

# Linking Personality and Strategic Leadership to Organizational Identification

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## Abstract

Links have been established between organizational identification and the way employees behave in the workplace. Amidst stiff competition and an urgent need to improve employee productivity it would benefit organizations to know what fosters organizational identification among employees. Consequently, this study purposed to investigate the influence of employee personality and strategic leadership on organizational identification among teachers. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design to collect data from a sample of 136 private high school teachers. The results of the study indicated that strategic leadership, extraversion and agreeableness were significantly correlated to organizational identification. Additionally, it was found that neuroticism was negatively correlated with organizational identification. The study may be particularly useful to educational leaders who desire to help their employees feel a sense of belonging with their organizations.

**Key Words:** Organizational Identification, Strategic Leadership, Personality, Teachers, Cross-sectional survey design, India.

## 1. Introduction

All humans are designed to seek affiliations that add meaning to their lives (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Moreover, it is a basic human need and must be satisfied for the well-being of individuals (Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008). This need is so basic that a deprivation of it can lead to negative behavioral outcomes (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). Further, a deprivation of social interaction can have cognitive and affective consequences as. In fact, it has been quantified that very happy people are very social people (Diener & Sligman, 2002). In order to illustrate the importance of this need it has been said that when unmet "people make humans of non-humans" (Epley, Waytz, Akalis, & Cacioppo (2008) p. 143). Baumiester and Leary (1995)

suggested that whatever human beings do is the result of feeling a sense of belongingness. Given the number of hours an individual spends at the workplace it may safely be suggested that the need to belong may extend to the workplace. The work context is perhaps an ideal platform for social interaction and therefore, an important source of happiness and well-being. Today organizations are more concerned with the well-being of employees as their stability, well-being and identification have shown to improve productivity (Heckman, Bigley, Steensma & Hereford 2009). This sense belongingness towards an organization is defined as organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael 1989).

Being the most important resource of an organization (Siddique, 2011), sufficient emphasis must be placed on humans. Ensuring employee satisfaction should be central to management of any organization as the human relations theory suggests that satisfied workers are productive workers (McGregor, 1960). Productive workers ascertain individual performance and as such enhance organizational performance (Naseem, Sheikh, & Malik, 2011). This is even more relevant to current times considering the nature of work environments which is characterized by momentous change and uncertainty (Clegg, Kornberger & Pitsis, 2008). Organizational Identification has been linked to employee satisfaction (Qureshi, Shahjehan, Zeb, & Saifullah, 2011) and therefore may be of interest to organizational researchers and practitioners.

People are different and as such the need to belong may vary from person to person. The magnitude of this need may, to a significant extent, be explained by personality. Further, an understanding of personality can explain complex behaviors exhibited by an individual. Additionally, studies in leadership have also argued that the way an individual behaves in the workplace may be determined by the leadership style in an organization. The leader in an organization is an important catalyst in the creation of the work environment. As a result, the way an individual relates to the work environment depends greatly on the leader. Leadership studies have propagated that a leader creates influence which further affects the work environment. Arising from these arguments, this quantitative study seeks to investigate the relationship that strategic leadership and personality have with organizational identification. Additionally, given the tenuousness of contemporary work environments managers and leaders may profit from an understanding of what promotes a sense of belongingness. Consequently, this paper purposed to contribute to the understanding of organizational identification.

## **2. Literature Review**

In order to put the study in perspective related literature was carefully reviewed and put together for the edification of the reader. This section presents the literature on personality and strategic leadership in relation to its impact on organizational Identification. The review will also trace the conceptual framework so as to give a comprehensive understanding while acknowledging the contribution of other research studies in this field.

### *2.1 Organizational Identification*

Termed as the “Cinderella of organizational studies” (Boros, 2008 p.1), organizational identification did not draw the attention of organizational researchers until the 60’s. For the larger part of its early years it was overshadowed by organizational commitment. It is only after Ashforth and Mael (1989) applied the social identity theory to the concept of organizational identification that it began to make sense to organizational researchers. Since the application of SIT to the construct scholars have empirically and theoretically approached it as a unique construct (Riketta, 2005). Consequently, organizational identification is defined as a “perception of belongingness or oneness with” an organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989 p.34). They posited that in a social environment an individual cognitively makes classifications of the environment as means of defining individuals and in the process locating oneself in the social environment. By extension organizations are reservoirs of social environments providing individuals with the platform to segment and categorize. As such an individual can make sense of the environment and feel a sense of attachment and belonging. As a result of this approach the construct has developed considerable in the last two decades or so (Boros, 2008) and has significantly informed management research (He, 2013). The delay in the interest shown towards organizational identification was due to overlaps in the conceptualizations of organizational identification and organizational commitment. However, Riketta (2005) in a meta-analysis of the construct identified that the two are distinct constructs. Further, the analysis also helps understand that organizational identification had more of an overlap with a single dimension of organizational commitment than the whole construct per se. Once this was identified organizational researchers have directed considerable attention to the construct.

Organizational Identification was also conceptualized as being comprised of three subcomponents: self-categorization and labeling, integration of organizational goals and values, sense of membership and belongingness (Edwards & Peccei, 2007). Self-categorization and labeling is a process in which an individual absorbs the values and beliefs of the group and fits in (Boros, 2008). Further, the concept of depersonalization is central to self-categorization theory. As a result of depersonalization, an individual begins to see the group (category) and themselves as interchangeable exemplars (Hornsey, 2008). Consequently the individual begins to define themselves with the attributes of the affiliated group. As such the individual feels oneness with the organization.

A recent quantitative study of organizational identification study was done in 81 medium-sized US-based franchise organizations. Using a survey instrument data was collected and analyzed using statistical tests were done. The findings suggested that organizational identification helped create positive organizational impacts (Reese, 2014). In another study, 135 respondents were surveyed in an Iranian manufacturing company that recently implemented an enterprise system. The purpose of the study was to explore how organizational identification was related to the user’s perceived usefulness of the system and to the satisfaction of the system user. The study revealed that the more the user identified with the organization the more supportive they were of the organization as a result, were more willing to accept the newly implemented system (Khosravi, Rezvani & Ahmad, 2013). The study also further revealed

that the users were satisfied because of the contribution they made to the organization as a result of their successful use of the implemented system.

Additionally, studies have also suggested that organizational identification increases organizational citizenship behavior (Van Dick, Grojean, Christ, & Wieseke, 2006), enhances cooperation and participation (Kramer, 2006), improves job satisfaction (Carmeli, Gilat, & Waldman, 2007), reduces turnover and helps in employee control (Barker & Tompkins; Edwards, 2005). Further, it is argued that employees with high levels of organizational identification are more likely to act in a way that best suits the interest of the organization (Scott & Lane, 2000). Finally, higher levels of organizational identification is positively correlated with job satisfaction and helps significantly reduce withdrawal intentions.

When employee's needs are met they are satisfied (Bauman, 2012). Providing such satisfaction is vital to a service industry since it improves both productivity and the quality of work (Naseem, Sheikh & Malik, 2011). Further, when employees experience a sense of belongingness, they stand a higher chance to opt to engage in tasks that benefit the organization as opposed to their own personal interests (Ceri-Booms, 2012). Additionally, an understanding of organizational identification can help managers enhance organizational performance by helping employees identify with the organization. It was therefore considered relevant to unearth the relationships between the variables discussed in subsequent sections and organizational identification.

## *2.2 Personality and Organizational Identification*

Personality can be defined as "the structures and propensities inside people that explain their characteristic patterns of thought, emotion, and behaviour" (Colquitt, Lepin, & Wesson 2013). Personality is not so much a single part of a person rather it may better capture the concept to say that it was the aggregate whole of an individual. Factors that are considered major determinants of personality are heredity, environment and situation. Personality has been found to be enduring across situations and work life (Bozionelos, 2004). One of the earliest names in the efforts of constructing a personality taxonomy is documented to be Raymond Cattell. Studies on the relationship between personality and work-related outcomes are not uncommon especially in the field of organizational behaviour.

The following theories dominate the literature pertinent to personality research: (a) psychoanalytic theories, (b) humanistic theories, (c) biological theories, (d) behavioural, social learning, and cognitive theories, and (e) trait theories. Trait theory is perhaps the most accepted personality theory that is relevant in organizational behaviour research as it captures salient aspects of an individual. Trait theory focuses more on habitual patterns, behaviour, thought, and emotion. Trait theory suggests that a person's personality may, to some extent, be explained by certain traits the individual possesses. Among the many trait theories research has identified the Big Five model as the most widely accepted theory in personality studies (Aghaz & Hashemi, 2014). After the initial efforts of Raymond Cattell and several others scholars, the Big Five model finally made a mark in personality literature. The Big Five Model is characteristic of five super-ordinate factors (John & Srivastava, 1999), which are (a)

neuroticism, (b) extroversion, (c) openness, (d) conscientiousness, and (d) agreeableness. Each of these factors is described subsequently.

Neuroticism is characteristic of traits that include excessive worry, negative emotions, pessimism, and low confidence (Bozionelos, 2004). Neurotics have low levels of confidence and also have no belief and faith in others. As such, they have little ambition and are less likely to plan work engagements related to better performance and career advancements. Extroversion includes traits such as gregarious, assertive, and sociable. Extroverts tend to long for social acceptance, control and command (John & Srivastava, 1999). They are more likely to be ambitious regarding career advancements and, as a result, satisfying such propensities leads to engaging in work more actively. Openness is associated with traits such as imaginative, curious, refined, complex, open-minded, aesthetic, and intellectual. Openness has been both found to have a weak relationship with satisfaction and a positive relationship with job performance (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). However, its relationship with job performance may not necessarily be consistent across all occupations (Colquitt, Lepine & Wesson, 2013). Conscientiousness may be characterised by traits such as diligent, vigilant, responsible, determined, and attentive. It is believed that among all the other dimensions, conscientiousness is perhaps the one that has the greatest effect on work outcomes (Hitt, Miller & Colella, 2006). Individuals who are conscientious are able to focus on goals and work to achieve them in a systematic manner. Agreeableness includes traits like trusting, good natured, cooperative, merciful, kind, and soft hearted. Individuals with these traits are often easy going and tolerant and seem to be able to work well in teams. In times when managers require effectiveness over acceptance, this trait can be considered negative more than positive (Colquitt, Lepine & Wesson, 2013).

Personality when defined as a “stable set of characteristics representing internal properties of an individual, which are reflected in behavioural tendencies across a variety of situations” (Hitt, Miller, Colella, 2006) has several implications to organizational behaviour. Additionally, employees’ dispositional factors to a great extent influence their behaviour in work settings. Organizational identification is the part of person’s self-concept based on the affiliation with an organization (Riketta, 2005). Further, the self concept of an individual is influenced by personality (Dorner, 2006). By extension, organizational identification as the self concept derived from organizational membership is influenced by personality. A propositional paper by Hongwei and Brown (2013) suggested that there is a relationship between personality and OID and that research exploring this relationship is lacking. Further this relationship was tested and found to be positive and hence supported empirically (Aghaz & Hashemi, 2014). Additionally it was suggested by Jones and Volpe (2010) that the relationship between personality and organizational identification could be of interest for future research. This paper therefore fills this gap by adding empirical support to the relationship examined recently.

### *2.3 Strategic Leadership and Organizational Identification*

Leadership has been a widely studied construct and especially so in the organizational context. Over the years this area has undergone metamorphosis. In the latter part of the development it was pointed out that leadership had more to do with developing strategy and

influencing followers to buy in (Phipps & Burbach, 2010). Carrying this idea forward the upper echelon theory was proposed (Elenkov, Judge, & Wright, 2005) which worked under the premise that an organization was a reflection of the thoughts, beliefs and values of its top management. The argument that fueled this thought is that when leaders function at a strategic level they begin to judge the market based on their knowledge, belief, and experience and as such would make choices that directly impact the organizational strategy which over time is reflective of the top management. The impact of strategic leadership in relation to organizational behavior can be clearly seen through the strategic framework at play in regards to the organization's mission, vision and values. Researchers Sahu and Bharti (2009) continue to emphasize that it is through the values of the organization that its employees are able to construct a relational fabric. It is to be noted that organizational values are founded on its vision and mission i.e. the organization's ultimate identity in terms of its image and scope as well as its core purpose. Therefore, for the above named elements to be established in an organization, strategic leadership plays a significant role in determining the operational structures.

In fact Hitt, Miller, and Crella (2006) delineate six aspects of strategic leadership: determining organizational vision and purpose, maintaining core competencies; sustaining organizational culture; emphasizing ethical practices; enhancing human capital; ensuring balanced organizational control. This turns strategic leadership into a competitive advantage for the organization (Phipps & Burbach, 2010). Further, Boal and Hoojberg (2000) encouraged moving beyond demographics to integrate research that reveals how strategic leaders influence organizational outcomes. They were of the idea that strategic leaders have the ability to nurture three capacities within organizations: the learning capacity, the capacity for change, and the capacity for managerial wisdom. Further, Lear (2012) studied the inter-relationship concerning strategic leadership and strategic alignment by highlighting the high performing companies in South Africa. The research findings led the researcher to conclude that strategic leadership is a decisive aspect in high performing institutions and the rationale being that between strategic leadership and strategic alignment, there existed a positive association.

Additionally, it is argued that strategic leadership is product of a synthesis of the constructive development theory and the stratified system theory (Phipps & Burbach, 2010). In a similar vein, (Elenkov, Judge and Wright (2005) contended that the upper echelon perspective, the total leadership perspective, and the visionary leadership perspective point out that strategic processes and outcomes are impacted by strategic leadership. These broader discussions further illustrate the significance of strategic leadership in contemporary organizations that want to stay ahead of the game. The role of top management in an organization's innovation process is fundamental. The more innovative an organization is the more likely they are to stay competitive in the market and therefore is critical to 21<sup>st</sup> century organizations (Hana, 2013).

Organizational identification, as mentioned earlier, is the way an individual feels one with the organization. A factor in ensuring identification was the prestige of the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1992). They illustrated that it is important for employees to know that others think highly of their organization in order to feel one with it. In addition, an innovative



organization stands the chance to be competitive in the market and as such may hold a good prestige. It may therefore be argued that strategic leadership, among other things, determines the innovativeness of the organization. As a result, this paper contends that strategic leadership may have a relationship with organizational identification and therefore explores the relationship.

### **3. Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship that personality and strategic leadership have with organizational identification and therefore a quantitative approach was deemed appropriate. This section presents a discussion on the research design, sample and population, and instrumentation. Further the results and their implications along with recommendations are presented.

#### *3.1 Research Design*

Taking the quantitative approach and, in order to meet the purpose of the study, a survey design was employed. The survey design was considered appropriate as it is best suited when capturing the opinions and experience of research participants (Creswell, 2012). Emerging from literature as presented earlier, the study involved the test of relationships of personality and strategic relationship, with organizational identification. The population, sampling procedure and instrumentation are discussed subsequently.

#### *3.2 Population and Sample*

The population of this study included teachers of private high schools in the city of Pune, India. All the participants were included based on their willingness to be involved in the research study. Additionally, no names of participating individuals or schools are mentioned anywhere in this document. A total of 8 schools were approached for data collection and employing the random sampling method surveys were distributed and collected from 136 teachers.

#### *3.3 Instrumentation*

With the permission of the relevant authors data was collected using pre-constructed instruments. The three variables in the study were measured using a survey consisting of 56 questions. The three instruments were pilot tested to ensure their reliability. The instrument measuring personality dimensions had 42 items and was reliable with a Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) score of 0.71. Further, the instrument measuring strategic leadership had 20 questions with reliability of 0.86. Finally, organizational identification was measured using an instrument consisting of 6 items with a reliability score of 0.86. The data was encoded and entered in SPSS as 1 for "strongly disagree", 2 for "disagree", 3 for "undecided", 4 for "agree" and, 5 for "strongly agree". Once the data was cleaned correlation analysis was run in SPSS version 21.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

In order to meet the purpose of the study two types of analysis were carried out. First, a descriptive analysis was done to shed more light on the nature of the population under study. Second, a correlation analysis was done to assess the relationships between employees' personality and their identification, and employees' perception of strategic leadership and organizational identification. We begin by presenting a description of the population followed by the correlation analysis.

The demographic frequency distribution of the respondents is presented in Table 4. 1. Taking into account the gender of the participants, males (n=20) were a lot lesser than females (n=116). This difference in distribution could perhaps be attributed to the fact that the teaching profession in India and several other countries are dominated by women (Kelleher, 2011). A reason for such domination in academe could be because women are more patient than men (Bauer & Chitylovia, 2009). Further, on analysis of the age demographic it was revealed that the largest number in the sample were in the age groups 30-39 (n=55), and 40-49 (n=40) representing 40.4% and 29.4% respectively of the sample. This result is consistent with other studies which found that most of the workforce in the teaching profession was within the same age bracket (Usop, Askandar, Kadtong, & Usop, 2013; Ramachandran, 2005).

**Table 4.1 Summary of the respondents' demographic distribution**

Gender		Age		Civil Status		Years of Service	
Category	F	Category	F	Category	F	Category	F
Male	20	20-29	25	Married	105	0-5 yrs	69
		30-39	55	Single	30	5-10 yrs	38
Female	116	39-50	40	Separated	1	10-15 yrs	11
		≤ 50	16			15-20 yrs	15
						≤ 20 yrs	3
Total	136		136		136		136

Pertaining to the civil status of the respondents, the larger fraction were married (n=105) and represented 77.2%. The respondents who were single (n=30) represented only 30% of the sample. Further, there was only one respondent who was separated. It may be argued that since the family system traditionally is important to the Indian context (Rabbiraj, 2014) marriage is an inevitable phenomenon and as such the large number of married respondents. Additionally, the largest number of respondents was teachers with up to 5 yrs of service (n=69) suggesting that the respondents were fairly newer teachers.

A look at the descriptive statistics of the variables under consideration in this study presented in table 4.2 suggests that the respondents felt a good sense of identification with the institution they were working in. Further, the results are also suggestive that the respondents perceived their leaders to practice strategic leadership. Additionally, the table also indicates that the respondents perceived themselves to have agreeableness and conscientiousness most



evident as opposed to the other personality dimensions. Further, the respondents perceived neuroticism as the least evident personality dimension among the others.

The results of the correlation analysis are presented in table 4.3. According to the results of the analysis strategic leadership was significantly related to organizational identification  $r=0.21$ ,  $p<0.05$ . In addition, extraversion was correlated to organizational identification  $r=0.22$ ,  $p<0.05$ . Further, among the variables in the study, agreeableness was the only one with the strongest correlation with organizational identification  $r=0.23$ ,  $p<0.01$ . These correlations are significant however, they are weak correlations. The results also suggest that neuroticism had a weak negative correlation with organizational identification  $r=-0.08$  along with conscientiousness that had a weak positive correlation with organizational identification  $r=0.08$ . The implications of these findings are discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

**Table 4.2 The descriptive statistics of the variables in the study**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Strategic Leadership	4.2165	.51172	136
Organizational Identification	4.5870	.44443	136
Extraversion	3.5993	.47315	136
Conscientiousness	4.1201	.45382	136
Agreeableness	4.0850	.47685	136
Neuroticism	2.4715	.59199	136
Openness	3.6890	.31427	136

According to the results presented above it may be pointed out that teachers working in private high schools in Pune feel a sense of belonging with their institutions because they perceive their leaders to be strategic. In other words, when a leader is perceived to be able to conceptualize, articulate, engage and implement current and future actions (Davies & Davies, 2006) to move towards a well thought of vision the followers feel more one with the organization. This study therefore affirms the notion that academic leaders can help their teachers feel a sense of belongingness with their schools by being strategic in their thinking and doing what strategic leaders do.

**Table 4.3 Table presenting the correlations between the variables in the study**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Organizational Identification	1						
Strategic Leadership	.207*	1					
Extraversion	.220*	0.120	1				
Conscientiousness	.081	.337**	.417**	1			
Agreeableness	.230**	.365**	.444**	.584**	1		
Neuroticism	-.082	-.198*	-.405**	-.477**	-.615**	1	
Openness	.086	.199*	.438**	.463**	.418**	-.277**	1

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

This study further suggests that teachers who have more of extraversion and agreeableness personality dimensions evident in them are more likely to feel a sense of belongingness with their schools. This holds true because extraverts are more sociable, talkative, active, and assertive (Erdheim, Wang & Zickar, 2006). Additionally extraverts enjoy collaborating and working in teams (Delvis, 2014) and therefore help others in the organization feel a sense of belonging. These results are consistent with other studies that found extraverts are able to enhance cohesiveness (Brown, Barrick, & Stevens, 2005) and as such enhance the common sense of belongingness. In the same vein, people who are agreeable tend to be more willing to be kind, cooperative, patient, polite and adaptable (Erdheim, et al., 2006) and therefore create a sense on oneness and belongingness. These are also people who are able to build trusting relationships (Zimmerman, 2008) and as a result help create a supportive environment (Miligore, 2011).

Another important fact emerging in this study is the inverse correlation of neurotic personality dimension with organizational identification. This result indicates that individuals, who are worried, depressed, emotional, doubtful worried and lack confidence (Erdheim, 2006) are more likely not to feel a sense of belongingness in an organization. This is perhaps because they have this aura of negativity that makes them susceptible to causing unstable relationships. This instability may cause breakdown in group cohesiveness and as such can negate organizational identification.

## 5. Conclusions and Implications

This study sought to investigate the empirical link between strategic leadership and organizational identification, and personality dimensions and organizational identification. The results of the study suggested that the stronger the respondents perceived their leaders to

practice strategic leadership the stronger their organizational identification. It also further substantiated the results of some other studies suggesting that the more the respondents had evidences of agreeableness and extroversion personality dimensions the more likely they were to identify with their organizations (Aghaz & Hashemi, 2014; Brown, et al., 2005). In addition, the study also suggested that the more the respondent tended to be a neurotic the less likely they were to identify with their organizations.

There are several implications arising from this study pertaining to practice and future research. We suggest that for future study researchers consider investigating the concert effect of strategic leadership and personality dimensions on organizational identification. The study may also be replicated in other settings. For practice we suggest that organizations select employees who are more agreeable and extroverts in order to help foster organizational identification and also to avoid neurotics as much as possible for the same reason. Additionally, organizations should consider selecting new or nurturing existing leaders with the ability to conceptualize, articulate, engage and implement current and future actions that would help fulfill the mission and vision of the organization.

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