

# ORGANISATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTIFICATION: A SOCIAL IDENTITY STUDY OF A POST MERGER SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

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**ABSTRACT** Based on the principles of the Social Identity Theory this qualitative study examined how organisational identification and professional identification relate to each other in times of an organisational merger. To understand the relationship between these two constructs this study focussed on the perceptions of academic staff members of a post-merger South African university. The method of research consisted of a combination of semi-structured interviews, a focus group session and document analyses. The most striking result is that for most of the academic staff members who have experienced a decrease in organisational identification as a direct result of the merger, their *focus* of identification has shifted towards their profession. In other words, their professional identification is enhanced as a result of a decrease in organisational identification. This decrease in organisational identification can be explained by the negative influences of perceived pre-merger status differences and dominance. However, it appears that the amount of identification that is needed to legitimate the effort one puts into a job needs to come from some form of identification; either organisational identification or professional identification. Previous research only focussed on the influence of an increase in organisational identification on professional identification and vice versa. What is renewing about the results of this study is the fact that professional identification can even compensate for a decrease in organisational identification as well.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to investigate the dynamic between organisational identification and professional identification in times of an organisational merger. To date, only few studies have been conducted into the antecedents of professional identification (Johnson, Morgeson, Ilgen, Meyer & Lloyd, 2006). The focus of earlier research has primarily been on the relationship between these two constructs (e.g. Scott, 1997; Scott et al. 1999) and on the differences in importance between the two (Russo, 1998; Johnson et al., 2006). Furthermore, empirical evidence so far comes mainly from laboratory and survey studies (Ullrich, Wieseke & Van Dick, 2005). As an alternative, this research was based on a qualitative field study, in order to get a more in depth understanding of the dynamics between organisational and professional identification.

For a thorough understanding, this study is conducted in a post-merger South African university. First of all, universities employ academics. Academics are characterised by the fact that they usually show a strong sense of identification with their profession (Trowler, 2001), which makes them extremely useful for studying the antecedents of professional identification. Secondly, within South Africa, the legacy of Apartheid has had an enormous influence on the development of the South African higher education landscape; which makes the context unique for studying issues of social identification. Due to the legacy of Apartheid, parallel institutions emerged over the years, serving specific racial and population groups. To date, the government is working hard to redress these racial inequalities by forcing mergers

(nationwide) between historically black universities (HBU) and historically white universities (HWU) (see Box 1. for a more extended explanation). These forced mergers are driven externally and involve planned transformation of fundamental organisational attributes such as its mission, strategies, structures, and core values. Therefore they imply discontinuity, which means that they put social identification at stake (Ulrich et al., 2005). Based on the abovementioned facts this merger can be regarded as a unique and extreme case of organisational change. As Eisenhardt (1989) argues, 'extreme cases are desirable when building theory because the dynamics being studied are more visible than the parallel dynamics would be in another context'.

This inquiry was based on the principles of the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner 1979). The Social Identity Theory explicitly deals with the human factor in organisations and is particularly suitable for studying issues of social identification. Furthermore, Hogg and Terry (2000) have given examples of successfully involving the Social Identity Theory in social studies on organisational mergers and acquisitions, group structure and group cohesion and deviance. Besides, Tajfel and Turner (1979) originally developed the Social Identity Theory to understand the psychological basis of inter-group behaviour and out-group discrimination as a result of social identification. The fact that the Apartheid legacy was based on discrimination makes this theory extremely useful for studying social identification in the context of a merger between two apartheid-institutions. Within previous research social identification has primarily been associated with identification with the organisation as a whole or subgroups within the organisation (like workgroup identification) (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). However, Ashforth and Johnson emphasise that 'a particular intriguing but little studied notion is that individuals may identify with extra-organisational work related groups such as occupations or professions.' This phenomenon is called *professional identification* (Scott, 1997; Scott et al. 1999). Professional identification denotes the degree to which employees identify themselves with the profession that they practice and the typical characteristics thereof (Bartels, 2006). As mentioned above, professional identification rather than organisational identification is a common phenomenon among academics. Research indicates that academics in general identify more with the subject they teach and the (global) community of practice, rather than with the organisation they work for (Trowler, 2001).

In a merger the assets of both merger organisations are transferred to a newly launched organisation (Ulrich et al., 2005). However, in practice there is usually a power differential between the two merger partners. As a result, one partner usually turns out to be more influential in shaping the post-merger organisation. As a consequence, perceptions of pre-merger status differences and dominance appear to be two of the most important antecedents to take into account when studying social identification in the context of a merger (Van Knippenberg & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Cartwright & Cooper, 1993). A superior status of an employee's pre-merger organization (e.g. in terms of prestige) is in most cases predictive of higher identification, affective commitment, and job satisfaction after the merger (Terry, Carey & Callan, 2001; Terry, 2003). Therefore, this study did not only focus on the relationship between organisational and professional identification, but has taken status differences and dominance into account as well as the two most important antecedents of social identification in times of an organisational merger.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

### SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

In essence, Social Identity Theory concerns the way people categorize themselves as part of a group. Once people have defined themselves in terms of these social categorizations, individuals seek to achieve positive self-esteem by positively differentiating their in-group from comparable out-groups (Haslam, 2001; Hogg & Terry, 2001). As a consequence, violating the group norms may feel like violating one's own norms, and group prestige may feel like one's own prestige. Considering this point of view, one can imagine that positively differentiating one's own pre-merger organisation can easily happen in a merger between a historically white and historically black South African university.

A study conducted by Ashforth and Mael (1989) shows that in organisational contexts, employees who identify strongly with their own organisation often see other organisations as inferior (mainly to feel better about themselves). This can be explained by the fact that when people identify with a group, their group-membership intertwines with their self-concept. As a result, the need for positive self-esteem extends towards the group as a whole, so that one can see his/her group as positively distinct from other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Put differently, 'the question whether one's own group compares favourably with other groups becomes central' (Ulrich et al., 2005). In essence, this means that if post-merger organisational members still define themselves in terms of their pre-merger organisation, Social Identity Theory predicts that these organisational members will see their pre-merger organisation as superior to their counterpart in the merger process. This might result in perceived status differences between both merger partners. Based on those status differences dominant behaviour can easily arise from the employees who perceive their pre-merger organisation as the high status merger partner. As a consequence, friction between pre- and post-merger identification might emerge for those employees whose organisation is perceived to be the low status merger partner. Haunschild, Moreland and Murrel (1994) emphasize this concern from a social identity perspective. They argue that the process of merging often means a process of social identity change for *both* merger partners (either a transformation into a dominant role or a transformation into a dominated role), which makes the development of a new and uniform post-merger identity a difficult task to complete.

### ORGANISATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Organisations provide numerous categories for employees to structure their social identity at work. For instance, employees can self-categorize as members of a profession as distinct from other professions, or as members of their organisation as distinct from other organisations. The latter is called *organisational identification*, and can be defined as 'the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him- or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he or she is a member' (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Organisational identification is an important and useful aspect of the human factor in organisations in times of a merger, because highly identified employees derive a large portion of their self-esteem from belonging to the organization and working towards its goals (Ulrich et al., 2005). This manifests itself on important performance-related indicators such as work motivation and job satisfaction (Van Dick, 2001). Previous research has even shown that organisational identification helps to energize behaviour directed towards the goal of organisational change (Van Dick, 2004). For instance, organisational identification influences employees' willingness to strive for organisational goals (Elsbach & Glynn, 1996), their willingness to stay within the organisation (e.g. Scott et al. 1999; Van Dick, Wagner and Lemmer, 2004), their willingness to engage in organisational citizenship behaviour (e.g.

Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; Haslam, 2001; Feather and Rauter, 2004), and their willingness to cooperate with organisational members (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). Because of the fact that organisational identification is positively related to behaviours that are beneficial to the organization, Boen et al. (2005) suggest that psychological disengagement after a merger should be taken into account seriously as a potential cause of underperformance of a merged institution. Especially for those people who perceive the pre-merger organisation as the cornerstone of their personal (self-)identity, the announcement of a merger may be evaluated as a major threat to the continuity of their own identity (Jetten, O'Brien, & Trindall, 2002; Ellemers, 2003; Haslam, Postmes, & Ellemers, 2003a).

The more employees see the merged organisation as a continuation of their pre-merger organisation, the closer their association will be between their pre-merger and their post-merger identification. However, since most mergers are not mergers of equals, there is usually a status differential between both merger partners. As a result, one merger partner usually turns out to be more dominant than the other one, and thus influential in shaping the new organisation (Ulrich et al., 2005). As predicted from the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the negative effects of a merger on organisational identification are most marked for employees of the low-status merger partner (Terry et al., 2001). In most cases employees of the low status merger partner are not able to maintain their pre-merger identity in the post-merger organisation. As a consequence, they will not be able to identify themselves with the newly formed organisation.

However, organisations are more than just holistic identities (Bartels, 2006). Organisations can be seen as a melting pot of all kinds of sub-cultures and sub-identities. As a result, organisations consist of multiple levels which employees can identify with, like job, workgroup, department, division, and organisational level (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Research has shown that employees' identification with their job is often stronger than their identification with the organisation as a whole (Apker & Fox, 2002; Riketta, 2005). Identification with one's job is called *professional identification* (Scott, 1997; Scott et al., 1999). Professional identification denotes the degree to which employees identify themselves with the profession that they practice and the typical characteristics thereof (Bartels, 2006). Professional identification, rather than organisational identification, is a common phenomenon among academics. Research indicates that academics in general identify more with the subject they teach, with educating people and with the community of practice, rather than with the organisation they work for. In most cases, academics identify themselves as members of a profession long before they join a particular organisation. As a consequence, 'they will refer to themselves first or elementally as members of that profession' (Drucker, 1993). Trowler (2001) clarifies this phenomenon by arguing that 'universities may set the structural contexts for practice by setting out some of the rules and providing resources, establishing guidelines for the division of labour and setting the task, but the community of practice develops the day-to-day practices, behavioural and discursive, and develops codes of signification and sets of assumptions about what to do and how'. It is obvious that the South African community of practice is one of its kind, since it is heavily influenced by the Apartheid regime. Therefore, it might be expected that the academics under study, who have clearly chosen to be part of such a unique (and for a long time malfunctioning) community, are driven by professional rather than organisational identification. They might have been driven by their personal need to contribute to the development of the South African higher education sector.

It is argued that there will not be any conflict between organisational and professional identification *if* the individuals' professional work expectations are met by the employing organisation (Lachman & Aranya, 1986). In times of a merger this means that if the merged university succeeds to provide the required resources for the academics to carry out their

profession to the best of their abilities, than organisational identification will likely to increase. However, mergers and acquisitions often end in failures partly because the change is designed in discontinuous ways and employees do not feel they are able to do the same job after the merger as before (Ulrich et al., 2005). Put differently, professionals like to be recognized by the organisation they work for as experts in their fields, to have a sense of authority about what they do and how they do it, and to feel that they are engaged in meaningful work and that they are respected by the organisation (Somech, 1993). For professionals, satisfaction of these particular needs develops a sense of identification with their organisation and their profession, as well as it will improve their performance.

For an organisation that employs professionals, the relation between professional and organisational identification may have serious consequences (Wallace, 1993). It is argued that employees who identify more with their profession are less likely to identify with the organisation they work for, and therefore they are more likely to engage in behaviour that is disadvantageous to the organisation (Wallace, 1993). Kalleberg and Berg (1987) refer to this phenomenon as the *zero-sum game*, in which a gain in one area means a loss in the other. In the context of organisational and professional identification the zero-sum game basically means that a gain in one form of identification results in a decrease in another form of identification. This means that if organisational identification increases, professional identification will decrease, and vice versa. However, the zero sum game does not make any claims about what will happen if professional identification increases (for instance because of external influences like having heard a very interesting lecture), and at the same time the organisation does its utmost best to provide all the means necessary to perform one's job. Than organisational and professional identification would likely to increase *both*, since the argument from Lachman and Aranya (1986) made clear there will *not* be any conflict between organisational and professional identification *if* the individuals' professional work expectations are met by the employing organisation. Furthermore, the zero-sum game also does not make any claims about how a decrease in one form of identification influences the other form of identification. Earlier research has only focussed on the influence of an increase in one form of identification. To set an example, a decrease in professional identification will likely to result in a decrease in organisational identification (because the organisation is directly associated with the profession). But what will happen with professional identification if organisational identification decreases? It would be awkward to think that one's professional identification will decrease, since Drucker (1993) argues that academics identify themselves as members of a profession long before they join a particular organisation. However, to date researchers have not yet studied this question to fully understand the critical tension between positive and negative effects of identification.

## STATUS DIFFERENCES

Since most mergers are not mergers of equals pre-merger status differences appear to be an important antecedent of social identification in times of organisational change (Van Knippenberg & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Cartwright & Cooper, 1993). Van Oudenhoven and De Boer (1995) argue that it is rare for two organisations that merge to be of equal status. As a consequence, the announcement of a merger is likely to make employees' pre-merger organisational membership salient, and thus there is an accentuation of inter-group status differences (Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992). Furthermore, the basic principles of the Social Identity Theory imply that if one wants to understand the impact of a merger on organisational members, one needs to take the relative status of the two pre-merger organisations into account (Terry et al. 2001).

Pre-merger status differences were especially interesting to take into account in this particular study, since the merger between the former HBU and HWU is based on government plans to dissolve the radicalised inequalities that exist among the South African higher education institutions. One can expect that when dealing with previously advantaged (white) and disadvantaged (black and coloured) social groups, status differences might easily come into play. On the one hand, one might expect that the former HWU will be perceived as the high status merger partner, due to the development HWU's nationwide have gone through *during* the Apartheid regime (economically and academically). On the other hand, one might expect that the HBU will be perceived as the high status merger partner, due to the *post* Apartheid legislations which favour black and coloured South African employees (for instance through the Employment Equity Act (Parsons & Woodward, 2004)).

## DOMINANCE

Beside status differences, dominance is another important antecedent of social identification in times of a merger (Van Knippenberg & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Cartwright & Cooper, 1993). Even though status and dominance are two concepts which are closely related to each other, it is important to note that status and dominance are two distinct concepts which are important to differentiate between. Status and dominance are not necessarily the same and can even be independent of each other (Van Knippenberg et al., 2002). Nevertheless, the high status group often dominates during and after a merger.

Giessner et al. (2006) define status differences by 'the comparison between two groups before the merger, by taking the pre-merger context into account'. In contrast, power differentials within the merged organisation define dominance within the merger. Power differentials probably have a larger impact on social identification than status differentials have, because employees of the dominated organization often have to undergo a major change in their social environment (Van Knippenberg et al., 2002).

Power differentials have been a central aspect of the Apartheid era. For a long time white South Africans were the dominant citizens of the country; dominating the day-to-day practices in all levels of society. As a result, the Apartheid regime has had a negative influence on the development of the South African higher education landscape. In the South African higher education sector, education for the white people was separated from education for the black and coloured people. Given this fact, one might expect dominant behaviour to have taken place in the merger between the former HBU and HWU.

Van Knippenberg and Van Leeuwen (2001) emphasise that the dominant organisation is much more likely to define the character of the post-merger organisation. As a consequence, a negative relationship between pre-merger and post-merger organisational identification might be expected for the dominated partner in the merger process; because of a feeling of discontinuity that threatens the existing group values and group structures. What is interesting about this study, however, is the fact that both merger partners might have engaged in dominant behaviour, since both merger organisations might be seen as the high status merger partner on certain aspects. It all depends from which perspective one looks at the pre-merger context. If one looks at the pre-merger context from an *Apartheid* perspective, than the former HWU might be regarded as the high status merger partner. During the apartheid era HWU's had the opportunity to develop themselves. Therefore they are perceived to be academically and economically stronger than the former HBU's. In contrast, if one looks at the pre-merger context from a *post Apartheid* perspective, than the former HBU might be regarded as the high status merger partner, since the post Apartheid government is clearly favouring the historically disadvantaged institutions.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Since this study dealt with an extreme case, the research question was broadly formulated to allow for emergent theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989). This study addressed the following question: how do organisational identification and professional identification relate to each other in times of an organisational merger and what role do status differences and dominance play in this context?

## METHODS

The core focus of this study laid on perceptions. To obtain intricate details about perceptions, thought processes and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a qualitative research approach is chosen. Furthermore, qualitative research can be used to explore substantive areas about which little is known (Stern, 1980). Although there have been several studies on the relationship between organisational and professional identification in the higher education sector (Boen et al. 2005), the influence of the Apartheid era makes this context so extraordinary that deductive research methods would not be suitable to answer the research question.

In order to stay objective and control intrusion of bias, a technique provided by Straus and Corbin (1998), known as data triangulation, is used. Data triangulation basically means obtaining multiple view points in order to look at a particular issue more objectively. The following methods are used; in-depth interviews, a focus group session and document analyses. Furthermore, the social distance between the researcher and the participants can be regarded as beneficial to stay objective and control intrusion of bias (the researcher was an outsider from a foreign university). As a direct consequence of the Apartheid regime, social identification is a highly sensitive issue in South Africa. In line with Silverman (2004), who argues that an outsider will be perceived as less judgemental, the participants emphasised that they trusted the researcher more than when the researcher would have been an insider. An additional advantage was that participants indicated that they saw the researcher as someone who did not have enough pre-knowledge of the South African higher education landscape to understand the social complexity of this merger. Therefore they gave more precise and expanded answers in order to make the researcher fully understand the situation.

## PARTICIPANTS

The participants were selected following a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling means that the sample selection is based on the judgments of the researcher on the population, its elements, and the purpose of the study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Purposive sampling is particularly suited for naturalistic inquiries. Furthermore, deviant cases which are approached from a qualitative research perspective generally rely on purposive sampling (Bernard, 1995).

The selection of the participants was based on three criteria. First of all, since this study focussed on the perceptions of academic staff members, the participants all needed to be academics. Secondly, the participants all needed to be working at a department that has had an equivalent department within the other pre-merger organisation. Only then the participants were expected to be involved in, or exposed to the merger of pre-merger social groups. Thirdly, the participants all needed to be working for the organisation, and in their profession as academic, for at least five years; in order to make sure that there was a certain amount of pre-merger organisational *and* professional identification. Beside this selection, a small group of additional people were selected who either recently started working for the merged

university (employment < 1 year), or who had been working for both pre-merger universities in the past. The reason to select these people was to collect a more 'objective' point of view as well (in order to control intrusion of bias), and therefore to get more insight in why people from the main selection might feel as they do about certain topics. These people were primarily used to validate the findings out of the interviews, the focus group session and document analyses. In collaboration with the Teaching and Learning Centre of the post-merger university forty people were identified as most suitable for this study.

A sample of  $N = 31$  out of forty academics was willing to participate in the interviews; fourteen people from the former HBU (six male, eight female), twelve people from the former HWU (seven male, five female) and five people who had, at that point, recently started working for the merged university, or who had been working for both pre-merger universities in the past (two male, three female). Looking at the distribution of race; six black, five coloured and three white people from the former HBU participated in the interviews. In contrast, one black, two coloured and nine white people from the former HWU participated. One black, two coloured and two white people from the 'objective selection' participated in the interviews.

A sample of  $N = 11$  out of forty academics was willing to participate in the focus group session; five people from the former HBU (two male, three female), five people from the former HWU (two male, three female) and one person from the 'objective selection' (male). Looking at the distribution of race; three black and two coloured people from the former HBU participated in the focus group session. From the former HWU three white and two coloured people participated. One black person from the 'objective selection' participated in the focus group session.

For the document analyses, fourteen emails were analysed. These emails (send between August and December 2006) had been send to all of the academic staff members of the merged university; either by academic staff members of the former HBU ( $N = 8$ ) or the former HWU ( $N = 6$ ). None of these emails were sent anonymously. All the emails discussed feelings about merger related topics. The emails were provided by the Teaching and Learning Centre of the post-merger university.

## INTERVIEW

The main data gathering method was the in-depth face-to-face interview. Millar and Gallagher (2000) emphasize that the interview is likely to extract unanticipated information, while it also provides the opportunity to have a greater depth and meaning. As mentioned above, in-depth information was necessary to understand the social complexity of merging a traditionally black with a traditionally white South African university. Because of the abovementioned complexity, a semi-structured interview was chosen. Within a semi-structured interview the questions are pre-arranged, but the interviewer has got the freedom to ask additional questions when necessary (Bernard, 1995). It was important to have a certain standardisation of the interview, in order to obtain comparable results. However, flexibility was needed to obtain in-depth information about the thought processes, feelings and emotions of the respondents. The interview guideline consisted of open-ended questions and brainstorming cues falling into five sections:

1) *The influence of the social political context of the South African higher education landscape on pre-merger status differences.*

Respondents were asked if they perceived pre-merger status differences to be present between the two merger partners, and how they thought that the social political context had influenced those status differences.

- 2) *The influence of pre-merger status differences on dominance during and after the merger.*  
 Respondents were asked if they perceived one merger partners to be more dominant than the other in the process of merging, and how they thought that status differences and dominance related to each other.
- 3) *The influence of pre-merger status differences and dominance on post-merger organisational identification.*  
 Respondents were asked if their perceptions of pre-merger status differences and dominance had influenced their post-merger organizational identification.
- 4) *The influence of post-merger organisational identification on post-merger professional identification.*  
 Respondents were asked how their post-merger organisational identification influenced their post merger professional identification.
- 5) *The influence of the relationship between post-merger organisational and professional identification on post-merger behavioural outcomes?*  
 Respondents were asked how their post-merger organisational and professional identification had influenced their post-merger organisational behaviour.

The interviews were conducted between October and December 2006 and took about one hour each. In the introduction, the purpose of the interview was explained to the participants. All interviews were voluntary and confidentiality was assured. Permission to tape-record the interview was asked for and in all cases obtained. Most participants were pleased to be given the opportunity to voice their impressions and took more than the planned amount of time to answer our questions. Contents of the interviews were based on theoretical considerations.

After multiple readings of the transcript of the interview recordings the researcher sorted the answers into the five categories described above. In this analytic and comparative process focus was given to recurring themes and redundancies while maintaining records of whether the statements reflected a more general trend or a singular opinion.

#### FOCUS GROUP SESSION

A focus group session was held to discuss the outcome of the in-depth interviews. A Focus group session is a way of collecting qualitative data, by engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion, focussed around a particular topic or set of issues (Silverman, 2004). Focus group sessions yield insights on *why* people feel as they do about a particular issue (Bernard, 1995). The focus group session has shown to be extremely useful for validating the findings out of the interviews.

The focus group session was held in November 2006, and took about two and a half hours. In the introduction, the purpose of the session was explained to all the participants and confidentiality was assured. Permission to tape-record was asked for and obtained. The researcher started the session by presenting the outcome of the interviews. After each presentation of one of the five sections of the interview, the researcher gave the participants a question or a quote to discuss.

The analyses of the focus group session followed the same strategy as the analyses of the interviews. After multiple readings of the transcript of the session recordings, the researcher sorted the answers into the abovementioned five categories. After this process recurring themes and redundancies were sought for, while – again – maintaining records of whether the statements reflected a more general trend or a singular opinion. After that process was finished, the findings of the focus group session were compared with the findings of the interviews, in order to validate the outcome.

## DOCUMENT ANALYSES

Document analyses were used to further validate the findings of the interviews and focus group session. Document analysis principally focuses on the language embodied in the document under study, as a medium of thought and expression (Silverman, 2004). General emails were analysed, in which academic staff members of both pre-merger universities have discussed merger related topics. Silverman (2004) emphasizes that through the process of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), complex and transformative understandings of *self identity, other* and *reality* often are negotiated. These negotiations have shown to be useful as a form of *evidence*, to enhance the findings of the interviews and focus group session.

To ensure consistency, the analyses of the emails followed the same strategy as the analyses of the interviews and focus group session. After multiple readings of the emails, the researcher sorted the answers into the five categories, searching for recurring themes and redundancies (again maintaining records of whether the statements reflected a more general trend or a singular opinion). Finally, the findings of the document analyses were compared with the findings of the interviews and the focus group session.

## RESULTS

Unless indicated otherwise, everything presented in the this section is bolstered by relative unanimity between the participants. The following sections discuss each theoretical concept, and the relationship between these concepts in detail. For present purposes, the findings are summarised along the five sections of the interview.

### PRE MERGER STATUS DIFFERENCES

The social political context of the South African higher education landscape has been of great influence on the perceptions of pre-merger status differences for the academic staff members of both the former HBU and HWU. However, the academic staff members of both merger partners have clearly got different opinions about the *locus* of pre-merger status differences.

The academic staff members of the former HWU emphasised that they perceive their own pre-merger organisation to be of a higher *academic* status compared to the former HBU. They clarified that these academic status differences are based on the former Apartheid legislations, which enabled HWU's countrywide to develop academically. HWU's received more funding and attention from the government during the Apartheid era, and were therefore called to be the *historically advantaged institutions*. As one academic staff member of the former HWU mentioned:

Our University had a good reputation, it had good facilities, and it had good academic staff [...] one can't say the same about the HBU. Because, once again, for the historical reasons [...]. For instance, our university only offered jobs to lecturers with Masters or PhD Degrees. They, on the other hand, adsorbed people without having Masters Degrees. So that created a sense of superiority versus inferiority.

A colleague from another department within the former HWU mentioned the same academic status differences by saying:

People now tell us: 'you have to do it exactly the same in the post-merger organisation'. This would mean that we have to drop our standards, to meet the standard that we perceive to be present at the HBU. The standards will drop, because there was a lot of

research push on this side. We are always told that our standard is very high. So, we are starting from that kind of position [holding hands in the air, showing an unequal position, with the former HWU higher than the HBU].

Beside academic status differences, the academic staff members of the former HWU also perceive *political* status differences to be present between the two merger partners. They emphasised that they perceive the former HBU to be of a higher political status compared to their own pre-merger organisation. Whereas they perceive the academic status differences to be based on the *former* Apartheid legislations, they perceive the political status differences to be based on the current *post* Apartheid legislations; for that the post Apartheid legislations favour the historically disadvantaged social groups (and thus the historically disadvantaged institutions) politically, in order to equalise the radicalised inequalities that exist in South Africa. As one academic staff member of the former HWU mentioned:

We are referring to ourselves as being the currently disadvantaged. Because we have to meet our countries objectives, we have to make everything aligned and representative. So all our senior management and senior staff, vice-counsellors, and rectors, and all the most important people in the post merger organisation, they are all more often black than they are white. I think that those tensions are quite obvious.

A colleague from another department within the former HWU emphasised the same political status differences by saying:

It seems to be a governmental concern to favour people who are black or coloured over white people, in terms of leadership positions. My impression is that the HBU is privileged in a sense that a historically black institution that has got black leaders is in a stronger position than a white institution with white leaders. When you talk about the merger, when it was possible they have appointed black leaders. So in that sense it is unequal. It is an attempt to redress the past.

The dynamic between the *academic* and *political* status differences was clarified by one of the academic staff members of the former HWU, when asked about the influence of the Apartheid era:

The HWU had academic status, but the HBU had political status. Yes. Generally; the post apartheid legislations were designed to promote the black people in academia to be part of the mainstream. So because of that bias towards black people one can say they enjoyed that privilege.

Together with the academic staff members of the former HWU, the academic staff members of the former HBU emphasised that they perceive the former HWU to be of a higher academic status as well, compared to their own pre-merger organisation. They also indicated that they perceive the academic status differences to be based on the former Apartheid legislations, which enabled HWU's countrywide to develop academically. As one academic staff member of the former HBU mentioned:

The HWU has always got strong links to the Apartheid regime. In fact, even in the way all their departments operate is very much in line with the whole policy of the Apartheid [...] so they have had all the resources to develop themselves, all the knowledge, all the qualifications, etc.

A colleague from another department within the former HBU emphasised the same academic status differences by saying:

In the case of their staff, all their staff members have got an academic, a pure academic background. Whereas here we have a more practical background.

Beside the academic status differences, the academic staff members of the former HBU also perceive *pedagogical* status differences to be present between the two merger partners. The academic staff members of the former HBU indicated that they perceive their own pre-merger organisation to be of a higher pedagogical status, compared to the former HWU. They perceive these pedagogical status differences to be based on the former Apartheid legislations; since those legislations made HBU's countrywide cater for disadvantaged student groups. As a direct consequence, HBU's had to develop more adequate teaching and learning methods, in order to keep up with the requirements of the industry. As one academic staff member of the HBU mentioned:

Although the lecturers at the HWU had better qualifications, the lecturers at the HBU worked harder because of the weaker students. They developed better teaching methods to cope with the lack of education. And in many instances ... what people in our department were doing ... pre-merger ... was far superior to what the staff members at the HWU were doing.

The dynamics between the academic and pedagogical status differences have been clarified by a colleague from another department within the former HBU:

We are very strong in teaching and learning on this side, because we had to ... because of the profile of our students. They were weaker than us in that. But they were massively stronger than us in research. We were weaker on research.

In order to collect a more objective view concerning pre-merger status differences as well, five people who have either worked for both universities in the past or who have just recently started working for the merged university were asked about the dynamics between the different *loci* of pre-merger status differences. One of these people gave the following explanation, which strengthens the abovementioned results:

It is the tension between the *political* and the *academic* locus of power. More academic staff members from the HWU have got PhD's. But my impression is that the HBU is privileged in a sense that the leadership positions ... uhm ... I think it is a common perception of the HWU that the political power is distributed towards the HBU. That is an attempt to redress the past. Furthermore, I know that for instance the HWU department [X] feels like they are *academically* superior to the HBU department [Y]. But the HBU department [Y] feels that they are *educational* and *pedagogically* superior to the HWU department [X].

Figure 1 provides a schematic overview of the perceptions of pre-merger status differences.

**General perception HWU:**

- the HWU has got academic status
- the HBU has got political status

**General perception HBU:**

- the HWU has got academic status
- the HBU has got pedagogical status

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Figure 1.

## DOMINANCE

The perceptions of pre-merger status differences have been of great influence on the perceptions of dominance for most of the academic staff members under study. What is interesting about the results is that the academic staff members of *both* merger partners feel dominated by the other merger institution.

The academic staff members of the former HWU emphasised that they perceive the HWU to be dominated by the former HBU; based on the political status that the former HBU could bring into the merger. They clarified that the political status gave them the *power* to be dominant. As one academic staff member of the former HWU mentioned:

Nowadays the HBU is in a position where they can actually tend to dominate. So if it comes to give and take it tends to be more taking from the HBU and giving from the HWU. Most of the decisions for the new institution and curricula have clearly favoured the old HBU structure. We call it a hostile take over. There was a hostile take over from the HBU.

A colleague from another department within the former HWU emphasised the same feeling of being dominated by saying:

The balance of power, pre 1994, was held more in the white universities. Prestige wise, resource wise and so on. And definitely the HWU was then the superior player, the advantaged player. Since the merger, being embraced by the new political scenario, the HBU definitely had more ground to negotiate. I think that it is quite evident. If you look at the negotiations about the curricula, the offering ... than it is quite evident that eight out of ten times I would say that what the HBU offered was accepted, and what the HWU offered was rejected. And I think that was solidly embedded in that history of disadvantage. So now that there is a movement in the power play, The HBU could now take the power in hand and say 'okay, right, now are we going to dictate how this ball is going to be shaped.'

Looking back at the perceptions of pre-merger status differences, it is obvious that the academic staff members of the former HWU perceive that the former HBU had political status, and they themselves had academic status to bring into the merger. However, when they were asked to relate those perceptions of pre-merger status differences to their perception of dominance, they *solely* related the former HBU's political status to their feeling of being dominated. They never mentioned their own academic status in relation to dominant behaviour; even though that was emphasised many times in the interviews with and emails

sent by respondents from the former HBU. In contrast, the academic staff members of the former HBU *solely* related their perception of the former HWU's academic status to their feeling of being dominated. They never mentioned their own pedagogical status in relation to dominant behaviour. Neither did they 'admit' that they have had political status to actually base dominant behaviour on (as the respondents of the HWU argued). From a social psychological point of view, this underlines the subjectivity of *perceptions* during social conflict in a clear but very interesting way.

As mentioned above, most of the academic staff members of the former HBU feel dominated by the former HWU, based on the academic status that the HWU could bring into the merger. They emphasised that this academic status gave the former HWU the *power* to be dominant. As one academic staff member of the HBU argued:

I think the HWU would like to see it as a takeover. I think they do all they can to make it a take over. They see themselves as the dominant merger partner. That is why I mentioned, from a race point of view as well, they see themselves as intellectually white, therefore they know better. We have got Masters, but they have got PhDs. And the big power play is that kind of thing.

A colleague from another department within the former HBU emphasised the same feeling of being dominated by saying:

It was a white institution and a black institution. The HWU perceived itself to be a better quality institution than the HBU. The people at the HWU have the perception that they have now obtained some employees who can now help them and assist them in doing their academic work.

Another interviewee from the former HBU argued as follows:

We all said it has been a takeover. Like they felt that their systems in place were right. That those are the best systems, and that we should adopt those systems.

In order to gain more insight in the perceptions of dominance, the participants of the focus group interview were asked to discuss the outcome of the interviews on the dynamics between pre-merger status differences and dominance. One of the respondents gave the following explanation, which strengthens the above-mentioned results:

My perception is that both try to use dominance in different ways. There is definitely a political power that was given to the HBU, because of the whole national politics. So it is understandable that when a repressed group in society suddenly gets political bagging, they want to. And where I see the dominance coming in is how they allocated the structures in the institution. But by the same time, the HWU - assuming that their standards were so much better - tried to dominate the academic side of it. So they both did. They both used it, but they used it in different areas.

## ORGANISATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

The perceptions of pre-merger status differences and dominance have influenced post-merger organisational identification negatively. As stated above, the academic staff members of both universities under study feel dominated by each other. Their feeling of being dominated is strongly related to a negative feeling of *discontinuity* of their own pre-merger organisational identity. As a direct consequence, academic staff members of both the former HWU and former HBU indicated that they have experienced a decrease in organisational identification.

The academic staff members of the former HWU emphasised that they can not identify with the post-merger university, due to their feeling of being dominated. As stated above, their perception of dominance is strongly related to their perception of pre-merger status differences. As one academic staff member from the HWU mentioned:

I have got a social identity crisis, yes. Because on this side the perception is that standards are dropped. Because there was a lot of research push on this side ... and we have been sold out. Because of everything is pushed towards the HBU nowadays. And you see a lot of key-posts ... and it is a national thing ... are given to them [...]. So at this stage ... uhm ... for me personally ... there is a sense of 'missing the family'. I have my own identity ... but in a sense of buying into the new corporate image ... I am not quit there yet.

A colleagues from another department within the former HWU mentioned a decrease in organisational identification by saying:

Pre-merger, I was more an individual doing very well. And after the merger it was more like 'you just do what we say' ... you know. 'Just come down to earth now and do what we say ... because you are no longer there ... because we are now part of you ... you have to do what we say. A sort of dominance. Whereas before the merger no one ever dominated [...]. After the merger it was like 'we are in charge now, and you need to listen to us.' It was so confusing, because everything changed [...]. So yes, I see myself more as an HWU member than as a member of the post-merger organisation.

Another interviewee of the former HWU argued as follows:

I find it difficult to associate with these power games. I can't, so I am not the person that feels very strong attachment to the merged organization.

Together with the academic staff members of the former HWU, the academic staff members of the former HBU emphasised that they can not identify with the merged university as well. They clarified that they base their perception on a feeling of discontinuity of their own pre-merger organisational identification. As one academic staff member of the former HBU responded:

If I really have to be honest, in my heart I still think of it as the HBU. My feeling of loyalty to, and pride in the institution is still based on my long association with the HBU, because there is no shared vision among the employees yet. We don't share the same identity. Organisational identification is low.

This feeling of discontinuity is influenced negatively mainly by their perception of pre-merger status differences and dominance. As a colleague from another department within the former HBU answered:

They think they are better [...]. Everybody is still where they were at the time of Apartheid. There is no real change in terms of equity and promotion of people [...]. For me it went down, in terms of identification. The HBU had a good image out there. A lot of respect. But the merger ... it hasn't enlightened anything.

Another interviewee of the former HBU argued as follows:

Because they are a white institution, and they are mainly white ... predominantly white lecturers, they think they have the superiority over 'them out there at the HBU' ... the

lower campus in their perception [...]. So no, off course not. Off course not. I still talk about the HBU. I still see this as the HBU ... because I still see the attitude and mentality ... and uhm ... it has not moved forward in that sense. And I still think of it as the HBU.

Normally, such psychological disengagement after a merger should be taken into account seriously as a potential threat to the underperformance of a merged institution. However, it was interesting to discover that most of the academic staff members of both pre-merger universities still show behaviour that is beneficial to the post-merger university, despite a decrease in organisational identification. The reason for this phenomenon can be explained by their professional identification (which will be further explained in the next paragraph). The one behaviour that is affected negatively by a decrease in organisational identification is the willingness to cooperate with organisational members of the other merger partner. As one academic staff member of the former HWU mentioned:

When you go to these intercampus functions, there is still quite a strong sense of sticking with your own group identity. So there is still quite a strong sense, at functions, in thinking, in developing ideas, of consulting with people in your own pre-merger organisation, rather than across the merger institutions. And it will take some time.

As a result, the perception of oneness with or belongingness to the merged university is hardly present among the academic staff members of both the former HBU and HWU. One of the academic staff members of the former HWU clarified the situation as follows, in a general email sent to all the academic staff members of the post merger university:

The forced merger between the HBU and the HWU has affected the morale of all who now work for the post-merger university in different ways. The uncertainty of the future coupled with many tensions, nuances and dynamics, if not appropriately managed, has the potential to perpetuate the ‘them’ and “us” perceptions that are pervasive throughout the institution at present.

#### PROFESSIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Even though the willingness to cooperate with organisational members of the other merger partner is affected negatively by a decrease in organisational identification, the academic staff members of both the former HWU and HBU have indicated that they are still willing to strive for organisational goals; willing to stay within the organisation; and willing to engage in organisational citizenship behaviour. This rather ‘odd’ phenomenon can be explained by the fact that this study dealt with *academics*. In general, academics identify more with their profession than with the organisation they work for. As a consequence, the participants of both the former HWU and HBU mentioned that *not* organisational identification *but* professional identification is for them the driving force to engage in behaviours that are beneficial to their profession, and *thus* (indirectly) beneficial to their organisation. Since they perceive that underperformance of the post-merger university is reflecting negatively on their profession (as the core business of the university is research and education), the academic staff members emphasised that their professional identification is even *enhanced* for the sake of the South African higher education sector.

When an academic staff member of the former HWU was asked why she was still motivated to do her job to the best of her abilities, even though her organisational identification had decreased, she answered as follows:

If you don't, than you are doing injustice to your students. Because you are here for them. So I leave the issues behind me when I am in the classroom. Because you can not do injustice to your students. So it does not influence the way I teach. No, not at all. If you are in teaching, your main purpose should be the student ... you know. Issues may come and go. But what is most important are the students. So I always put that first. In that sense, the organisational issues don't actually matter.

The following quote from one of her colleagues from another department within the HWU, is a good example of how perceived pre-merger status differences have influenced post-merger organisational identification negatively, and, as a result, enhanced professional identification for the sake of their profession:

I have got excellent students coming in, and I just don't want to drop them and say 'okay you all now have to go to this lower level'. So it is kind of a battle to try and keep everything on a professional level and to show that there is hope in the future. And that is basically the only reason why I stayed. Otherwise I would have left and done something else.

What is most interesting about the results is the fact that the academic staff members of both merger partners have given the same kinds of responses, when they were asked about the dynamics between organisational and professional identification. This clarifies that professional identification is indeed the driving force for their behaviour. As an academic staff members of the former HBU mentioned:

The organisational issues have not influenced my commitment. No, not at all. In fact, it has even urged me to get on with it, because I think the challenges are there [...]. So it is more commitment to the subject I teach, rather than commitment to the organisation. Very much so. Commitment to the students, teaching, and the program that I am working on.

When a colleague from another department within the former HBU was asked about the influence of a decrease in organisational identification on her professional identification, she responded as follows:

As an academic, you still have students sitting in front of you in the class. You still have responsibility towards them. You still have to ensure that they get the benefit of good teaching. So you can't just walk away from that. If I would walk out now, I would leave this department in a very, very difficult time. And I feel like that is the same as jumping of a sinking ship as a captain and say 'okay guys, you are going down anyway.' That is not the way you do it. So I am going to hang in there. I would like to see that we work again from a position of strength. That we show the world out there that we can deliver.

To gain insight on the relation between organisational and professional identification, the participants of the focus group interview were asked to discuss the dynamics between the two concepts. One of the participants gave the following explanation, which clarifies the above-mentioned results:

Academics in general barely identify with their institution ... they identify with the discipline .... or a section ... or subsection of that discipline. Even though they are involved in discussions about the institution.

In order to fully understand the reason why a decrease in organisational identification has influenced post-merger behavioural outcomes positively (with professional identification mediating this process), five people who have worked for both universities in the past or have just recently started working for the merged university were asked about their perception on this subject. One of the respondents clarified this phenomenon as follows, which strengthens the abovementioned results:

It is not necessarily commitment to the organisation. Because people primarily do what they do for the people who are sitting in the classroom. The plus point is that the organisation benefits from that, but it is obviously not their first priority. The organisation they work for comes second.

Another respondent who has worked for both universities in the past shared this vision by emphasising that for most of the academic staff members who have experienced a decrease in organisational identification, their focus of identification has obviously shifted towards their profession.

Professional identification is in fact the only reason that this merged university is still functioning. Because there is a huge gap between the management and decision making, and the academic interface. And the academics in this institution are carrying on. They are doing their own thing and carry on. If they are doing it wrong, than it is because they are not given directions. But the commitment, their enthusiasm, their innovation, and their research practice ... that is across the board ... for the HBU and the HWU. If it was not for them, this place would have collapsed completely. The same with the other merger situations in South Africa.

## DISCUSSION

### MAIN CONCLUSIONS

The results of this qualitative study show that within an organisation that employs professionals, professional identification might be enhanced as a result of a decrease in organisational identification in times of an organisational merger. It appears that the amount of identification that is needed to legitimate the effort one puts into a job needs to come from some form of identification; either organisational or professional identification. For the academics under study, the *focus* of identification has clearly shifted towards their profession. Several conclusions can be drawn.

First of all, in line with previous research, the academic staff members of both pre-merger universities resisted in the process of social identity change (Haunschild et al., 1994; Jansen, 2004). Resistance has been a major drawback in the development of a new and uniform social identity for the merged university. Fear of losing status and being dominated have shown to be the determinants for this phenomenon.

A second conclusion involves the Social Identity Theory. In line with this theory the academic staff members of both pre-merger universities categorized themselves as part of their own pre-merger organisation. Previous research shows that once employees have defined themselves in terms of their pre-merger organisation, they will see their counterpart as inferior in the merger process (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Haslam, 2001). Put differently, employees usually tend to positively differentiate their own organisation from other organisations in order to feel better about themselves. The findings of this study have shown that the academic staff members of both universities indeed saw their counterpart as the inferior merger partner on certain aspects. However, both merger partners also emphasized that there were other aspects on which their own pre-merger organisation was the inferior

merger partner. More specifically, the academic staff members of the former HWU emphasized that they perceive themselves to be academically superior, but the former HBU to be politically superior. In contrast, the academic staff members of the former HBU emphasized that they perceive the former HWU indeed to be academically superior, but they themselves to be the pedagogically superior. It is even so that both merger partners seemed to put more emphasis on those aspects on which they perceive their own pre-merger organisation to be inferior, in order to create an atmosphere of empathy for the fact that they were put in a perilous position in which their counterpart has had the opportunity to be the dominant merger partner.

Based on the perceptions of inferiority versus superiority, the findings of this study underline the argument made by Van Oudenhoven and De Boer (1995) that it is rare for two organisations that merge to be of equal status. Van Oudenhoven & De Boer put most emphasis on status differences that are based on ratio. However, the results of this study have shown that deeply rooted emotions might be an important determinant for perceived pre-merger status differences as well. Therefore, this study associates more with Giessner et al. (2006), who argue that it is the *context* of a merger that primarily influences the *perceptions* of pre-merger status differences. The findings have shown that when dealing with previously advantaged and disadvantaged social groups, perceived pre-merger status differences might easily come into play. Another interesting result concerning the context of a merger, is the fact that the context might develop different loci of pre-merger status differences. Within this study, pre-merger status differences could be subdivided into academic, political and pedagogical status differences.

The findings have demonstrated that status differences and dominance are indeed closely related to each other, as Van Knippenberg et al. (2002) argue. Giessner et al. (2006) emphasize that it is a common phenomenon that the high status group dominates during and after the process of merging. Even though the results are in line with their argument, the findings can add to their argument that both merger partners might be *dominant* and *dominated* at the same time, based on different loci of pre-merger status differences. Now what is interesting about the results, is the fact that the participants solely referred to their feeling of being dominated. None of the participants 'admitted' to have engaged in dominant behaviour themselves. And that is interesting, because it explains why the academic staff members of both merger partners have experienced a decrease in organisational identification. Being dominated basically means a form of discontinuity of one's own pre-merger identification, and Van Knippenberg and Van Leeuwen (2001) argue that a sense of continuity is the key to post-merger identification.

In the context of a merger, a decrease in organisational identification usually reflects negatively on the post-merger organisation. Van Knippenberg et al. (2002) even argue that identification with the post-merger organisation is a key factor of success in the process of merging; since employees who can not identify with the post-merger organisation usually do not engage in behaviours that are beneficial to the organisation. However, Van Knippenberg et al. (2002) have not taken into account the fact that professional identification might in some cases be a *more* important determinant for behavioural outcomes in times of a merger. The findings of this study have shown that when dealing with professionals (like academics), a decrease in organisational identification might cause a shift in the focus of identification towards their profession. Indirectly, this reflects positively on the organisation as a whole.

#### MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

As Wallace (1993) argues, the relation between organisational and professional identification has indeed serious management consequences for an organisation that employs professionals.

The outcome of this study offers multiple starting points for managing employee identification in times of a merger.

For professional employees, like academics, professional identification has shown to be the most important determinant for behavioural outcomes in times of a merger. Those behaviours influence the post-merger organisation indirectly. Even though professional interests are not necessarily one hundred percent in line with those of the organisation, management should constantly weight between the importance of communication about organisational goals and communication about professional goals, in order to keep their employees motivated.

As the findings of this study have shown, the major drawbacks in the development of post-merger organisational identification are the perceptions of pre-merger status differences and dominance. This implies that management should continuously monitor and try to positively influence the perceptions that employees have with regard to the other merger partner and the merger as a whole. Only then post-merger organisational identification can be facilitated. *Social Identity Management* should therefore be an important management issue long before a forthcoming merger is announced. Internal communication strategies should be implemented as a strategic instrument of social identity management. Open and honest communication will thereby be the key factor of success, since employees' perceptions are usually not based on ratio, but rather on emotions (fed by past time experiences).

## LIMITATIONS

Even though this study dealt with an extremely fruitful case, since the South African context made the dynamics being studied probably more visible than the parallel dynamics would be in another context, there are some limitations.

The most important limitation is the generalization of the results. In this study only data was collected from academics, as part of the larger group of professional workers (like for instance medical staff, truck drivers, and accountants). Similar research in different types organisations that employ professionals would be needed to replicate some of the findings.

Second, this study only focussed on mergers as a form of organisational change. As a result, it is not possible to make valid claims about the relationship between organisational and professional identification in times of other forms of organisational change, like for instance internal restructuring.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

As mentioned above, this study only focussed on academics. However, there are more groups of professional workers to identify. In order to deepen the understanding of the relationship between organisational and professional identification, similar research in other organisations that employ professionals is needed.

This study focussed on a merger as a form of organisational change. Since organisational restructurings are at the order of the day worldwide, the question of how organisational and professional identification relate to each other in times of other forms of organisational change would be relevant (like internal restructurings).

This study focussed on the relationship between professional identification and organisational identification as a whole. However, organisational identification can be subdivided into multiple organisational levels which employees can identify with, like workgroup, department and division (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001; Bartels, 2006). It is even so that workgroup identification is often stronger than employees' identification with the organization as a whole (Apker and Fox, 2002; Riketta, 2005). As a result, workgroup

identification might be a better predictor of attitudes and behaviour with regard to the organization. It is therefore of great importance that management gains more insight in the specific determinant(s) of workgroup identification. Only then managers will be able to facilitate the process of social identity change effectively. Future research should therefore focus on the relationship between professional identification and workgroup identification in times of organisational change.

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