SOCIAL IDENTITY PROCESSES IN ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXTS

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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 Ballach (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 (Pieffer, 1982) excludes individuals who do not work within an organization’s physical structure during standard work hours (e.g., telecommuters, virtual workers, and partners). In contrast, defining membership based on contractual relationships (Jensen & Mehlhorn, 1999) 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 (Alldritt & Macf, 1989). Contemporary views emphasize that organizational membership is less a
manner of being in or out than knowing when and to what degree one is a member (Rafaeli & Tyler, 1990). By conceptualizing membership as a matter of degree, this definition 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., recognizing oneself as an organizational member) for individuals whose membership status is ambiguous. We use the term ambiguous to describe these 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 integrative process (Snow & Anderson, 1987; Van Maanen, 1979).

Our perspective on the daily work of constructing a sense of organizational membership relies on interaction between others to constitute a set of goals that we have for our chapter. First, we aim to shift the focus in organizational identification processes from a self-inolation to a self-in-relation perspective (Gergen & Gergen, 1990; Sorell, 1991). Our perspective emphasizes that organizational membership is seized through daily encounters with others rather than being solely an interpretive 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 stable sense of organizational membership. Our chapter aims to elaborate how organizational scholars skirt processes underlying identification by acknowledging the degree to which they are more relational and more embedded.

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 (Ransmeier & Leary, 1995) and evolutionary psychology (Caporael, 1967; Stevens & Fine, 1966) contended 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 found, 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 (Ransmeier & Leary, 1995).

By implication, we suggest that individuals generally seek to cultivate and preserve relationships with their work organization, even when they perceive that it is less desirable or poses 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 MEMBERSHIP

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 tension organizational connections, such as when individuals are located far from an organization in time and space. Virtual workers and telecommuters, for example, work alone and often lack the physical and social ties that generate feelings of membership. Without clear evidence to suggest strong membership status, 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 prevent clear insider and outsider distinctions. For example, organizations themselves may have ambiguous features (e.g., M. S. Feldman, 1994), inconceivable technologies, unclear solutions and contradictory beliefs (Meyerson, 1991). It is contributive to a sense of ambiguous membership for certain individuals. The pervasiveness of "boundaryless" in organizations has inspired new conceptualizations of work and careers (Arthur & Bourgeois, 1996). Traditional views portray organizations as hierarchies in which individuals climb deep 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 generate ambiguity as individual confront confusing 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 the volunteer organization, often wrestle with issues of membership as the boundary between work and community is blurred. These volunteers express confusion 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 I was hard to know if I should be. I’m not really a regular volunteer because I didn’t start to the office daily service agency through traditional means. I am a part-time performer in my work organization. To me, that’s a different role but I am sure that there is clear the service agency as it is not me. I didn’t know who to be. It was looking someone who would like to join me to tell me up from how I fit in there. It wouldn’t be the fact that day a lot easier (Baker, 2001).

In situations where organizational membership is ambiguous, the process of organizational identification becomes difficult. One discussion takes the perspective of social identity theorists (Aronson, 1999; Hogg & Terry, 2000; G. T. Turner, 1985; J. C. Turner, J. C., & Hogg, M. A., 1989). Past 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 or 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 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 they feel like organizational members. Bamossy and Leary (1995) noted that real, potential, or imagined changes in one’s belonging status can produce emotional responses, with positive feelings associated with inclusion and negative feelings associated with exclusion. In fact, social exclusion had been identified as a basic source of anxiety (Leary, 1990). Williams (1997; Williams & Sommers, 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 & Sommers, 1997, p. 644). Accordingly, the greater the ambiguity surrounding one’s organizational membership 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 temp shared similar sentiments, noting that “the life of the temp is eating lunch alone every single day” (p. 98) and that the work can be “a dehumanizing 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 margin, not feeling like an insider, but hardly as an outsider. 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” (Manser & Pza, 1994). Such research provides social identity theory to show how negative perceptions about ingroup members, by implication, individuals with ambiguous memberships are likely to encounter more incessant and more extreme acts of exclusion from other organizational members who do not perceive oneself as existing at the margin (e.g., supervisors, co-workers, supervisors, 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 at the origin of the self, with other people’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior providing important information about who we are (Blumer, 1966; Cooley, 1942; Mead, 1934). Work in this tradition has examined how social identities are created, used, and changed through social interactions (e.g., Poteet & Wheeler, 1999; Prus, 1996; S. Reicher, 1995; Schneidew, 1995; Swann, 1977). In terms of organi- zational memberships, conceptualizing the process of identification as an interpersonal achievement emphasizes that other people are cognitively involved in understanding and self-feeling (Daly & Hocking, 1999; Gergen, 1994; Sommers, 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] 1990) idea of "working together" to elaborate the role of social interactions in resolving membership ambiguity. Goffman argues that participants in an exchange or act to simplify and order the social environment by establishing the nature of their relationship to each other. This process requires "identity work," 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 identity. However, we alter the definition by using identity work to refer to the joint work done by the "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 "organizational membership," or the efforts of individuals to "claim" membership status in groups. We focus on overt behavior as well as verbal expression, given that both factors are integrated with social and political implications and account for individuals' perceptions of themselves and others (McKeev, Popp, & Welter, 1993; Roth, 1995). Throughout, we use examples of individuals in two types of circumstances where their organizational membership may 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, 1959). For people who are unclear about whether and to what degree they belong as a member, the performance can take significant effort and be met with mixed degrees of success. The success or efforts that individuals engage 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 contact to "get by" without being identified with a particular group or organization (Goffman, 1959), claiming involves active efforts to have others see oneself as a valid organizational member. Using the terms of Cred and Scally (2000), claiming involves both stating and assuming 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 membership status is not done solely 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 particular organization. In Snow and Anderson's ([1987] 1990) terms, declaring resembles role-subservience, 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 desire 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, each individual 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 tough at first, you 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 crusty. 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 receiving the rewards in the degree and timing of declaring their membership in a client organization, all the while knowing that any claims of organizational "membership" 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 employees (e.g., accountants, lawyers, lab technicians) the challenge of claiming and feeling like an organizational member is never ending. An experienced contingent employee who is a mechanical design engineer explained:

"You get to new companies, they look you up in your. They don't know you, 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's the..."

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(Continued...)

**AMBIGUOUS ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

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Membership in an organization is a form of claiming status. Individuals can establish a sense of worth and a position in society by being associated with a particular group or organization. This sense of belonging can be a source of pride and identity. However, membership in an organization is not always the easiest or most straightforward process. Individuals must often overcome various barriers and challenges to become members of an organization. 

For example, in modern society, membership in certain organizations may require a certain level of education or professional certification. This can be a significant barrier for individuals who do not have the necessary qualifications. Additionally, organizations may have strict membership requirements, such as paying a membership fee or attending certain events. These requirements can be a source of frustration for individuals who are interested in becoming members but do not meet the necessary criteria.

It is important to note that membership in an organization is not always a guarantee of recognition or approval. Individuals may be met with resistance or skepticism from others who do not share their views or beliefs. This can be a challenging experience, but it is essential to perseverance and dedication.

Ultimately, membership in an organization is a complex and multifaceted process. It requires time, effort, and dedication, but it can also provide a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment. By joining an organization, individuals can become part of a larger community and contribute to the greater good.
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 recognition. As Sarnoff (1936) pp. 4-5, "the other endures us with meaning and others 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 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 grant to others both the content (what is meant and valued) and the status (what is it worth) of their organizational memberships. 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 of knowledge 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 themselves to clients. Such announcements smooth the way for volunteers to successfully make the claim of organizational membership. 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 lower income families noted that the agency director told him:

1 We really count on [your company]’s support to build houses. We get not just a matter of getting locally to help us. [Your company]’s not just the people who work for it. [Your company] is responsive to community needs and wants to help others, so we become its employees, like you think it's important. That's why we count on [your company], because we know its people — concerned, are reliable, and will do a good job.

Declaring acts can help resolve 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 (Sarnoff, 1959). 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 inside knowledge of the organization's strategic initiatives regarding social responsibility. Questioning can also elicit information that an individual possesses characteristic of members with a strong insider standing, thus helping to further resolve their 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 supervisory status grants become those often control the distribution of valued resources that signal whether someone is a legitimate organizational member. Temporary work­ers, for example, often lack access to 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 space 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 "inside" than "outside" 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 technological 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 conditioning 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 best I had was extraordinary at taking me under his wing. He did things for me as a team that I wasn't used to. It was as if the minute I walked through the door I wasn't... you know, I was an agreement employee, even if I really wasn't. He took me to lunch the first day. I mean, it was... everything... everything the company did, in detail, he brought all the materials, and he even talked about all the political relationships of everyone in the
Other examples of equipping include providing individuals with personal resources by involving individuals in activities that are highly visible and central to an organization's operations, or providing employees with political resources such as access to opportunity structures for expressing support or dissent about the organization's activities. For example, Lauche's (2000) study of temporary workers at S&Co. described circumstances in which management restricted temporary workers from opportunities to express concerns. In doing so, management desired, rather than granted, 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 S&Co. and management though. They need to come in and do their work and send their own business. S&Co. employees do have the right to comment. Contractors don't." (Lauche, 2000, p. 11)

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

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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, and it 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 an essential factor in determining degrees of organizational membership. For example, Kunda et al. (1990) found that technical contract workers were often reimbursed for their expenses because they lacked the ability to "speak for the company." Even though the work of contract employees actively promotes organizational goals and save costs, others may attempt to keep such individuals at arm's length by preventing them from fully exercising the role of organizational representative. For example, a contract worker whom Kunda et al. (1990) 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 on the kind of thing. (p. 16)
GRANTING AND CLAIMING AS TWO SIDES OF THE MEMBERSHIP COIN

Crafting one's membership coin in a given context is often an intense, independent process, rather than a shared one; claiming and granting, social interactions that transform ambiguous membership credentials, providing the incentives for organizational identification. Such interactions are critical when the cognitive act of self-awareness (Ford, 1997) fails to illuminate the degree to which an individual holds insider status. In situations, such social interactions are focused, claiming and granting are unlikely. This involves one's own attempts to claim membership status as well as other people's efforts to grant membership status. We see the figure of such acts at an improved performance that can create feelings of membership in and belonging to an organization.

Creating situations with a significant context is a complex process. To achieve a successful outcome, both granting and claiming must be transparent. That is, the identity work results in a social fact that is accepted by all participants in the interaction. This can be difficult in absence. Participants do not always participate in membership-claiming and granting acts with equal vigor. One discussion addresses what individuals are motivated to secure their ambiguous membership, and will draw upon a repertoire of claiming tactics to accomplish this. We believe that people are 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 claim with comparable granting acts. The absence of granting provides feedback from others that is necessary to complete the process by encouraging and serving as cues to the identification process. Creating a working consensus becomes more difficult, perhaps impossible, to achieve, and ambiguous, 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's claims membership may differ from the degree to which someone's claims status 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 definitions of a person's status. Or participants may be unable to grant certain degrees of membership status due to contextual constraints, such as normative beliefs about particular organizational roles or structures. 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 interactions can use to create and sustain organizational memberships. We focused on the "social" 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 violation 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 personal membership status. Identifying attributes of the individuals involved in an interaction and the social context features that affect which claiming and granting act are likely to be used in another important move to be explored. Finally, social encounters may be few in number, and while the process of identity formation by claiming may occur, or even the process that can be initiated. In the end, research is needed to identify 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 is the word "social." We wrote this chapter in part to rethink accounts of organizational identification that tend to oversimplify the role of others in actively creating and sustaining organizational membership status. Our perspective builds on prior claims that perceptions of the self-sold in social interactions suggest that individuals play distinct roles in the identification process as both claimers and generators 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 celebrates the specific actions that other people undertake intentionally, or otherwise, to allow for the granting of membership status in 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. Proust's (1990) recent study of social investment and membership status reflects such an effort, describing how these individualists initially define their membership status or "provisional selves" by seeking out role models, experimenting with behaviors, and soliciting feedback.

Gold's (1989) study of the creation of order through the linking of authority and identity claims for ski patrolmen 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 "grouped" organizational identities, as suggested by studies of ritualized organizations and work organizations in which individuals seek to transform the social context of their job, or role (Adair & Kivett, 1990; Snow & Anderson, 1987). Like Van Maanen (1988), we argue that identity work is a normal process of identity negotiation that occurs in all jobs. We also suggest that identity work is partially central to understanding identity.
dilemma of people who experience ambiguous organizational memberships. Thus, our perspective has broad applicability 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; Leta, 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 create 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 membership 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 perspectives on claiming and granting open new ways of looking at identification for people in ambiguous membership situations as well. Future research will need to address how these granting and claiming activities are situated in particular organizational and subgroup contexts (Galbraith, 1990). 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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