

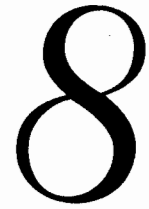
SOCIAL IDENTITY PROCESSES IN ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXTS

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extent to which individuals feel committed to their group is an important predictor of their willingness to exert themselves in order to achieve common group goals. In this sense, then, this chapter illustrates the validity of a theoretical analysis of work-related behavior in social identity terms, and underlines the usefulness of a social identity approach to behavior in work organizations.



Ambiguous Organizational Memberships: Constructing Organizational Identities in Interactions With Others

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In theory, the process of organizational identification begins simply with knowing that one is a member of an organization. In reality, organizational boundaries that distinguish members from nonmembers are increasingly less transparent and knowable. Membership in modern organizations is based on diverse types of ties to organizations that do not clearly delineate whether an individual is an insider or outsider. As Rafaeli (1997) described, traditional perspectives on organizations tend to view membership as a simple dichotomy and to deny membership status to individuals with nontraditional work relationships. For example, defining membership according to physical or temporal interactions (Pfeffer, 1982) excludes individuals who do not work within an organization's physical structure during standard work hours (e.g., telecommuters, virtual workers, and part-timers). In contrast, defining membership based on contractual relationships (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) fails to include contingent and temporary workers who are paid by employment agencies and volunteers who receive no financial remuneration for their services. Although formal definitions may classify certain individuals as nonmembers, these same individuals may identify psychologically with an organization, having feelings of membership and belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Contemporary views emphasize that organizational membership is less a

matter of being in or out than knowing when and to what degree one is a member (Rafaeli, 1997; Tyler, 1999). By conceptualizing membership as a matter of degree, this redefinition transforms how one thinks about the processes through which individuals come to identify with their work organization. In this chapter, we examine how the process of organizational identification begins (i.e., perceiving oneself as an organizational member) for individuals whose membership status is ambiguous. We use the term *ambiguous* to describe those situations in which memberships are experienced as vague, problematic, or unstable. We emphasize that membership ambiguity is situation-specific. An individual may perceive his or her organizational membership status as strong in a given setting, yet weak in another context (Hogg & Terry, 2000; see also Ashforth & Johnson, Chapter 3 of this volume). Central to our discussion is the idea that individuals aim to resolve ambiguity about their organizational memberships through social interactions.

Our chapter focuses on the work that individuals do in constructing an organizational identity in interactions with others inside or outside of their work organization. We explore how a sense of membership in an organization is constituted through daily interactions with others in the form of claiming and granting acts. We describe specific interactive strategies that individuals use to construct organizational memberships by word and by deed and how others grant membership status to individuals through their own words and actions. Thus, the identity work through which organizational memberships are created involves a social and interactive process (Snow & Anderson, 1987; Van Maanen, 1998).

Our perspective on the daily work of constructing a sense of organizational membership in interaction with others is consistent with two goals that we have for our chapter. First, we aim to shift the focus in organizational identification processes from a self-in-isolation to a self-in-relation perspective (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Surrey, 1991). Our perspective emphasizes that organizational membership is sensed through daily encounters with others rather than being solely an intrapsychic act of cognitive categorization that typifies current perspectives on organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994). Our second goal is to highlight the work, effort and resources that individuals expend in these encounters to construct a viable sense of organizational membership. Our chapter aims to elaborate how organizational scholars depict processes underlying identification by acknowledging the degree to which they are more relational and more effortful.

THE BASIC NEED TO IDENTIFY WITH SOCIAL GROUPS

We assume that individuals are motivated to believe that they are part of the settings in which they work. Researchers in social psychology (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and evolutionary psychology (Caporael, 1997; Stevens & Fiske, 1995) contend that the need to form and maintain interpersonal relationships

with others is a fundamental human motivation that drives identification with social groups. Ideally, people tend to seek out interpersonal contacts and cultivate possible relationships that are personally satisfying rather than distressing. However, once formed, people will resist breaking social bonds even when they become difficult to maintain and when there are no material or pragmatic reasons to preserve them (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

By implication, we suggest that individuals generally will seek to cultivate and preserve relationships with their work organization, even when they perceive that it is less desirable or possesses less attractive features relative to other organizations (Dutton et al., 1994). The desire to belong and to identify with one's work organization, however, can be a challenging task for individuals with ambiguous memberships. As we describe below, individuals in these situations often exert considerable effort to resolve their membership status and create feelings of belonging.

THE EXPERIENCE OF AMBIGUOUS MEMBERSHIPS

Membership ambiguity is not a stable descriptor of one's organizational standing, but a perceptual and emotional state experienced in particular social contexts. Ambiguity exists when an individual's membership status is unclear to him- or herself as well as other people in the social context. Ambiguous organizational memberships can emerge in several ways. Ambiguity can stem from tenuous organizational connections, such as when individuals are distanced from an organization in time and space. Virtual workers and telecommuters, for example, work off-site and often lack the physical and social ties that promote feelings of membership. Without clear evidence to suggest strong membership status, such individuals as well as others in the social context are often unsure about the degree to which they possess insider standing.

Ambiguous organizational memberships also arise when situational cues create boundaries that push individuals to go beyond the periphery. Individuals often find themselves in situations in which their organizational membership status is ambiguous because physical boundaries do not prescribe clear insider and outsider distinctions. Further, organizations themselves may have ambiguous features (e.g., M. S. Feldman, 1991), incommensurable technologies, unclear solutions and contradictory beliefs (Meyerson, 1991) that contribute to a sense of ambiguous membership for certain individuals. The pervasiveness of "boundarylessness" in organizations has inspired new conceptualizations of work and careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996a). Traditional views portray organizations as bureaucracies in which individuals climb steep hierarchies, whereas modern perspectives depict organizations as networks of connected goals and structures in which individuals move laterally across provisional and permeable boundaries. Our argument is that these structural changes have psychological consequences for understanding how people struggle to create feelings of membership in the organization.

Temporary workers, for example, perform tasks within an organization yet often face differential treatment by other members and exclusion from organizational routines or activities (Henson, 1996). Such situations promote ambiguity as individuals confront conflicting messages that confirm and deny membership simultaneously. Similarly, organizational volunteers, who work off-site to provide services directly to other groups (e.g., social service agencies, educational institutions) on behalf of their work organization, often wrestle with issues of membership as the boundary between work and community is blurred. These volunteers often experience ambiguity about the degree to which they perceive themselves as organizational members when performing community service. For example, an organizational volunteer noted the following:

When I initially started it was hard to know who I should be. I'm not really a regular volunteer because I didn't come to be at [the service agency] through traditional means. I'm a part timer that's here for [my work organization]. To me, that's who I represented but I wasn't sure that's how [the service agency] saw me. I didn't know who to be. I was hoping someone would help me, to just tell me up front how I fit in here. It would've made that first day a lot easier. (Bartel, 2001)

In situations where organizational memberships are ambiguous, the process of organizational identification becomes difficult. Our discussion takes the perspective of social identity theorists (Abrams, 1999; Hogg & Terry, 2000; J. C. Turner, 1985; J. C. Turner et al., 1987) that perceptions of organizational membership are context dependent. Identification is a perception of belonging to an organization that is triggered when situational cues highlight common interests or shared outcomes between an individual and the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). However, situational cues (e.g., cooperative tasks, shared experiences, perceived similarities to others) often do not clarify whether and to what degree an individual is an organizational member. Individuals lack sufficient information to conduct cognitive evaluations of their organizational relationship and, thus, often rely on alternative means to resolve the ambiguity. Social interactions constitute another mechanism through which individuals may come to perceive themselves as organizational members.

We emphasize that membership ambiguity is more than a perceptual puzzle, it presents an emotional dilemma as well. The term ambiguity reflects the degree to which individuals *perceive* themselves as organizational members and how much they *feel* like organizational members. Baumeister and Leary (1995) noted that real, potential, or imagined changes in one's belongingness status can produce emotional responses, with positive feelings associated with inclusion and negative feelings linked to exclusion. In fact, social exclusion has been identified as a basic source of anxiety (Leary, 1990). Williams' (1997; Williams & Sommer, 1997) work on social ostracism illustrates the effects of social exclusion in the workplace. Social ostracism is a perception of being ignored, excluded, or rejected by others in one's presence that deprives people of feelings

of belongingness to an organization and weakens their perceived control over interactions with others (Williams & Sommer, 1997, p. 694). Accordingly, the greater the ambiguity surrounding one's organizational memberships status, the more likely it is that a person will perceive him- or herself as an outsider and experience feelings of insecurity and instability.

The feeling of exclusion and devaluation associated with temporary worker status is portrayed vividly in Henson's (1996) research. A temporary worker whom he interviewed noted that "it is kind of bleak in that respect. I mean, you're always marginal. You're totally peripheral. You're not part of anything" (p. 104). Other temps shared similar sentiments, noting that "the life of the temp is eating lunch alone every single day" (p. 105) and that the work can be "a debilitating and a painful reminder of one's place in the world" (p. 112). Such comments illustrate that ambiguous memberships often lead oneself and others to perceive one as existing at the margins; not feeling like an outsider, but barely as an insider. Attempts to marginalize members of one's own social group and the perceptual and emotional consequences that ensue for those individuals are implicated in research on the "black sheep effect" (Marques & Paetz, 1994). Such research applies social identity theory to show how negative perceptions about atypical ingroup members are often more extreme than negative perceptions about outgroup members. By implication, individuals with ambiguous memberships are likely to encounter more frequent and more extreme acts of exclusion from other organizational members than do people whose membership clearly places them outside the organization (e.g., suppliers, customers, competitors). Accordingly, we assert that individuals with ambiguous memberships are generally motivated to gain greater clarity about themselves and to clarify their status to others, with the goal of repairing negative self-perceptions and emotional states. We suggest that individuals aim to accomplish this task through social interactions.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AND SITUATED ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Relationships with others play an important role in how information about the self is organized. Theorists have long considered social interactions as the origin of the self, with other people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors providing important information about who we are (Blumer, 1966; Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Work in this tradition has examined how social identities are created, used, and changed through social interactions (e.g., Potter & Wetherell, 1998; Prus, 1996; S. Reicher, 1995; Schlenker, 1985; Swann, 1987). In terms of organizational memberships, conceptualizing the process of identification as an interpersonal achievement emphasizes that other people are coproducers of self-understanding and self-feeling (Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Gergen 1994; Somers, 1994). That is, interactions are arenas in which individuals collectively construct a person's membership status in the organization.

We draw on Goffman's (1959) idea of "working consensus" to elaborate the role of social interactions in resolving membership ambiguity. Goffman argues that participants in an interaction aim to simplify and order the social environment by establishing the nature of their relationship to each other. This process requires "identity work," a collaborative effort to give meaning to one's self and others in a given context. We suggest that people do identity work in clarifying their membership status in an organization. We borrow the idea of identity work from Snow and Anderson (1987), who studied homeless persons' efforts to construct a particular personal identity. However, we alter their definition by using identity work to refer to the joint work done by the self (in claiming) and the "other" (in granting) that creates, presents, and sustains a particular social identity. That is, we are interested in the identity work involved in creating perceptions of membership in and belonging to an organization.

In the remainder of this chapter, we focus on the structure of social encounters and processes through which identity work helps resolve ambiguous organizational memberships. We describe efforts of individuals to "claim" membership status in a given context as well as the efforts of others to "grant" membership status to individuals. We focus on overt behaviors as well as verbal expressions, given that both forms of expression are infused with social and political implications and meaning that affect individuals' perceptions of themselves and others (McKinlay, Potter, & Wetherell, 1993; Reicher, 1995). Throughout, we utilize examples of individuals in two types of circumstances where their organizational membership is likely to be ambiguous: temporary workers and organizational volunteers. In building our theoretical storyline, we borrow from the stories of temporary workers and volunteers, which are part of the data sets from ongoing projects of both authors.

CLAIMING ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP STATUS

The social creation of membership status in an organization is a type of performance (Goffman, 1963). For people who are unclear about whether and to what degree they belong as a member, the performances can take significant effort and be met with mixed degrees of success. The moves or acts that individuals engage in for the purpose of displaying their status as members are what we call membership-claiming behaviors. Membership claiming describes an individual's efforts to communicate that he or she is a legitimate organizational member of a particular work organization.

Membership claiming can be attempted through both verbal and physical displays. In direct contrast to passing or attempting to "get by" without being identified with a particular group or organization (Goffman, 1963), claiming involves active efforts to have others see oneself as a viable organizational member. Using the terms of Creed and Scully (2000), claiming involves both stating and owning a particular social identity. In this sense, claiming can be thought of

as a strategic use of words and acts to assert that one is a legitimate organizational member. As we will suggest below, the achievement of organizational member status is not done on the basis of claiming alone. Rather, organizational identification depends also on whether or not other people affirm or validate this social claim of organizational membership through different forms of identity granting.

The simplest and most direct form of claiming an organizational identity comes in the form of *declaring*. Declaring occurs when an individual makes verbal assertions that he or she is a member of a certain organization. In Snow and Anderson's (1987) terms, declaring resembles role embracement, as it is a form of "identity talk" that expresses an acceptance of and/or attraction to a particular social role. In this case, the role is organizational member. Sometimes membership claiming is done voluntarily, as when individuals have a choice and choose to exercise it by stating their organizational membership. For example, organizational volunteers often talk about the degree to which they feel comfortable displaying and asserting their organizational affiliation within social service agencies. When working with agency clients, such individuals must decide whether they will present themselves as "just another volunteer" or whether they will distinguish themselves by announcing their organizational membership. As an organizational volunteer at a homeless shelter noted,

You need to make a quick choice about who you're going to be. It's a tough call; you never know how people will react. Sometimes [the clients] think it's great that local companies are trying to help out, but other times they get very cynical. They don't know who you are and they question your motives. Sometimes it's just better to check your company hat at the door, that way you don't have to constantly prove yourself.

As a contrasting example, office and clerical temporary employees often talk about exercising discretion in the degree and timing of declaring their membership in a client organization, all the while knowing that any claims of organizational "member" would be short-lived. Even if client assignments for a temporary employee are of long duration, individuals in these types of jobs face the constant challenge of claiming and legitimating their organizational affiliation. Even for the high-end, professional temporary employee (e.g., researchers, lawyers, lab technicians) the challenge of claiming and feeling like an organizational member is never-ending. As an experienced contingent employee who is a mechanical design engineer explained:

You go to a new company, they look on you as an outsider. They don't tell you much, and you are a stranger in the beginning, and it takes a while to get to know them. You have to prove yourself all over again. It takes a while to establish yourself. By the time you establish yourself, you're out of the company. Your work is done and you're gone. So that is the downside. (Kunda, Barley, & Evans, 1999, p. 18)

Verbally declaring one's membership in an organization is the simplest form of claiming, but it is certainly not the only one. *Questioning* is a form of active inquiry used to shape one's own view of the self as well as the impressions that others form of oneself. This can be accomplished in at least two ways. First, becoming an active inquirer can convey an image of competence, interest, and dedication. Such qualities are more typical of organizational insiders than outsiders and, thus, support claims that one possesses membership status. For example, organizational volunteers often report that their supervisors perceive them as "slackers" and treat them as marginal members (e.g., delegating important assignments to others) when they use opportunities to volunteer on company time. One way volunteers maintain or restore their good standing is through questioning. For example, an organizational volunteer noted that:

It's critical that you persuade your boss that you're still a player, that you haven't gone soft. Make sure you find out what went on while you were gone, ask everyone. Following up shows them that out of sight doesn't mean out of mind, at least when it comes to the office.

Questioning can also uncover similarities between oneself and organizational insiders in terms of traits and qualities characteristic of organizational members. Individuals can then use this information to display how and to what degree they possess such features. This, in turn, influences an individual's feelings of membership and shapes other people's perceptions of his or her status. For example, temporary clerical workers discussed the ways that they asked questions and sought information upon entry into a new client assignment (Henson, 1996). They sought information about key organizational players, sacred organizational values, favored organizational language, and behavioral norms that would allow them to effectively "fit in" as new organizational members.

Membership claiming can also take the form of *revealing* when individuals use information gathered through questioning. Revealing acts involve showing others that one has the knowledge and attitudes befitting an organizational insider. For example, individuals can verbally acknowledge aspects of the organization's culture that become part of the backdrop for insiders' interactions, such as specialized language and jargon, organizational rituals and celebrations, and commonly shared values and ideology. Revealing is an important way that people present themselves as "possessors of culturally appropriateselves" (Kunda, 1992, p. 171). Through revealing, individuals whose membership is ambiguous strive to create and sustain membership status by displaying interest and creating the impression that they fit the prototypical image of an organizational member. In Henson's (1996) terms, revealing is a way temporary workers transform "their temporary status of their current employment and pass for normals" (p. 151). Passing for normals means creating a valid sense in one's own eyes and the eyes of others that one is more an organizational insider than an outsider.

Membership claiming is accomplished through more ways than talk. Individuals can *equip* themselves with the material and symbolic resources that help to legitimate their assertions that they do, indeed, belong. Claiming by equipping can take the form of behavioral and artifactual displays that help to communicate the validity of an organizational self (Kunda, 1992). For example, individuals can use dress to claim organizational membership. Dressing appropriately for organizational membership can be an effortful activity involving physical, emotional, and cognitive work (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993; Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, & Mackie-Lewis, 1997). Focus group interviews with temporary clerical and administrative employees were brimming with stories of failed membership claiming through botched organizational dressing. Temporary employees are typically given limited, if any, information about what to wear in new client assignments other than the noninformative request to where business or casual business attire. The information vacuum about appropriate dress can lead to dressing mishaps that botch or limit current or future attempts at claiming organizational membership. A seasoned clerical temporary described a typical instance:

That situation when I walked into that environment where everyone is casual, in jeans and that, and I'm like, I look like, you know, I looked like the boss, and immediately, I was dead, was dead. I knew it too. I was there a couple of days and they'll find some reason that's totally unrelated to your performance and they will dismiss you. But you know, half the time, you know it. You're doomed. You feel it.

This temporary worker sensed immediately that her chances for claiming valid status as organizational member were eliminated through improper dress. From the moment she walked in, she was poorly equipped to construct a viable claim that she was a legitimate organizational member. As a result, we would expect that creating perceptions of membership would be nearly impossible in this social encounter.

Individuals also equip themselves as a form of membership claiming through the display of artifacts that communicate their association or disassociation with the organization. As Kunda (1992) put it, "office space contains numerous clues to the inhabitants' stance toward the organization." Individuals can play an active role in providing clues about their stance. Administrative temporary workers talk about the difficult decisions they have to make in taking over someone's desk on a contingent basis. On the one hand, having control over the office space gives individuals a physical platform to use in the claiming of an organizational identity. On the other hand, because of temporary workers' status, they have to be careful not to disturb or violate physical materials that may belong to the permanent desk owner or place holder. Nonetheless, displaying physical artifacts is an important means for claiming membership status.

GRANTING ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP STATUS

If the social creation of membership status in an organization is a performance in which individuals act out through words and behavior the part they wish to claim, then the success of such performances is partly dependent on audience reactions. As Sampson (1993) put it, "the other endows us with meaning and clothes us in comprehensibility" (p. 106). Thus, other people in the social setting actively participate in the construction of organizational membership.

Goffman (1959) argued that interaction partners strive to create "working consensus" or agreement about the degree to which a person's claims will be honored in a given context. This agreement does not reflect consensus about what truly exists, but rather, an agreement about whose claims will be temporarily honored. Accordingly, we suggest that individuals with ambiguous organizational memberships can use claiming tactics to attain greater insider status, but that others must confirm such claims to resolve the ambiguity. We refer to interaction partners' affirmation of membership status as membership granting. Membership granting refers to efforts to acknowledge that another person is a legitimate organizational member. In social interactions, people can grant to others both the content (what it means) and value (what it is worth) of their organizational membership. This is often accomplished through verbal and behavioral acts that mirror various claiming tactics.

Individuals can grant others membership status through *declaring* and *questioning*. Declaring involves verbal assertions acknowledging that an individual maintains a strong position as an organizational insider. Organizational volunteers, for example, note that staff members at social service agencies often announce their company affiliation when introducing them to clients. Such announcements smooth the way for volunteers to successfully make the claim of organizational member. Sometimes staff members will also include value statements about volunteers' organizational membership, providing further information about what individuals represent or stand for in that context. A volunteer who worked for an agency that builds homes for low-income families noted that the agency director told him:

We really count on [your company's] support to build these homes. It's not just a matter of getting bodies to help out. A company is only as good as the people who work for it. [Your company] is responsive to community needs and wants to help others out because its employees, like you, think it's important. That's why we count on [your company], because we know its people are concerned, are reliable, and will do a good job.

Declaring acts can help remove ambiguities about the degree to which an individual holds membership status in a given context. We propose that membership ambiguity is attenuated and working consensus is achieved when a person's declarations match closely the content and value of another individual's claims of organizational membership. That is, individuals involved in an interaction

can partly resolve membership ambiguities when their claiming and granting acts are mutually reinforcing.

Granting can also occur through acts of questioning. Individuals can make inquiries that help to establish that another person is a legitimate organizational member. Questioning is a dialogical tool that brings forth and sustains a particular construction from another (Sampson, 1993). Questioning allows individuals to proclaim their organizational affiliation and define their degree of membership. For example, when agency personnel ask volunteers to explain the structure and goals of their organization's community service programs, it provides opportunities for them to proclaim their membership status by revealing insider knowledge of the organization's strategic initiatives regarding social responsibility. Questioning can also elicit information that an individual possesses characteristics typical of members with a strong insider standing, thus helping to further resolve his or her membership status.

Granting is not limited to the spoken word, but can also occur through *equipping* behaviors that fortify an individual's membership status. Individuals can equip others with tangible and intangible resources that organizational insiders possess. Tyler and Lind (1992) argued that supervisors are potent status grantors because they often control the distribution of valued resources that signal whether someone is a legitimate organizational member. Temporary workers, for example, often speak of how their immediate supervisors fail to equip them with material resources that help create feelings of membership. Notably, supervisors often provide less compensation, benefits, and promotion opportunities relative to permanent employees. In other cases, temporary workers express frustration with inadequate work spaces and equipment. Failure to equip an individual with such materials provides direct feedback about the degree to which an individual is (or is not) perceived as an organizational member. The absence of material resources that signal one is more "outside" than "inside" the organization can make difficult the social accomplishment of membership status.

Supervisors can also equip others with intangible resources, such as information that only organizational insiders are usually privy to. This includes task-related technical information as well as cultural information regarding shared ideologies, specialized language, customs and rituals, and appropriate member etiquette and demeanor (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Granting such information to individuals with ambiguous memberships may promote feelings of inclusion by better enabling them to accurately diagnose, understand, and take part in task and social processes within the organization. A temporary worker vividly expresses the value of information in the following quote:

The boss I had was extraordinary at taking me under his wing. He did things for me as a temp that I wasn't used to. It was as if the minute I walked through the door I wasn't . . . you know, I was a permanent employee, even if I really wasn't. He took me to lunch the first day. I mean, he went over everything [the company] did in detail, he brought out all the materials, and he even talked about all the political relationships of everyone in the

department—his allies, management, this person and that person. This was the most delightful experience I've ever had.

This temporary worker went on to explain how such acts brought her "into the fold" and made her feel "part of the system," suggesting that information provided informally to others holds symbolic value that increases the degree to which individuals view themselves as organizational members. Individuals with ambiguous memberships, however, are often granted nonmembership status, being excluded from rites, rituals, and customs (e.g., awards ceremonies, annual meetings, and office parties) where social information is learned through both observation and conversation. Such acts also reduce opportunities for individuals to form relationships with organizational insiders, which can reinforce feelings of isolation often associated with ambiguous memberships.

In addition to informal means, individuals can equip others with task and social information through formal mechanisms such as training. For example, a temporary worker expressed this point:

They brought me in and gave me very rudimentary training. I really didn't know what I was doing. I was told specifically that I had to be very careful with the information I gave out on the phone, yet they wouldn't tell me the information I was supposed to give out on the phone. I was there for two days, there were no back-ups, no other information, and the boss was gone. So the employee who trained me went to management and said this person isn't working out, so they fired me.

Failure to equip an individual with pertinent task or social information does more than convey a lack of respect for the person or position, it creates barriers to successfully creating a sense that one belongs. It also reduces the likelihood that others will grant him or her the status of organizational member.

Authority and political clout are other types of intangible resources that individuals can provide, increasing the chances that recipients will be granted membership status. Such resources are a primary source of power in organizations (Pfeffer, 1982), which we see as a critical factor in determining degrees of organizational membership. For example, Kunda et al. (1999) found that technical contract workers were often reminded of their outsider status because they lacked the ability to "speak for the company." Even though the work of contract employees actively promotes organizational goals and interests, others may attempt to keep such individuals at or beyond the periphery by preventing them from fully enacting the role of organizational representative. For example, a contract worker whom Kunda et al. (1999) interviewed noted:

When it comes to representing the company, I can make recommendations and all that. But when it comes down to it, I can't speak for the company. I don't have the authority to do things in their name even though I have a job description that says, OK, this contract employee is the one who will recommend go—no-go on this kind of thing. (p. 18)

Other examples of equipping include providing individuals with political resources by involving individuals in activities that are highly visible and central to an organization's operations, or providing employees with vital political resources such as access to opportunity structures for expressing support or dissent about the organization's activities. For example, Lautsch's (2000) study of temporary workers at SarCo. described circumstances in which management restricted temporary workers from opportunities to express concerns. In doing so, management denied, rather than granted, them the necessary political "equipment" for constructing a viable sense of organizational membership. In the words of one manager:

I won't tolerate contractors making disparaging remarks about SarCo. and management though. They need to come in and do their work and mind their own business. SarCo employees do have the right to comment. Contractors don't." (Lautsch, 2000, p. 14)

We summarize in Table 8.1 the repertoire of claiming and granting acts that individuals use to resolve ambiguous organizational memberships in social interactions.

TABLE 8.1. Summary of membership claiming and granting acts.

	Verbal acts	Behavioral acts
Membership claiming	<p><i>Declaring</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asserting that one is a member <p><i>Questioning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active inquiry to shape other people's impressions • Active inquiry to gather information about members <p><i>Revealing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing that one has member knowledge 	<p><i>Equipping</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material resources (securing office space) • Symbolic resources (displaying artifacts, dress)
Membership granting	<p><i>Declaring</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asserting that another person is a member <p><i>Questioning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active inquiry to gather information that shows another person is a member 	<p><i>Equipping</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material resources (pay, benefits, office space, equipment/technology) • Symbolic resources (task and social information) • Social resources (contact and interaction with other members) • Political resources (power and authority)

GRANTING AND CLAIMING AS TWO SIDES OF THE MEMBERSHIP COIN

Crafting one's membership status in a given context is often an interdependent rather than an independent process. Through claiming and granting, social interactions can transform ambiguous memberships, providing the impetus for organizational identification. Such interactions are critical when the cognitive act of self-categorization (J. C. Turner et al., 1987) fails to illuminate the degree to which an individual holds insider status. In these situations, social interactions are locales in which self-understanding is mutually constructed. This involves one's own attempts to claim membership status as well as other people's efforts to grant membership status. We see the fusion of such acts as an improvised performance that can create feelings of membership in and belonging to an organization.

Cocreating situated identification is a complex process. To achieve a successful outcome, both granting and claiming must be intelligible. That is, the identity work results in a social fact that is accepted by all participants involved in the interaction. This can be difficult to achieve. Participants do not always partake in membership claiming and granting acts with equal vigor. Our discussion addresses individuals who are motivated to resolve their ambiguous memberships and will draw upon a repertoire of claiming tactics to accomplish this. We realize, however, that people are not equally motivated to do so. In the same vein, other people in the social context vary in terms of their willingness to reciprocate an individual's claims with comparable granting acts. The absence of granting precludes feedback from others that is necessary to complete the performance and bring some closure to the identification process. Creating a working consensus becomes more difficult, perhaps impossible, to achieve, and ambiguity about one's membership status is likely to persist.

In other situations, membership claiming and granting may operate at cross-purposes. That is, the degree to which an individual claims organizational membership may differ from the degree of membership status that another person wishes to grant. Although it may be common to see discrepant forms of claiming and granting at the start of an interaction, participants can synchronize their efforts successfully and achieve consensus on a person's membership status. In other contexts, participants may be unwilling to adjust their definition of a person's status. Or, participants may be unable to grant a certain degree of membership status due to contextual constraints, such as normative beliefs about particular organizational roles or occupations. We expect that ambiguity about one's organizational membership will endure in such settings.

This chapter provides an initial mapping of the specific strategies that social interaction partners use to resolve ambiguous organizational memberships. We focused on the "tools" that people use, but additional work is needed to understand how these tools are practiced in everyday organizational life. For example, we do not expect that various claiming and granting acts are equally

effective in all situations. We recommend research to examine conditions under which certain tactics exert substantial influence on perceptions of a person's membership status. Identifying attributes of the individuals involved in an interaction and the social context features that affect which claiming and granting acts are likely to be used is another important issue to be explored. Finally, we echo Pratt's (1998) position that a deeper understanding of organizational identification must consider how emotions affect the process. The experience of organizational membership involves an inseparable mix of perceptions and sensations, thus we recommend research to focus on how individuals experience and cope with ambiguous memberships in their minds and in their hearts through claiming and granting encounters with others.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The perspective that we have outlined makes organizational identification a form of social accomplishment. The key word in this claim is the word "social." We wrote this chapter in part to resocialize accounts of organizational identification that tend to underspecify the role of others in actively creating and sustaining one's organizational membership status. Our perspective builds on prior claims that perceptions of the self unfold in social interactions to suggest that individuals play distinct roles in the identification process as both claimers and granters of membership status. Thus, our perspective expands how we think about verbal and behavioral strategies that individuals use to create their own sense of organizational membership. It also elaborates the specific actions that other people undertake to intentionally, or otherwise, allow for the granting of membership status to individuals. Our prediction is that richer conceptualizations of organizational identification processes could emerge from greater consideration of the different ways that people actively contribute to the social creation of organizational identification. Ibarra's (1999) recent study of novice investment bankers and consultants reflects such an effort, describing how these individuals initially define their membership status or "provisional selves" by seeking out role models, experimenting with behaviors, and soliciting feedback. Guild's (1999) study of the creation of order through the linking of authority and identity claims for ski patrollers and lift operators in a California ski resort also brings rich texture to the idea that identity is socially constituted in situ through interactions with others.

We also emphasize that identity work is not limited to people who are affiliated with "spoiled" organizational identities, as suggested by studies of stigmatized occupations and work organizations in which individuals seek to rectify or redignify the status of their organization, job, or role (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Snow & Anderson, 1987). Like Van Maanen (1998), we argue that identity work is a normal process of identity negotiation that occurs in all jobs. We also suggest that identity work is particularly central to understanding identity

dilemmas of people who experience ambiguous organizational memberships. Thus, our perspective has broad application that further elaborates how individuals come to think, feel, and act like organizational members.

Finally, our perspective may also expand how socialization processes are conceptualized. Organizational researchers (D. C. Feldman, 1981; Louis, 1990; Morrison, 1993; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) have described the types of information that organizations impart to newcomers, or that newcomers actively seek out, to become effective and participating members. Implicit in such perspectives is the idea that newcomers cross a clear organizational boundary and can readily identify themselves as members. As we point out, new forms of work challenge such assumptions. Organizational memberships are often unclear and unstable. Thus, organizational entry and socialization may also require substantial identity work. We provide an account of the social interaction factors that novice and veteran members may exhibit.

Ongoing changes in how organizations structure and execute their activities will continue to raise questions about how individuals construe their relationship with their employers. We highlighted a specific dilemma facing individuals with nontraditional work arrangements and asked the question, "How do individuals with ambiguous memberships achieve a sense of membership in and belonging to their work organization?" Our answer suggests that we cannot understand the achievement of organizational identification without considering the social processes that undergird its production. We believe that the perspective on claiming and granting opens new ways of looking at identification for people in unambiguous membership situations as well. Future research will need to address how these granting and claiming activities are situated in particular organizational and subgroup contexts (Guild, 1999). With new forms of work and the multiplication of forms of attachment to work organizations, there is fertile ground for growing new ways to look at the important process of organizational identification.

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