

Organizational identity and hierarchical differences

Differences between organizational hierarchies and their effects on descriptions of organizational identity, descriptions of organizational attractiveness and organizational identification.

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Samenvatting

Dit onderzoek gaat in op verschillen tussen hiërarchieën in organisaties en het verband hiervan met de organisatie-identiteit. Eerder onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat medewerkers, afhankelijk van hun hiërarchische positie in de organisatie, de organisatie-identiteit waarnemen in overwegend strategische of culturele eigenschappen. Dit onderzoek gaat dieper in op deze veronderstellingen.

Interviews over de percepties van een organisatie-identiteit zijn afgenomen met drie verschillende hiërarchieën van medewerkers; managers, middelmanagers en werknemers. Dit heeft geresulteerd in een lijst van organisatie-eigenschappen. Een deel van deze eigenschappen kon worden onderverdeeld in twee categorieën; strategische en culturele eigenschappen. Vervolgens zijn deze eigenschappen gebruikt in een vragenlijst. Deze heeft inzicht gegeven in (1) omschrijvingen van de organisatie-identiteit, (2) omschrijvingen van de aantrekkelijkheid van organisaties en (3) de evaluatie van de huidige organisatie-identiteit en de relatie hiervan met de organisatie-identificatie van medewerkers.

Verwacht werd dat (1) de uitkomsten voor managers meer beïnvloed zouden worden door strategische eigenschappen, (2) de uitkomsten voor werknemers meer beïnvloed zouden worden door culturele eigenschappen en dat ten slotte (3) de uitkomsten voor middelmanagers beïnvloed zouden worden door zowel strategische als culturele eigenschappen.

Resultaten tonen aan dat alhoewel hiërarchieën wellicht verschillen in hun betrokkenheid met de organisatie-identiteit, ze niet altijd sterk verschillen in het gebruik van strategische of culturele eigenschappen. Voor omschrijvingen van de organisatie-identiteit en de aantrekkelijkheid van organisaties, bleken culturele eigenschappen voor alle drie hiërarchieën belangrijker te zijn. Daarnaast laten de resultaten zien dat de organisatie-identificatie van managers en werknemers meer beïnvloed wordt door strategische eigenschappen, terwijl dit voor middelmanagers door zowel culturele als strategische eigenschappen wordt beïnvloed.

Het huidige onderzoek geeft diverse verklaringen voor de gevonden resultaten. Praktische uitkomsten worden besproken welke interessant kunnen zijn voor organisaties en HR-werknemers. Ten slotte worden verschillende opties uiteen gezet voor toekomstig onderzoek.

Summary

This research focuses on differences between organizational hierarchies in relation to organizational identity. Previous research has shown that employees will perceive the organizational identity more in either strategic or cultural attributes, depending on their hierarchical role within the organization. This research will explore these presumptions more extensively.

Interviews about organizational identity perceptions were conducted with employees from three organizational hierarchies: managers, middle managers and operational employees. This resulted in a list of organizational identity attributes. Some of these attributes could be subdivided into two distinct categories; strategic and cultural attributes. Together, these attributes were used in a survey which gave insights in (1) descriptions of organizational identity, (2) descriptions of organizational attractiveness and (3) evaluations of organizational identity and its relationship with the organizational identification of employees.

Expected was that (1) the outcomes for managers would be more influenced by strategic attributes, (2) the outcomes for operational employees would be more influenced by cultural attributes and (3) the outcomes for middle managers would be influenced by both strategic and cultural attributes.

Results show that although the hierarchies might differ in their involvement with the organizational identity, they do not always strongly differ in their use of strategic and cultural attributes. For descriptions of organizational identity and organizational attractiveness, cultural attributes prove to be more important for all three hierarchies. In addition to this, results show that the organizational identification of managers and operational employees is influenced more by strategic attributes, while the organizational identification of middle managers is influenced by both strategic and cultural attributes.

The current research gives several alternative explanations for the found results. Some practical implications are discussed which might be useful for organizations and HR-practitioners. Finally, this research lays the foundation for future research about organizational identity and hierarchical differences

Introduction

Corley (2004) states that there are hierarchical differences in organizational identity perceptions. His results lay the foundation for the current research. This research takes the results of Corley (2004) to another level, by translating his results to hierarchical differences in descriptions of organizational identity, descriptions of organizational attractiveness and finally in organizational identification. To start with, the concept of organizational identity will be outlined.

Organizational identity

Organizational identity is often named as everything which is central, enduring and differentiated in the character of an organization (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994). It's about 'who are we' as an organization (Nag, Corley and Gioia 2007: 824).

Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) and Whetten and Mackey (2002) state that the organizational identity resides in collectively shared beliefs and understandings about central and relatively permanent features of an organization. It contains all the verbal, graphic and symbolic representations, which are used by the organization in its communication with several constitutions (Gioia e.a., 2000).

Cornelissen, Haslam and Balmer (2007) finally show that collective identities (like an organizational identity) (1) are made viable as a function of their positivity and distinctiveness, (2) are fluid rather than fixed, (3) are a basis for shared perceptions and action, (4) are created and managed strategically, (5) are associated with behavior that is qualitatively different from that associated with lower-order identities and (6) are the basis for achievement of higher-order material outcomes and products.

Whetten (2006) strengthens the concept of organizational identity as everything which is central, enduring and distinguishing. He states that to define organizational identity, it is also important to ask 'how', 'when' and 'why' the organizational identity manifests itself. By this, he makes the concept of organizational identity and its formulation more explicit. These questions should lead to a list of organizational attributes, which together describe everything which is distinguishing (how), enduring (when) and central (why). Distinguishing attributes are seen as organization-specific, positive and essential attributes. Central and enduring

attributes are manifested in an organization's core programs, policies and procedures which reflect its highest values. These attributes have passed the test of time and the character of the organization would be altered if the attribute would be removed (Whetten, 2006).

Next to this, Nag e.a. (2007) point to the importance of not only using 'who are we' to define organizational identity, but also 'what we know' and 'what we do'. They use 'what we do' as a link between 'what we know' and 'who we are'. According to them, these three concepts are interrelated and together contribute to organizational identity. 'Practice is a linchpin connecting organizational identity and knowledge. It is through practice that each influences the other – identity influences knowledge use by connecting knowledge to action, and knowledge use influences identity by providing the behavioral frames for its manifestation and maintenance' (Nag e.a., 2007: 822). Therefore, also these concepts should be included in identity research.

The results of Nag e.a. (2007) and Whetten (2006) seem somewhat related. They both claim that not only 'who we are' or everything which is 'central, enduring and distinguishing' describes organizational identity, but that how this is manifested within the organization is also important. Although in these articles different questions are used, they all seem to be used to get a clearer view of the organization's identity.

In this research, organizational identity will be looked upon as everything which is central, enduring and differentiated in the character of the organization (Albert and Whetten, 1985) and how, when and why this is manifested as applied in Whetten (2006). The latter relates to 'what we do' and 'what we know' of Nag e.a. (2007) as it asks about certain practices and attributes which together describe the organizational identity.

Differences in organizational identity perceptions

Because of the complexities around identity and the fact that large groups of people are together in one organization, the potential for differences in identity perceptions can be high. Organizations can have many 'selves' and these multiple organizational identities should be managed (Pratt and Foreman, 2000). They state that organizations have multiple organizational identities when different conceptualizations exist about what is central, distinctive and enduring about the organization. How these multiple identities are management has a large impact on organizational effectiveness (Foreman and Whetten, 2002). Organizations with multiple identities usually have the capacity to meet a wider range of expectations and demands (Pratt and Foreman, 2000). But according to them, too much

different identities can cause inconsistent action because of identity conflicts.

From research, distinctions can be made between demographic, sub cultural and hierarchical influences on organizational identity perceptions.

Demographic variables: To be a member of a certain demographic group, could influence how someone perceives organizational identity and how someone wants the organization's identity to be (Foreman and Whetten, 2002). They state that demographic factors like gender, race, ethnicity, religion and occupation can influence these perceptions. Riketta (2005), Mael and Ashfort (1992) and Bartels (2006) also state that for example tenure, age, job level and educational level can be demographic variables which influence this. Research therefore shows that demographic factors can cause employees to differ in their perceptions about what is central, distinctive and enduring in the character of the organization.

Sub cultural variables: According to Corley (2004), organizational unit boundaries, functional boundaries and professional boundaries can all cause differences between employees in their organizational identity perceptions. Employees differ in the units that they are a member of, for example their workgroup or team (Cole and Bruch, 2006). Differences between units in the organization can be seen as differences between sub cultures. All these sub cultures relate differently to the organizational identity (Bartels, Pruyn, de Jong and Joustra, 2007). Therefore they will perceive this identity differently (Corley, 2004).

Hierarchical variables: Finally, also hierarchy can cause differences in organizational identity perceptions (Corley, 2004). According to Cole and Bruch (2006), employees may perceive their level within the organization's hierarchy as a salient social category that is shared with other members of an in-group and not shared with members of an out-group.

Corley (2004) states that senior leadership employees are responsible for the organizational strategy which has to provide survival and growth. Their responsibilities involve issues like vision and mission, strategic decision-making and internal framing of topics and issues important for employees. Middle management is often seen as a buffer between the strategic top and the operational part of the organization. They are involved in operationalizing the vision and strategy, planning and managing the tactics associated with achieving the goals from the strategy, directing their followers in their tasks and listening and communicating. Operational employees are responsible for the implementation of the tactics and completion of daily business operations (Corley, 2004).

Caused by these different hierarchical positions, organizational members will perceive

organizational identity in other ways. According to Corley (2004), senior managers tend to see identity in light of the organization's strategy, whereas the operational employees perceive the organizational identity in light of the organization's culture. Middle managers have interactions with senior executives about the strategy, as well as interactions with lower ranks of the hierarchy about cultural values and beliefs (Corley, 2004). Therefore, they talk about organizational identity as being a combination of strategy and culture.

Concluding, different members of an organization have different perceptions of its identity and therefore act differently in regards to issues involving organizational identity (Corley, 2004). He states that because of the hierarchical role someone has within the organization, someone will differ in his or her involvement with the strategic or cultural attributes of organizational identity.

Strategic and cultural attributes of organizational identity

Strategic attributes: When a person perceives the organizational identity more in strategic attributes, then the organization is reflected in what the organization's mission and purpose is, how the organization distinguishes itself from competitors and how the organization is compared with its rivals in the competition within the industry (Corley, 2004). The chosen strategic direction often becomes the basis for asserting who the organization is.

Both Corley (2004) and Gioia and Thomas (1996) claim that top managers are very much concerned with issues regarding the organization's strategy. Moreover, results from Corley (2004) show that managers are more concerned with outsiders perceptions of the organization and therefore are more influenced by construed external image discrepancies.

Cultural attributes: Operational employees lower in the hierarchy see the organizational identity as an outgrowth of their organization's culture and therefore as much more stable and unchanging than senior leadership (Corley, 2004). Who they are as an organization is reflected in values and beliefs that guide organizational behavior and determines which actions are most appropriate in a given situation. Corley (2004) also states that employees lower in the hierarchy seem to be less concerned with external influences, they think of identity as being more stable and harder to change. These employees do not perceive change as long as they do not see these changes in the manifested behavior within the organization.

Middle management employees tend to talk about identity as being a combination of what the organization does to distinguish itself from its competitors and internal beliefs about what is

valued and appreciated within the culture (Corley, 2004). They have a view of the organization as a strategic entity, but their responsibilities also require them to stay connected with lower ranks of the hierarchy. As a result, they have to interpret the strategic directives of top management into operational actions for the day-to-day running of the organization (Corley, 2004). Therefore it is necessary for these middle management employees to have involvement in both strategic and cultural matters.

Whereas Corley (2004) concludes that different hierarchies perceive the organizational identity more in strategic or in cultural attributes, he does not exactly describe which attributes could be defined as cultural or strategic. This research therefore generates a list of strategic and cultural attributes. By this, it describes the exact meaning of these concepts more extensively.

In the same research, only qualitative measures were used. This research therefore wants to find out whether there are hierarchical differences in the involvement with the organizational identity, by also using quantitative research methods. It will show whether there are hierarchical differences in (1) descriptions of organizational identity, (2) descriptions of organizational attractiveness and (3) evaluations of organizational identity and its relationship with organizational identification.

Descriptions of organizational identity

Corley (2004) shows that employees are differently involved with the organizational identity, because of their hierarchical role within the organization. He shows that their hierarchical position causes them to be more involved with either the strategic or cultural attributes of organizational identity.

As a result, it is expected that different hierarchies might also use different attributes when they talk about the organization to outsiders. Because they are differently involved with the organizational identity, this might also cause them to talk about different things to outsiders. Most likely, employees will emphasize on these attributes that they are mainly involved with.

Therefore, the following hypotheses can be proposed¹:

Hypothesis 1a: Managers describe organizational identity more in strategic attributes than in cultural attributes.

Hypothesis 1b: Employees describe organizational identity more in cultural attributes than in strategic attributes.

Hypothesis 1c: Middle management employees describe organizational identity in both strategic and cultural attributes.

Descriptions of organizational attractiveness

The attractiveness of an organization is very important for the attraction of qualified applicants (Turban, 2001; Lievens, van Hove and Anseel, 2007). When organizations attract more applicants then they have more applicants to choose from. This results in a greater benefit of the organization's selection system (Turban, 2001). Therefore, organizational attractiveness is an important concept in this research.

An organization should apply certain strategies and practices designed to improve its attractiveness in the labour market, to be more successful (Hiltrop, 1999). In order to improve organizational attractiveness, recruitment often applies a certain procedure (van Hove and Lievens, 2005). A message about the organization as an employer is communicated to

¹ To give more generalizing results, quantitative research will be conducted within three organizations. But therefore it is not possible to find out whether there are hierarchical differences in identity perceptions across these organizations. For this, respondents should indicate whether they perceive their organization's identity more in light of its strategy or culture. Their answers to this will depend on the extent to which employees perceive the strategic or cultural attributes as more central, enduring and distinguishing. But differences between hierarchies about these perceptions, can be due to differences in the identity of their organization, not to the fact that hierarchies perceive the identity more in strategic or cultural attributes. For example; to indicate whether the organization's strategy is central, distinctive and enduring, relates very much to the extent to which an organization has a central, distinctive and enduring strategy, not so much to whether an employee perceives the identity more in strategic or cultural attributes.

potential job seekers through a specific channel or source. As a result, this message and its source are important antecedents of organizational attractiveness for these job seekers. Therefore, an organization has to research what it has to offer to prospective employees (Lievens, 2007). He states that this is the central message that an organization has to use in its communication to unfold a clear employer brand.

Following on this, Lievens e.a. (2007) use the instrumental-symbolic framework to explain attraction to organizations. Instrumental attributes describe the job or organization in objective, concrete and factual ways. Symbolic attributes are described as subjective, abstract and intangible. Symbolic and instrumental attributes are confirmed to influence organizational attractiveness. Especially symbolic attributes account for incremental variance in explaining a company's attractiveness as an employer (Lievens e.a., 2007). As a result, strategic and cultural attributes could also be looked upon as attributes which are related to organizational attractiveness, because they too are subjective, abstract and intangible.

When this is related to the hierarchical levels mentioned before, then it is interesting for organizations to know if hierarchies differ in what makes an organization attractive for them. Organizations can use this information to improve their reputation and employer brand.

Employees differ in their involvement with the strategic and cultural attributes of the organizational identity because of their hierarchical role. Therefore, it is expected that they will also differ in what makes an organization attractive for them. They are likely to be attracted to these attributes that they are mainly involved with. Based on this, the following hypotheses can be proposed:

Hypotheses 2a: Managers are more attracted to strategic attributes than to cultural attributes.

Hypotheses 2b: Employees are more attracted to cultural attributes than to strategic attributes.

Hypotheses 2c: Middle managers are attracted to both strategic and cultural attributes.

Evaluations of organizational identity and organizational identification

When a person's self-concept contains the same attributes as those in the perceived organizational identity, then this cognitive connection can be defined as organizational identification (Dutton e.a., 1994: 239). According to Tajfel (1978: 63), identification is 'the cognition of membership of a group and the value and emotional significance attached to this membership'.

In previous literature, commitment and organizational identification are often used to describe the same constructs. Van Knippenberg and Sleebos (2006) nevertheless show that organizational identification is different from commitment. They conclude that; 'the core difference between identification and commitment lies in the implied relationship between individual and organization: Identification reflects psychological oneness, commitment reflects a relationship between separate psychological entities' (Van Knippenberg and Sleebos, 2006: 1). Riketta (2005) also claims that researchers must make a distinction between organizational identification and commitment. He states that, although organizational identification and commitment have large empirical overlaps, these two constructs correlate differently with organizational outcomes like job satisfaction, absenteeism and extra-role behavior. He claims that organizational identification can be seen as a construct which is more specific and homogeneous than commitment and has unique empirical qualities. Therefore, the current research will apply the concept of organizational identification.

Dutton e.a. (1994) describe how organizational identification can be developed. Cognitive comparisons between the organization and self-categorizations leave the employee with a comparison between these two concepts. The higher the level of congruence, the most likely the level of a member's identification is higher. The connection between the definition of the organization and the definition a person applies to him- or herself therefore causes organizational identification. 'Organizational identification occurs when members adopt the defining characteristics of an organization as defining characteristics for themselves' (Dutton e.a., 1994: 242). Then, the employee will accept the values and behavioural norms of the collectivity, which can be the organization, and the group is psychologically accepted as part of the self (Scott and Lane, 2000).

The relationship between the organizational identity and the identification of

employees is related to the person-organization fit (PO-fit). When employees believe that their values match the organization's values and the values of other employees within the organization, then they perceive that they fit the organization (Cable and DeRue, 2002).

Following on this, Dukerich, Golden and Shortell (2002) show that individuals will evaluate the current organizational identity and will try to get an idea about how attractive this identity is for them. Based on this, they will have more or less organizational identification.

Consequently, organizational identification is related to how employees evaluate organizational identity. Therefore, evaluations of organizational identity will be used in the current research to test the relationship with organizational identification.

Corley (2004) shows that hierarchies differ in their involvement with the strategic and cultural attributes of organizational identity. As a result, it is expected that their organizational identification is related the most to evaluations of the attributes that they are more involved with. Consequently, the organizational identification of an employee is probably more related to strategic or cultural attributes, depending on the hierarchical role one has. Therefore, the following hypotheses can be proposed;

Hypothesis 3a: Organizational identification of managers is more related to evaluations of strategic attributes than to evaluations of cultural attributes.

Hypothesis 3b: Organizational identification of employees is more related to evaluations of cultural attributes than to evaluations of strategic attributes.

Hypothesis 3c: Organizational identification of middle managers is related to evaluations of both strategic and cultural attributes.

Method

Data was collected from three different accountancy and professional services organizations in the Netherlands. A so called multi-method, multi-strategy or mixed methods design was applied (Bryman, 2006) and as a result data was collected through interviews and a survey.

Accountancy and professional services organizations in the Netherlands

Accountancy and professional services organizations in the Netherlands seem to have many difficulties in attracting and binding enough employees to their organizations. There are not enough employees available for the amount of work each organization has. This causes a 'war on talent' in the Netherlands, especially on financial talents. Employees who are specialized in accountancy and professional services can therefore choose from several employers. This is why these organizations try to distinguish themselves from others and try to make themselves a more attractive employer. They will also try to bond the current employees to the organization, to keep them working for the organization as long as possible.

For this, these employers want to know how they can distinguish themselves from their competitors, what they can do to improve their attractiveness and finally how they can bind employees to the organization successfully.

Instruments

Interviews; This research wanted to define the exact meaning of strategic and cultural attributes more extensively. Therefore, a list of strategic and cultural attributes had to be generated. To do this, 20 interviews were conducted with 4 managers, 9 middle managers and 7 operational employees of one organization. This organization is one of the 'Big 4' accountancy firms. Interviews were only conducted with employees who worked for the Dutch firm.

Semi-structured interviews were applied, with items from Dukerich e.a. (2002) and Bartel (2001). Items were: 'What adjectives would you use to describe your organization?' or 'What is distinctive about your organization?'. Based on results from Nag e.a. (2007) and Whetten (2006), additional questions were formulated; 'What does your organization do?', 'How does this identity attribute manifests itself?' or 'When does this identity attribute manifests itself?'. Finally, based on research from Gioia e.a. (2000), Corley (2004) and Foreman and Whetten (2002), questions were asked about the desired organizational identity.

Items were; ‘What are the differences between the organizational characteristics your organization has now, and the organizational characteristics your ideal / preferred organization would have?’ and ‘How should your organization be ideally?’. These three different approaches were used to get broad insights in organizational identity attributes, resulting in much rich data.

Based on these interviews, 91 organizational identity attributes could be defined. Following the research method of Corley (2004), the interview data first was categorized. When the researchers could not agree upon to which category a particular attribute belonged, then the attribute was left out of the research. The attributes which could be categorized as strategic or cultural, were used in the current research. This led to a list of 28 attributes, 15 strategic and 13 cultural attributes. Attributes can be for example the vision of the organization (strategic) or the atmosphere within the organization (cultural). For the exact descriptions of the 28 attributes, see Appendix I. Then, following the research method of Dukerich e.a. (2002), these identity attributes were used in a survey.

Survey: The strategic and cultural attributes were translated to questions for the survey. The survey was created in such a way that it was applicable across several organizations. Please see the Appendix for a complete overview of all survey items.

Descriptions of organizational identity. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they would use these 15 strategic and 13 cultural attributes to describe their organization to outsiders. An item is; ‘If I would have to describe my employer to outsiders, then I would mainly talk about the atmosphere within the organization’. Participants responded to each item using a 7-point scale (1 = completely do not agree, 7 = completely do agree). The strategic and cultural attributes were averaged to create a single collective score in relation to organizational identity descriptions. Cronbach's alpha was .93.

Descriptions of organizational attractiveness. Respondents were asked to indicate how important these 28 attributes were in relation to an organization’s attractiveness. An item is; ‘What makes an organization attractive for me, are the values and norms’. Participants responded to each item using a 7-point scale (1 = completely do not agree, 7 = completely do agree). The strategic and cultural attributes were averaged to create a single collective score in relation to organizational attractiveness. Cronbach's alpha was .95.

Organizational identity evaluations. In the research of Dukerich e.a. (2002), respondents were asked to indicate whether attributes of their organizational identity could be evaluated

as attractive. Using these evaluations of identity attributes, Dukerich e.a. (2002) measured the relationship with the strength of the organizational identification. As the current research also asked respondents for evaluations of organizational identity attributes, the items were formulated positively. An item is; 'My current employer can be described as an organization with a good strategy'. These evaluations were used to test the relationship with the organizational identification of the three hierarchies. Participants responded to each item using a 7-point scale (1 = completely do not agree, 7 = completely do agree). The strategic and cultural attributes were averaged to create a single collective score in relation to organizational identity evaluations. Cronbach's alpha was .95.

Organizational identification. Organizational identification was measured using a scale from Smidts, Pruyn and van Riel (2001) which consisted of 5 items. An item is; 'I am glad to be a member of the organization'. Participants responded to each item using a 7-point scale (1 = completely do not agree, 7 = completely do agree). The items were averaged to create a single collective score in relation to organizational identification. Cronbach's alpha was .92.

Population

Data was collected from three different accountancy and professional services organizations. The research was conducted in more than one firm to give more generalizing results. The same questionnaire was applied in all three organizations. Great emphasis was put on assuring the anonymity of the responses.

Organization 1 is one of the 'Big 4' accountancy and professional services organizations. With more than 150.000 employees globally, it is a very well-known and respectable firm. Research was only conducted within the Dutch firm, which has more than 6000 employees. All local offices were involved in the research. By means of an online message on the intranet of the company, employees were asked to complete the questionnaire. The intranet message referred to an online survey tool which they could use to complete the questionnaire. Overall, 149 employees completed the questionnaire.

Organization 2 is the largest Dutch accountancy and professional services organization which is originally founded in the Netherlands. It only operates in this country. It has over 1400 employees and 45 offices. 100 Employees were asked to complete the online questionnaire. Selection of these employees was randomly. Overall response percentage was 35 percent (n = 35).

Organization 3 also is a Dutch accountancy and professional services organization which has over 1300 employees and 60 offices. All employees of all offices, except staff and

support, were asked to complete the online questionnaire. Overall response percentage was 31 percent (n = 399).

In total, 583 respondents completed the questionnaire. 70 Percent (n = 409) of the respondents was male, 30 percent (n = 173) was female. Respondents were also asked to indicate whether they belonged to the 'management', 'middle management' or group of 'operational employees' of their organization. Results showed that 8 percent (n = 48) of the respondents belonged to the management, 14 percent (n = 81) to the middle management and 78 percent (n = 444) to the group of operational employees.

For descriptions of organizational identity, exploratory factor analyses showed that five components had an 'eigen value' larger than 1, which together explained 58% of total variance. As two components together explained 44% of total variance, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with these two components. Table 1 in Appendix II shows the factor loadings.

For descriptions of organizational attractiveness, exploratory factor analyses showed that again five components had an 'eigen value' larger than 1, which together explained 65% of total variance. As two components together explained 51% of total variance, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with these two components. Table 2 in Appendix II shows the factor loadings.

Finally, for evaluations of organizational identity, exploratory factor analyses also showed that five components had an 'eigen value' larger than 1, which together explained 66% of total variance. As two components together explained 52% of total variance, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with these two components. Table 3 in Appendix II shows the factor loadings.

Results for all three constructs showed that the items loaded almost perfectly on the two components. Strategic items all loaded on component 1 and most cultural items loaded on component 2. Therefore, component 1 can be seen as 'strategic' whereas component 2 can be seen as 'cultural'.

Based on these results, it was decided to remove the cultural attributes 'approach of people high in hierarchy' and 'diversity of employees' for descriptions of organizational identity and descriptions of organizational attractiveness. Factor loadings namely showed that these attributes loaded more on the strategic than on the cultural component or that there was

no clear distinction to which component the attribute belonged.

Factor loadings of organizational identity evaluations showed that 6 cultural attributes loaded on component 1 instead of component 2. It was therefore decided to also remove these 6 cultural attributes from the research.

Because the amount of cultural attributes changed for each of the three constructs new reliability analyses were conducted (see table 1).

Table 1 **Results of reliability analyses**

Construct	Old - Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)	New - Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)
Descriptions of organizational identity	.93	.92
- Strategic attributes	.91	.91
- Cultural attributes	.87	.88
Descriptions of organizational attractiveness	.95	.94
- Strategic attributes	.93	.93
- Cultural attributes	.89	.91
Organizational identity evaluations	.95	.94
- Strategic attributes	.94	.94
- Cultural attributes	.89	.86
Organizational identification	.92	.92

As results showed that the reliability of the constructs and the strategic and cultural attributes was also good after removing some attributes, research was continued with the smaller group of cultural variables.

Results

Descriptions of organizational identity

Hypotheses 1a – 1c predicted that there are hierarchical differences in descriptions of organizational identity. Table 2 shows the means from all three hierarchies of their descriptions of organizational identity in strategic and cultural attributes.

A t-test showed that there is a significant difference between the extent to which managers use cultural attributes and strategic attributes to describe organizational identity ($df = 43$, $p = .00$). Also for middle managers ($df = 75$, $p = .00$) and operational employees ($df = 394$, $p = .00$), results show that there is a significant difference.

Table 2 **Means Descriptions of Organizational Identity in strategic and cultural attributes**

Hierarchy	Mean Strategic attributes	Mean Cultural attributes
Management	4.3037 (SD = 0.84)	4.9516 (SD = 0.94)
Middle managers	4.2915 (SD = 0.97)	4.9021 (SD = 0.96)
Employees	4.0266 (SD = 1.10)	4.8034 (SD = 0.98)

Descriptions of organizational attractiveness

Hypotheses 2a – 2c predicted that there are also hierarchical differences in descriptions of organizational attractiveness. Table 3 shows the means from all three hierarchies of their descriptions of organizational attractiveness in strategic and cultural attributes.

A t-test showed that for managers, there is a significant difference between the extent to which they use cultural attributes and the extent to which they use strategic attributes to describe organizational attractiveness ($df = 42$, $p = .00$). Also for middle managers ($df = 72$, $p = .00$) and operational employees ($df = 410$, $p = .00$), results show that there is a significant difference.

Table 3 **Means Descriptions of Organizational Attractiveness in strategic and cultural attributes**

Hierarchy	Mean Strategic attributes	Mean Cultural attributes
Management	4.5896 (SD = 1.01)	5.5099 (SD = 1.02)
Middle managers	4.6196 (SD = 1.03)	5.4965 (SD = 1.06)
Employees	4.5084 (SD = 1.06)	5.4413 (SD = 0.97)

Evaluations of organizational identity and organizational identification

To examine the effect of organizational identity evaluations on organizational identification, multiple regression analyses were conducted, using dummy variables for management, middle management and operational employees. To determine the amount of variance in organizational identification explained by strategic or cultural attributes, R Square was used. Regression coefficients (β) were used to define to what extent strategic or cultural attributes influenced the dependent variable and what the exact relationship was between them.

Results (see table 4) show that organizational identification of managers is more related to strategic ($\beta = .729$, $p = .00$) than to cultural attributes ($\beta = .555$, $p = .00$). Organizational identification of middle managers is related to both cultural ($\beta = .757$, $p = .00$) and strategic attributes ($\beta = .740$, $p = .00$), because differences between these two are very small. Finally, the organizational identification of operational employees is also more related to strategic ($\beta = .717$, $p = .00$) than to cultural attributes ($\beta = .611$, $p = .00$).

Table 4 **Regressions among Organizational Identity Evaluations and Organizational Identification selected by hierarchy**

Hierarchy	R Square Strategic	R Square Cultural	β Strategic	β Cultural
Managers	.532	.308	.729	.555
Middle managers	.547	.573	.740	.757
Employees	.515	.373	.717	.611

Based on the found results, the summary in table 5 gives an overview of whether the proposed hypotheses can be confirmed or not.

Table 5 **Overview of hypotheses**

Hypothesis	Confirmed / Not confirmed
<i>Hypothesis 1a:</i> Managers describe organizational identity more in strategic attributes than in cultural attributes	Not confirmed
<i>Hypothesis 1b:</i> Employees describe organizational identity more in cultural attributes than in strategic attributes	Confirmed
<i>Hypothesis 1c:</i> Middle management employees describe organizational identity in both strategic and cultural attributes	Not confirmed
<i>Hypotheses 2a:</i> Managers are more attracted to strategic attributes than to cultural attributes	Not confirmed
<i>Hypotheses 2b:</i> Employees are more attracted to cultural attributes than to strategic attributes	Confirmed
<i>Hypotheses 2c:</i> Middle managers are attracted to both strategic and cultural attributes	Not confirmed
<i>Hypothesis 3a:</i> Organizational identification of managers is more related to evaluations of strategic attributes than to evaluations of cultural attributes	Confirmed
<i>Hypothesis 3b:</i> Organizational identification of employees is more related to evaluations of cultural attributes than to evaluations of strategic attributes	Not confirmed
<i>Hypothesis 3c:</i> Organizational identification of middle managers is related to evaluations of both strategic and cultural attributes	Confirmed

Discussion

This research aimed to give more insights about differences between organizational hierarchies in relation to organizational identity. The research of Corley (2004) laid the foundation for this research.

Corley (2004) states that organizational members must know that there is a big chance that their colleagues might differ in their sense of 'who the organization' is. More specifically, he concludes that these differences about organizational identity perceptions might occur across hierarchical boundaries, from a more strategic or cultural perspective on identity. Results of his research suggest that the top of the hierarchy is more concerned with strategic issues and that lower hierarchies are more involved with cultural issues. Results of this research partially contradict the results of Corley (2004) and give rise to a discussion about hierarchy in relation to organizational identity.

Descriptions of organizational identity

The expectation that operational employees describe organizational identity more in cultural attributes was confirmed. But results also show that cultural attributes are significantly more important for middle managers and managers in their descriptions of organizational identity. This means that when managers, middle managers and employees talk to outsiders, they will focus more on the cultural than the strategic attributes of organizational identity.

Lievens (2007) states that an organization has to know how it can distinguish itself from its competitors, to create a good employer brand. Based on the current results, one can conclude that organizations should especially give directions about their distinctive cultural attributes, because employees will talk about this to outsiders. This can improve the image of the organization.

The fact that cultural attributes are used more than strategic attributes for descriptions of organizational identity, can be explained by Hofstede's (1994) theory about national cultures. Especially his concepts 'power distance' and 'masculinity' relate to the found results. When a society can be described as masculine, then it is assertive and competitive. The Netherlands can be defined as a feminine society, which means that its culture is open and nurturing and that people are seen as equal (Hofstede, 1980)

Following on this, the Dutch culture is known for its low power distance. Power distance is 'the extent to which less powerful members of organizations and institutions

accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1994: 2). The Dutch society therefore seems to be focused on equality.

Concluding, the Dutch culture apparently is open, nurturing, aimed on equality and less focused on competitiveness. This means that employees from companies who work in this culture also are influenced by these societal values (Hofstede, 1980). Therefore, they probably take this into account when talking about their organization to outsiders. Strategic attributes are focused on how the organization distinguishes itself from competitors and how the organization is compared with its rivals. Because Dutch society is less focused on these competitive factors, this might have caused the greater use of the cultural attributes in descriptions of organizational identity.

Descriptions of organizational attractiveness

The expectation that operational employees describe organizational attractiveness more in cultural attributes, was confirmed. But results also show that managers and middle managers too use cultural attributes more in their descriptions of organizational attractiveness. This means that when managers, middle managers and employees have to describe what makes an organization attractive for them, they will focus on the cultural attributes of organizational identity more than on the strategic attributes.

Therefore, cultural attributes should be used more than strategic attributes to improve organizational attractiveness. These attributes have to be used in the central message of the organization to potential applicants (Lievens, 2007).

The results again do not indicate that the hierarchies clearly differ in these descriptions. Just like for descriptions of organizational identity, also these results can be explained by the fact that the current research was only conducted in the Netherlands. In general, the Dutch culture is known for its feminine society and little power distance. These societal values could cause employees from this country to describe organizational attractiveness more in cultural attributes.

Evaluations of organizational identity and organizational identification

Confirmation was found for the expectations that the organizational identification of managers is more related to strategic attributes than cultural attributes and that the identification of middle managers is related to both strategic and cultural attributes. Surprisingly, no confirmation was found for the expectation that operational employees' identification is more related to cultural attributes.

The fact that the organizational identification of operational employees is more related to strategic attributes, can be explained by the characteristics which are specific for accountancy and professional service organizations. According to Fogarty (1994; 18) accountancy firms are known for their 'rapid status movement and early achievement of managerial and supervisory responsibility'. This might mean that within these organizations, operational employees already are much involved with the strategy. This could have caused their organizational identification to be more related to strategic attributes.

Also, lower order employees from these accountancy and professional service organizations still have a knowledge-intensive job which can elicit them to have more involvement with the strategy of the organization. Bills (2003) namely states that highly schooled people have more opportunities to become highly placed in job hierarchies. Most accountancy and professional services organizations ask for well educated employees. This could cause these employees to have a high level job even though they work in the 'junior' level of the organizational hierarchy. Their level of education and the content of their jobs therefore might have caused them to be differently involved with the organizational identity than lower order employees of other organizations. Therefore, the results of Corley (2004) which show that the hierarchical position of an employee influences his or her perceptions of organizational identity must be looked upon from a broader perspective. It might be possible that, depending on the kind of organization, also junior level employees already have much involvement with the strategy.

Concluding, national cultures (Hofstede, 1994) seem to influence how the hierarchies talk about the organizational identity to outsiders and how they describe organizational attractiveness. Therefore, societal values might influence these descriptions more than the involvement of the hierarchies with the organizational identity.

For organizational identity evaluations and its relationship with organizational identification, results show that this probably is related the most to the attributes that employees are more involved with.

This means that the involvement with the organizational identity probably only relates to organizational identification, whereas it might not influence the way people describe the organization and organizational attractiveness. This will be influenced by other things than only their hierarchical position.

Practical implications

Employers want to know what they can do to make sure that enough employees choose them as their new employer. They want to know how they can distinguish themselves from their competitors, how they can develop an attractive employer brand and how they can bind employees to the organization.

Organizations should be aware of the fact that all hierarchies focus on cultural attributes more when talking about the organization to outsiders. Organizations should give directions to employees about distinctive cultural attributes of their organization. By this, making clear what distinguishes the organization from competitors.

The results also give directions for organizations in attracting more people to their organization. Turban, Forret, and Hendrickson (1998) state that organizational attributes positively influence applicant attraction to organizations. Research of Lievens e.a. (2007) shows that especially symbolic attributes influence organizational attractiveness. Based on the current research results, one could conclude that organizational attractiveness will be improved when organizations especially emphasize on their cultural attributes.

Another implication for organizations is the fact that the organizational identification of employees does seem to be strongly related to their involvement with either the strategy or culture of the organization. Therefore, they should know with which attributes the employees have more involvement. Organizations should use this information to keep employees working for their organization.

Future research

Cole and Bruch (2006) state that besides their research and that of Corley (2004), there is no other research available about hierarchy and its relation with organizational identity.

Therefore, further research might give more clear results about differences between organizational hierarchies. Cole and Bruch (2006) for example find that turnover intentions of the several hierarchical levels get influenced differently. ‘Group membership based on hierarchy can affect the relationships between turnover intention and organizational identity strength, identification and commitment’ (Cole and Bruch, 2006: 599). Future research can focus on hierarchical differences in other outcomes.

The current results also indicate that hierarchical differences in involvement with the organizational identity do not always cause differences in other things, like descriptions of organizational attractiveness. Further research should give more information about the things in which hierarchies do and do not differ.

Research in other settings than accountancy and professional services organizations might also give different results than the current findings. This especially can be the case when organizations are involved in which employees vary more in the level of their job. Because as research shows, operational employees within accountancy and professional services organizations already can have much involvement with managerial and supervisory tasks (Fogarty, 1994). When operational employees do not have these responsibilities, then different results might be found.

Finally, other results also can be found when the same research is conducted in other cultures than the Dutch culture. It will be very interesting to replicate the current study in for example countries which score high on Hofstede's (1980) dimension of power distance. In these cultures more inequality might be found between the hierarchies, which can cause different results.

Limitations

When interpreting the current research findings, one should take into account some limitations.

As already stated before, this research was only conducted in accountancy and professional services organizations in the Netherlands. This means that results cannot be readily generalized across other kinds of cultures, organizations and employees.

Another limitation is that only 41 managers and 81 middle managers were involved in the research. This means that the results also cannot be generalized across other managers and middle managers.

In addition to this, the factor analyses in general showed that two parts of the survey (descriptions of organizational identity and attractiveness) loaded almost perfectly on 2 components; the strategic and cultural component. For evaluations of organizational identity, results however showed that 6 cultural items did not load on the cultural component. This might imply that this part of the survey was less understood and less clear for the respondents. As the strategic items did load perfectly on the strategic component, this was only the case for the cultural items. Also reliability analyses of the constructs showed that the constructs and their items were reliable. Therefore, the current results still give solid directions for the relationship between evaluations of organizational identity and the organizational identification of employees.

Finally, the used research methods give some room for response bias. As employees might have completed the online survey in their office with other colleagues present, their

answers might be biased. Also, an office environment can cause the respondent to have problems with putting his or her mind to the survey. This causes some potential for error in completing the survey. Response bias can also be caused by the fact that the respondents might have given socially desirable answers about their current employers.

Conclusion

This research shows that indeed there are some hierarchical differences in relation to organizational identity.

For descriptions of organizational identity and organizational attractiveness the general conclusion can be that across all three hierarchies cultural attributes are significantly more important than strategic attributes.

This can be explained by the fact that the current study was only conducted within Dutch companies. The Dutch culture is known for its femininity, low power distance and little focus on competitiveness. These societal values might have caused the hierarchies to use the cultural attributes more for these descriptions.

For evaluations of organizational identity and its relationship with organizational identification, results show that managers and employees are more influenced by strategic attributes, while middle managers are influenced by both strategic and cultural attributes. This can be explained by the fact that the current research was only conducted within accountancy and professional services organizations. As these organizations are known for the possibility for employees to have managerial responsibility early in their career, this might mean that operational employees already have more involvement with the strategy. This could have caused them to have more identification with the organization based on these strategic attributes.

Concluding, the results show that organizational hierarchies differ to some extent in relation to organizational identity matters. Their involvement with the organizational identity does seem to influence their organizational identification, but not the way they use cultural or strategic attributes to describe organizational identity and attractiveness. Further research can provide more insights about this and should give a broader view on these topics.

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Appendix I: Research items

Descriptions of organizational identity

If I would have to describe my employer to outsiders, then I would mainly talk about...

1. The strategy
2. The goals
3. The position in the market as a business partner
4. The investments in the development of the organization
5. How the organization is seen in its market segment
6. How the organization handles change
7. How the organization offers her services to customers
8. Where the organization is known for as an employer
9. The visibility of the organization in the media
10. The position of the organization as an employer
12. The visibility of the organization for its customers
12. The visibility of the organization for job seekers
13. The customer satisfaction
14. The image of the organization for customers
15. The vision of the organization.
16. How people are approached high in the organizational hierarchy
17. The communication within the organization
18. The way employees have contact with their colleagues
19. The pressure of work
20. The work / life balance
21. How employees are coached within the organization
22. The values and norms
23. The cooperation with colleagues
24. The possibilities for employees to develop themselves
25. The way people are evaluated by their manager
26. The diversity of employees
27. The atmosphere
28. The help/guidance new employees receive

Descriptions of organizational attractiveness

What makes an organization attractive for me is..

1. The strategy
2. The goals
3. The position in the market as a business partner
4. The investments in the development of the organization
5. How the organization is seen in its market segment
6. How the organization handles change
7. How the organization offers her services to customers
8. Where the organization is known for as an employer
9. The visibility of the organization in the media
10. The position of the organization as an employer
12. The visibility of the organization for its customers
12. The visibility of the organization for job seekers
13. The customer satisfaction
14. The image of the organization for customers
15. The vision of the organization.
16. How people are approached high in the organizational hierarchy
17. The communication within the organization
18. The way employees have contact with their colleagues
19. The pressure of work
20. The work / life balance
21. How employees are coached within the organization
22. The values and norms
23. The cooperation with colleagues
24. The possibilities for employees to develop themselves
25. The way people are evaluated by their manager
26. The diversity of employees
27. The atmosphere
28. The help/guidance new employees receive

Evaluations of organizational identity

My current employer can be described as an organization..

1. With a good strategy
2. With good goals
3. With a good position in the market as a business partner
4. With good investments in the development of the organization
5. Which is seen as a good performer in its market segment
6. Which handles change in a good way
7. Which offers her services to customers in a good way
8. That has a good reputation as an employer
9. Which has good visibility in the media
10. With a good position as an employer
11. That is visible for its customers in a good way
12. That is visible for job seekers in a good way
13. Which has high customer satisfaction
14. Which has a good image for customers
15. Which has a good vision
16. With a nice way of approaching people high in the organizational hierarchy
17. In which there are pleasant internal communications
18. In which employees have nice contacts with their colleagues
19. In which employees experience a good work pressure
20. In which employees experience a good work / life balance
21. In which employees receive good coaching
22. In which good values and norms prevail
23. In which you can cooperate nicely with your colleagues
24. With good possibilities for employees to develop themselves
25. In which employees are evaluated by their manager in a good way
26. Which has a good diverse workforce
27. Which has a nice atmosphere
28. In which new employees receive good help/guidance

Organizational identification

1. I feel strong ties with the organization
2. I experience a strong sense of belonging to the organization
3. I am proud to work for the organization
4. I am sufficiently acknowledged in the organization
5. I am glad to be a member of the organization

Appendix II: Results of factor analyses

Table 1 **Rotated components matrix for Descriptions of Organizational Identity**

	Component 1	Component 2
Strategy	.647	-.107
Goals	.662	
Position in market as business partner	.652	
Investments in developments organization	.632	.189
How organization is seen in market segment	.700	
How organization handles change	.440	.336
How organization offers her services to customers	.653	.197
Where organization is known for as an employer	.545	.460
Visibility of organization in media	.589	.151
Position of organization as an employer	.609	.324
Visibility of the organization for customers	.706	
Visibility of the organization for job seekers	.544	.258
Customer satisfaction	.672	.239
Image of the organization for customers	.683	.229
Vision of the organization	.666	.136
Approach of people high in organizational hierarchy	.256	.273
Communication	.208	.652
Contact with colleagues		.718
Pressure of work		.581
Work / life balance		.643
Coaching	.256	.720
Values and norms	.409	.572
Cooperation with colleagues	.174	.697
Development possibilities	.325	.622
Way that people are evaluated by their manager		.641
Diversity of employees	.496	.275
Atmosphere	.117	.718
Help/guidance new employees receive	.372	.529

Table 2 **Rotated components matrix for Descriptions of Organizational Attractiveness**

	Component 1	Component 2
Strategy	.689	
Goals	.692	
Position in market as business partner	.700	.178
Investments in developments organization	.618	.304
How organization is seen in market segment	.729	.186
How organization handles change	.538	.440
How organization offers her services to customers	.645	.318
Where organization is known for as an employer	.596	.350
Visibility of organization in media	.679	
Position of organization as an employer	.629	.300
Visibility of the organization for customers	.794	.142
Visibility of the organization for job seekers	.651	.180
Customer satisfaction	.602	.352
Image of the organization for customers	.745	.268
Vision of the organization	.731	.162
Approach of people high in organizational hierarchy	.409	.176
Communication	.175	.736
Contact with colleagues		.769
Pressure of work		.667
Work / life balance		.732
Coaching	.415	.652
Values and norms	.364	.648
Cooperation with colleagues	.138	.782
Development possibilities	.384	.584
Way that people are evaluated by their manager	.278	.674
Diversity of employees	.535	.231
Atmosphere	.201	.682
Help/guidance new employees receive	.358	.600

Table 3 **Rotated components matrix for Evaluations of Organizational Identity**

	Component 1	Component 2
Strategy	.773	
Goals	.772	
Position in market as business partner	.713	.301
Investments in developments organization	.666	.276
How organization is seen in market segment	.611	.376
How organization handles change	.613	.345
How organization offers her services to customers	.650	.366
Where organization is known for as an employer	.683	.343
Visibility of organization in media	.659	.125
Position of organization as an employer	.723	.317
Visibility of the organization for customers	.682	.231
Visibility of the organization for job seekers	.632	
Customer satisfaction	.593	.402
Image of the organization for customers	.618	.386
Vision of the organization	.814	.156
Approach of people high in organizational hierarchy	.541	.329
Communication	.290	.704
Contact with colleagues		.809
Pressure of work	.159	.621
Work / life balance	.129	.599
Coaching	.550	.377
Values and norms	.519	.585
Cooperation with colleagues	.204	.785
Development possibilities	.538	.352
Way that people are evaluated by their manager	.531	.325
Diversity of employees	.467	.399
Atmosphere	.286	.782
Help/guidance new employees receive	.506	.317