannot provide evidence about causation. Although theory guided our hypotheses about causal relationships, rival causal flows cannot be ruled out. Further research should establish the causal hypotheses in our model.

Thirdly, the findings of this study are subject to the characteristics of the employees and the five organizations. We conducted the analyses on the combined results and not on the results of the individual municipalities, since the number of respondents in most of the individual municipalities was too small to be able to find any reliable results. Further research should use a larger sample of organizations, not only to improve the generalizability of the results, but also to assess differences between municipalities or different types of organizations, for example non profit organizations versus for profit organizations.

A final, critical note concerns the possible difficulties to apply the methods used to measure organizational identity in further research. We measured centrality (and value congruence, using the same list of values) by using a list of values that were suitable in describing municipalities. Since it is not possible to use an endless list of values that is applicable in all organizations, future research in other organizations might consider using values suitable for that specific type of organization (for example a for profit organization). Finally, in interpreting the relations between continuity and other variables, it should be noted that the measure of continuity had a low internal consistency alpha (.52), weakening the argumentation for some of our conclusions.

These and other potential limitations notwithstanding, the results of the empirical test provide several insights into the relations between organizational identity, employee identification and the support for the organizational objectives. However more empirical work is needed to fully understand the relations between the three concepts. Further research might give insight in the applicability of the model in other organizations (e.g. profit organizations). In addition, further research is required to confirm and enhance our findings and model, in a way that would benefit the study of organizations.

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