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PERCEIVED THREAT TO CHANGE IN ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY AND COLLECTIVE SELF-EFFICACY IN ORGANIZATIONS

Laura Illia is currently a post doc visiting research fellow at the Institute of Social Psychology at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), where she also gives seminars and workshops in the area of Corporate Communication. Prior to that she was researcher at the Institute for Corporate Communication (ICA) at the University of Lugano where she also taught Corporate Identity and Image at the MS in Corporate Communication. While working as a researcher and teaching assistant from 2001 to 2006 she completed her PhD. in Communication Sciences and she graduated at the Executive MScCom, Master of Science in Communications Management. Previous to this period she got her degree in Master of Science in Communication at the same university. Her master thesis won in 2001 the "Angelika Meyer Terlizzi Award" awarded by the Swiss Italian chapter of the Swiss Public Relations Society (SPRG) and in 2002 the "Jos Willems Award" awarded by European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) for the best European research work in PR. Her research interests are on organizational identity, corporate communication, stakeholder management and organizational change.
(Laura.Illia@lu.unisi.ch)

ABSTRACT

This research documents the empirical results of a study investigating the role of collective self-efficacy for resistance to change in organizational identity. Arising from the belief that members' threat perception to change in organizational identity creates resistance, thus far studies have explained the existence of this threat perception by focusing on the role of organizational identity in defining members' self-esteem. This research contributes to this debate by discussing what lowers this threat perception to change in organizational identity features that are relevant for members' self-esteem. Evidence supports the role of collective self-efficacy. Theoretical arguments developed illustrate that the level of collective self-efficacy reduces members' threat perception; collective self-efficacy enables members to feel competent in handling unforeseen situations based on their resourcefulness as a member of the organization, thereby giving members the idea that they are in control of threatening situations.

Keywords:

Organizational identity, Resistance to change, Collective self-efficacy

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PERCEIVED THREAT TO CHANGE IN ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY AND GENERAL SELF-EFFICACY IN ORGANIZATIONS

Organizational members perceive the change of organizational identity—i.e., that which they believe is distinctive, central, and enduring of an organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991)—as a threat. Current studies suggest that mechanisms of defense and resistance occur due to an organizational member's perceived threat to change in organizational features that define his or her self-esteem (Fiol & O'Connor, 2002; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Brown & Starkey, 2000). Such change implies emotional resistance because it threatens the continuity of members' self-concepts; thus, members would no longer be able to affirm their positions in the organization.

Although often referred to in the literature, this difficulty in changing organizational identity is rarely analyzed in depth (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). A need still exists for understanding why it is so difficult to change organizational identity. The current research argues that a more refined understanding of the role of collective self-efficacy in organizations (Bandura 1986; Schwarzer, 1992; Pierce & Gardner, 2004) is required so as to proceed further in this direction. Indeed, the addition of this concept within the current debate contributes to the understanding of what lowers members' threat perception to change in organizational identity features that define members' self-esteem.

To this aim, a theoretical discussion on threat perception, the organizational identity's definition of members' self-esteem, and collective self-efficacy is provided. In addition, a theoretical model on the emotional resistance of organizational members is developed by including the discussion on collective self-efficacy in the current debate on threat perception to change in organizational identity. The model is tested in a changing organization founded as a spin-off of a bank following

a methodology that integrates phases of qualitative and quantitative analyses. In the qualitative phase, the organization's identity features are defined in an inductive manner, integrating the Kelly Grid (Fransella et al., 2004) and Issue (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991) approaches. These organizational identity features are confirmed through a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988, 1992; Jöreskog, 1993; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993), which also provides a test of the hypothesis.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND MAJOR CONSTRUCTS

Threat perception to change in organizational identity

Members' threat perception is a key concept within the debate on organizational identity change. Studies that focus on resistance to change in organizational identity clarify that, when a radical change is involved, members perceive a threat of change in the organizational identity. Consequently they develop defense mechanisms that trigger resistance to change in organizational identity: denial, rationalization, idealization, fantasy, and symbolization (Brown & Starkey, 2000). Members highlight alternate identity attributes, portraying their organizations in the most favorable light, or alternate comparison groups, thus avoiding unfavorable social comparison (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996). These studies focus primarily on arguments that justify how members' threat perception creates resistance to change. Furthermore, studies that focus on acceptance to change in organizational identity clarify that the acceptance takes place after a period of resistance resulting from threat perception. When a radical change takes place, members perceive the change in the first period of de-identification as a threat, resulting in an initial period of resistance due to their anxiety and uncertainty in loss of meaning (Chreim, 2000; Fiol, 2002). This threat perception and its consequential resistance to change also take place

when the radical change represents a discrepancy with the construed external image. Indeed, members perceive a threat to change in organizational identity and react with an initial period of resistance due to anxiety and uncertainty (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia et al., 2000). As Reger et al. (1994) specify, threat perception creates resistance to change in organizational identity because the very high non-concurrence between construed external image and organizational identity leads members to believe that the change is unattainable. After this initial period of resistance resulting from the perceived threat, members will accept the change because they want to minimize the discrepancy with the construed external image (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia et al., 2000).

Clearly the current debate diagnoses the issue of organizational narcissism exposed by Hatch and Schultz (2002) in their treatise of the dynamics of organizational identity. This affirmation is supported by the fact that Hatch and Schultz explain the concept of narcissism by drawing on the defense mechanisms presented by Brown and Starkey (2000). Organizational narcissism is a dysfunction of organizational identity that occurs when organizations are too subject to self-absorption mechanisms, such as the defense mechanisms described by Brown and Starkey in their study and presented earlier in this review. According to Hatch and Schultz (2002), the overprotection of these defense mechanisms does not permit the organization to interpret, evaluate, and deploy information in order to influence its routines and adapt to external changes. Thus far, two antecedents to this threat perception have been discussed in the literature. A first group of authors refers to a cognitive antecedent, claiming that this threat perception emerges when traits are central. Meanwhile, a second group of authors refers to a social cognitive antecedent, arguing that this threat perception emerges when traits are relevant to members' self-esteem.

Organizational members' self-esteem and organizational identity

Defining self-esteem as the degree to which people like themselves, many studies analyzed how the self-esteem of an individual is strongly linked to the organizational context where he or she works (see, for example, Brockner, 1988; Ashforth & Mael, 1996, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994; Albert et al., 2000; and Scott et al., 1998). These researchers analyze how individuals' identities are embedded in the organization for which they work. By studying individuals' memberships in organizations, clearly these researchers take into account that organizational members also have other memberships (e.g., family and sports teams) that overcome the organizational context. These authors demonstrate that, since the learning and evolution of members' identities are similar to the values and beliefs of the organizational context where they interact, consequently members' self-esteem is as well.

The organization represents a context that ensures the situated identity of individuals; the individual defines him- or herself by looking at the organizational identity and perceiving that he or she shares a common destiny with the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1996, 1989). The sense of belonging to an organization that emanates from organizational membership is quite relevant due to the complexity of multiple social identities of individuals (Dutton et al., 1994). Although the social identity of individuals may occur in the absence of interactions with other members of the group, the sense of belonging requires such social interaction (Scott et al., 1998). Thus, as the organizational context present in individuals' daily lives, the embedding of members' identities into the organizational context is very salient for the definition of the overall identity of the individual. Albert et al. (2000) note that the workplace shapes the identity of members and demonstrate that the agency of human actions exists within the organizational framework. "By

internalising (sic) the group or organizational identity as a partial definition of self, the individual gains a sense of meaningfulness and connection (Albert et al., 2000:14).

Where does self-esteem stand in this explanation? Membership in an organization is strongly linked to the enhancement of members' self-esteem (Dutton et al., 1994). Indeed, any positive or negative inter-group comparison affects members' social identity and therefore their self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). As Dutton et al. clarify, this happens due to the association of organizational traits in enhancing members' self-esteem. "The association with an organization that possesses positive traits enhances members' self-esteem, because this affiliation provides them with the opportunity to see themselves with these positive qualities, strengthening the degree to which a member likes him- or herself" (Dutton et al., 1994:247).

Dutton et al. base their argument on the work of Brockner (1988), a key author for the conceptualization of self-esteem based on organizational membership. Brockner specifies that employees seek work in companies that permit them to enhance their self-esteem since "the motivating potential of the collective self represents a possibly important, and heretofore unexplored, extension of the thesis that individuals generally strive to feel good about themselves. Breckler and Greenwald (1986) suggest that one way in which individuals may do so is by achieving the goals of their internalized reference groups" (Brockner, 1988:226). Like Dutton et al. (1994), Brockner asserts that the employee, by enhancing his or her self-esteem, tries to develop self-confidence and a positive evaluation about his or her self-concept as a member of the organization. "All other things being equal, employees are apt to experience high self-esteem when their performance or attributes exceed those of the comparison target; they are in the presence of a high self-esteem model, whose basis of self-esteem is not threatening to employees; they have received positive feedback from social (or non social) sources; and their

work roles require them to act in ways that suggest that they are competent, valued, and/or in control” (Brockner, 1988:150-151).

Collective self-efficacy in the organization

Collective self-efficacy refers to group members’ shared belief in the group’s conjoint capabilities to attain their goals and accomplish desired tasks (Bandura, 1986; Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Both individual and collective self-efficacy involve a comprehensive judgment of perceived capability, involve motivation, and depend on the experience (Karrash, 2003). However, even if individual members are capable and their self-efficacy beliefs are high, the low confidence in the group’s efficacy for collective action may inhibit the collective action (Bandura, 1986; Figueroa et al., 2002). Thus, despite the fact that individual self-efficacy is rooted in collective self-efficacy, collective self-efficacy in organizations differs from the individual one (Karrash, 2003; Figueroa et al., 2002). The accent on collective self-efficacy was initially proposed by Bandura as domain-specific efficacy, meaning that it should be conceptualized in a situation-specific manner. Schwarzer (1992, 1994) subsequently argued that it can also be applied to general situations, meaning that it should be conceptualized in the context. The difference between Bandura’s and Schwarzer’s conceptualizations of collective self-efficacy lies in the fact that the former suggests that many general self-efficacies can exist in an organization depending on the particular situation or various domains (e.g., units). Meanwhile, the latter suggests that a general sense of self-efficacy exists that refers to the global confidence in one’s coping ability across situations depending on the shared experiences within the context (Schwarzer & Schmitz, 2004).

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Stemming from Soenen & Moingeon (2000) and van Rekom's (2002) assertion that studies of organizational identity change would profit from taking into account the role of perceived self-efficacy—"i.e., the degree to which people believe a goal is attainable" (van Rekom, 2002:17)—the role of collective self-efficacy during major organizational identity changes is explored in conjunction with studies that argue for the emotional reaction of organizational members, as presented in Figure 1. In addition, as many authors stress, collective self-efficacy is important when an organization approaches a threatening situation because it provides members with assurances that it is possible to exercise control over such threats (Schwarzer et al., 1999; Figuera et al., 2002). First, arguments will be presented regarding why organizational identity features, in defining members' self-esteem, create members' threat perception to change in organizational identity. Second, an explanation of why general self-efficacy lowers this threat perception will be provided.

[Insert figure 1 about here]

Organizational identity features, members' self-esteem, and threat perception

Why do members perceive changes to traits that define their self-esteem as a threat? Many authors, including Elsbach and Kramer (1996) and Fiol and O'Connor (2002), have sought to answer to this query. Elsbach and Kramer (1996) investigated why members perceive a threat to change in organizational identity traits that influence their self-esteem. They found that members wish to maintain those organizational identity traits that make them proud since they consider their elimination to be a threat to those items of the organization's image that define their social

identity as members. These traits gratify and reward members over time (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996). Members want their organization to ensure, not abolish, the organizational identity traits that allow them to constantly experience their identity as a member. These traits make them proud because of the positive connotation with their organizational identity image and, therefore, their self-image; therefore, members want to guarantee their existence over time. As Elsbach and Kramer discuss, this is a result of the self-esteem that emerges from the social identity of organizational members.

Similar to Elsbach and Kramer, Fiol and O'Connor (2002) reconsidered research on community development in the field of organizational identity. They identified how, after an initial period of resistance to change due to a perceived threat to the organizational identity, viewing the radical change as a threat permits mobilization and sustains radical change both through the de/re-identification and the attraction of the construed external image and strong symbolic actions. As this study found, threat perception is an important topic in the debate because it represents an initial emotional resistance. The authors assert that members' self-image is strongly linked to the image of the organization; therefore, a threat to the organizational image is interpreted as a threat to the self-image of the members. It is important to remember that this argument is drawn directly from Elsbach and Kramer's (1996) study, whose main contribution, according to the authors, is its discussion of the emotionality of organizational identity and how this emotionality can create a threat perception and subsequent resistance. "[...S]ome organizational identity work has certainly implied the emotionality of identities (e.g., accounts of defensive reactions when identities are threatened)" (Fiol & O'Connor, 2002:10). According to the authors, the organizational identity's definition of members' self-esteem indicates that the organizational

identity's definition of members' emotions plays an important role in the process of radical changes. In light of these theoretical discussions, it is possible to argue that:

H1: The higher the organizational identity's definition of organizational members' self-esteem, the higher the members' perception of a threat to change organization identity.

Collective self-efficacy and threat perception

Independent of Bandura's (1986) domain-specific and Schwarzer's (1992) context-specific arguments, collective self-efficacy is an important construct that enables researchers to understand people during change. Indeed, as Figuera et al. (2002) and Bandura (1986) say, collective self-efficacy is important for individuals' approach to threatening situations where they experience stress (Schwarzer & Schmitz, 2004).

In short, when a high general self-efficacy exists, members of groups or organizations approach the threatening situation with the assurance that they can exercise control over threats. Such an efficacious outlook produces personal accomplishment and reduces stress and vulnerability. Typical items to test such control over threats (Schwarzer et al., 1999; Figuera et al., 2002) include the judgment of one's ability to handle unforeseen situations thanks to the resourcefulness afforded as a member of the organization, solve problems as a group, and tackle the most difficult situations because, as members of the group, people are committed to the same goal. Schwarzer et al. (1999) considered these items of general self-efficacy in the educational setting, whereas Figuera et al. (2002) did so in a community setting. Drawing from previous arguments, it is possible to suppose that the collective self-esteem that organizational members

experience in the organizational context can have an effect on why members perceive threats and anxiety during changes. This collective self-esteem explains the overall motivation for adapting to a change: Organizational members tend to be more or less motivated to go through the change because of the collective self-efficacy that they share in the organizational context. For these reasons, it is possible to argue that a high level of collective self-esteem lowers the impact of these two antecedents, as follows:

H2: The higher the collective self-efficacy in the organization, the less members perceive a threat to change in organizational identity.

METHOD

The changing organization under scrutiny was founded as a spin-off of a bank; for confidentiality reasons, it will be referred to as *Beta*. The empirical testing of the hypotheses in this organization involved a two-step process. The qualitative phase gathered the identity traits of *Beta* qualitatively; the subsequent quantitative phase tested the model quantitatively.

First phase: Collecting *Beta*'s organizational identity traits qualitatively

In the preliminary phase, semi-structured interviews were carried out with all types of members to determine the specific identity traits of *Beta*. Interviewees had to have been part of Bank X—the previous employer—for at least two years and had to come from different sections and different profiles (e.g., age). In order to ensure total inductivity, each interview followed an interview guideline that incorporated both the Issue critical approach (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991)—the first part of the interview—and the Kelly grid approach (Fransella et al., 2004)—the last part of the interview. A total

of 14 interviews, about 40 minutes in length each, was completed. Each interview incorporated the laddering technique (van Rekom, 1997, 1998; Reynolds & Gutman, 1984).

Interviewing techniques and features of organizational identity at Beta

The Issue critical approach is a sort of semi-structured interview that highlights organizational identity through a critical episode in the history of the organization known to respondents. Starting from that episode, each interviewee is asked to answer to a series of questions. The complete list of original questions is available in Dutton and Dukerich (1991). In the present research, a smaller number of questions than in the original study by Dutton and Dukerich was considered. In the specific case of *Beta*, for example, interviewees were asked to list three attributes that describe the spin-off or talk about the major milestones in the processing of the spin-off. Laddering was used in each question by asking “why?” and “why is it important?”. As explained earlier, this laddering technique is important for classifying the organizational identity traits at the attribute, benefit, and value levels.

The Kelly grid approach (Fransella et al., 2004) is fairly different from other classic interviewing techniques. The preparatory phase consists of creating cards that contain elements related to the organization under scrutiny; for *Beta*, this involved *Beta* and its competitors. During the interviews, the respondents receive these cards in triads in order to deduce the constructs that distinguish the three organizations. Interviewees often mention items that are too concrete or too general; hence, laddering is applied as well during these interviews. After playing the game of triads many times to enable the interviewee to elicit the elements that distinguish the organization—in this case, distinguishing *Beta* from its competitors—interviewees are asked to

evaluate the constructs that have emerged. In the case of *Beta*, interviewees were asked to rank the elements elicited in the interview from the most to the least important for *Beta*.

Collected organizational identity features that distinguish Beta

Interviewees emphasized that *Beta* is a company where the client comes first and employees are extremely attentive to the outcome of their work. These two elements characterize *Beta* as company oriented toward market competition by providing excellent customer-oriented services, unlike the former employer, Bank X, which promoted contrary behaviors. Indeed, being competitive in the market in which *Beta* operates was not a priority for Bank X because it was only one of the bank's business areas. Bank employees were competent, but they were not concerned with the competitiveness of their departments as a player in the market. As far as customer orientation, Bank X again exhibited opposite traits compared to *Beta*. Indeed, the former organizational context distinguished itself for *not* being oriented to the customers.

“Before, everybody was much more apathetic about what they were doing. They were not concerned with ensuring [Bank X's] competitiveness in the market. [...] We were in a bank and we were sure that tomorrow the bank would be there. [...] Now everything is different [...] [*Beta*] has to be competitive to survive. [...] It was not that [Bank X] was not willing to be competitive [...] it just was not its fundamental concern [...] at least not in our business area [...].”

“Customer care depends a lot on people's attitude in being nice and kind. [...] Nevertheless I noticed that at [*Beta*], compared to [Bank X], there is much more of an idea that the customer comes first. [...] We are the same people, but what has changed is the context [...] now we know that it is much more fundamental to be nice and caring for a customer's needs. [...] It is something that we are trained to think about [...] there is a lot of coaching on this direction. [...] I see that there is a management style at [*Beta*] that helps us to care more about that.”

These quotes clearly identify that the elements that distinguish *Beta* from its competitors also distinguish it from the former employer. Do members perceive this substitution as a threat? Looking at the interview outcomes, it is evident that, although members prefer working in this new organization, they are worried about this new way of doing things.

“It is like waking up from a coma [...] we need to exercise our ability to make decisions. [...] It is a good occasion, but I’m worried about everybody’s ability to change and get used to it.”

“People are worried about not being able to face this new rhythm [...] before you did not think [...] now you have to think and act quickly.”

Second phase: Measures, their validation, and SEM analysis for testing

The second phase involved an e-survey. Measures were developed by combining organizational identity features defined in the qualitative phase and measures inspired by the literature. The measures were validated and the hypotheses tested following the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988, 1992; Jöreskog, 1993; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). Sixty-one members of *Beta* participated in the survey, with an answer rate of 60 percent. This rate does not introduce a bias since, in the sample used, the same proportions of members existed as in the organization itself (e.g., no gender bias occurred). The sample sizes reached the minimum sample size required to have a reasonable analysis with AMOS (Arbuckle & Worthke 2004) according to the Division of Research Consulting at ITS (2002), which states that a reasonable sample size for using AMOS requires at least 15 cases per predictor. This advice is also found in previous work by Stevens (1996) and Bentler and Chou (1987).

Measures

The e-survey was built based on organizational identity features that emerged in the preliminary phase—“the client comes first” and “employees are extremely attentive to the outcome of their work”—and on scales inspired by other studies in the literature. This procedure for the definition of measures is commonly adopted in other studies in the field of organizational identity, such as Dukerich et al. (2002), where researchers need to test hypotheses on different organizational identity features.

Organizational identity features’ definition of members’ self-esteem. As discussed earlier, organizational identity traits define members’ outer as well as inner self-esteem. Taking inspiration from this discussion, the developed measure was based on two items at the attribute level. In order to measure outer self-esteem—that emerging from the experience of identity based on the looking glass self-process—each respondent stated which attributes positively or negatively influence their pride in being members of *Beta* on a 5-point Likert scale (where 1 indicated no influence at all and 5 indicated strong influence).

Perception of threat to suppress organizational identity traits. This measure was defined on the basis of studies in psychology, such as Sandler et al. (1990), that determined the measure for the perception of threat in losing things. Such studies underscore the idea that the perception of the threat of loss is crystallized in people’s concerns that something may happen. In the present research, participants worried that an identity trait might be changed. Hence, based on these discussions, a measure using a 5-point Likert scale was adopted. Each respondent identified his or her degree of concern about the possible suppression of the identity attribute for each organizational identity trait.

Collective self-efficacy. The measure of collective self-efficacy was evaluated based on the work of Schwarzer et al. (1999) and Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1993). Five items were selected from a comparison of these two studies' measures that considered those items recurrent in both original scales. Respondents were asked to give an opinion, as an employee of *Beta*, to several prompts: [we] "...will be able to solve the most difficult problems if we are committed," "...will find a way to obtain what we need, even if there are obstacles," "...will be able to manage unexpected events thanks to the resources at our disposal," "...will be able to manage issues since we depend on the availability of our colleagues," and "...will be able to manage whatever comes our way." Opinions were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (where 1 indicated not at all true and 5 indicated absolutely true).

Descriptive statistics and measures validity

The use of a single instrument to collect all variables poses the threat of common method bias. To address this, both the procedural and statistical remedies suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003) were considered. Procedures included a pretest, labels in the scale, and the possibility to answer either electronically or on paper. This last element was only partially achieved because the majority of respondents used the online format. The distance between question on predictor and dependent variables was assured.

In addition to these procedural remedies, Podsakoff et al. (2003) and other authors, such as Schriesheim (1979) and Podsakoff and Organ (1986), suggest statistical remedies, which were considered in the current research. The Harman one-factor test (Harman, 1967) was conducted statistically. A principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed for each measure within each trait's model, at both the attribute level and the value level. Since all indicators

loaded on one factor that accounted for no more than 50 percent of the variance, the common method bias is not a concern for the present research; specifically, the factors generated less than 39 percent of the variance.

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and reliability of measures (Cronbach's alpha), presented in Table 1, indicate that the measures are reliable.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Tests of the hypotheses were computed using a Second Generation of Multivariate Analysis (Bagozzi & Fornell, 1982)—that is, the SEM analysis (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988, 1992; Jöreskog, 1993; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993)—run through AMOS. To choose the type of SEM model to test the research model, Jarvis et al.'s (2003) conceptual distinction between formative and reflective measurement models was taken into consideration. Principal factor (reflective) models are models where the measurement error is taken into account at the item level and where the direction of causality is from latent construct to measure; meanwhile, in composite latent variable (formative) models, the measurement error is taken into account at the latent construct level and the direction of causality is from measure to construct. For this research, the principal factor reflective model was chosen for several reasons: changes in the construct do not cause changes in the indicators, indicators are defining characteristics of the construct and not the manifestation of the construct, and indicators are not interchangeable.

RESULTS

As Figure 2 indicates, the degree to which organizational identity defines members' self-esteem increases according to the degree to which members perceive a threat to change in organizational identity at a rate of .70 ($p < .001$). The results also provide evidence on the role of collective self-

efficacy in lowering this threat perception. Indeed, the level of collective self-efficacy lowers according to the degree to which members perceive a threat to change in organizational identity at a rate of $-.61$ ($p < .001$). These two explanations account for 86 percent of the cases (see r^2 of endogenous variable, or the dependent variable). The identification of this SEM structural model confirms what has been thus far been debated about increased threat perception to change in organizational identity as a result of the fact that it defines members' self-esteem. In addition, it shows that the level of collective self-efficacy is an element that contributes to lowering such threat perception. Accordingly, both H1 and H2 are confirmed.

Global fit measures—Goodness of Fit Indices (GFIs) reported in Figure 2—support these results. These global fit measures certify the degree of appropriateness and truthfulness of a model by providing the overall model value's confirmation of results on the path value's reliability and validity previously illustrated. From a statistical point of view, these indices measure if, given the structure and values, the model implies a variance and a covariance suitable to those of the population. As Figure 2 shows, the structural models are appropriate in both the descriptive and inferential measures. The identified models are appropriate in the AIC, BCC, BIC, and CAIC theoretical indices, indicating that the models have a high informative value in regards to the theoretical concepts under scrutiny since, for each model, the default model's AIC, BCC, BIC, and CAIC values are lower than or somewhat equal to—but not higher than—the saturated model. The Chi-square is not three times higher than the degree of freedom, and the values of GFI and the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) are very good since they are much higher than the minimum criterion of appropriateness (.95). The values of the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the approximate value of significance (p -close) are discrete (.040 and .490, respectively), as is the Root mean square residual (RMR) at .076.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This research shows that organizational identity, by defining members' self-esteem, is easily subject to members' threat perception when changed and is, therefore, difficult to change when radical changes take place in the organization. This result is not astonishing since it empirically confirms previous studies as well as Albert and Whetten's (1985) statement that organizational identity is hard to change by nature since traits are part of the organizational identity when they satisfy the criterion of enduringness.

What is remarkable is that this research simultaneously shows that, although traits are by nature hard to change, the general self-efficacy represents an important element that lowers this threat perception. Results indicate that, when members consider the organizational context to be favorable for any action related to the work environment, they perceive a lower threat perception. As theory suggests, members perceive that they have the resources to face an unforeseen situation, which is why their threat perception to a changed trait lowers.

These findings represent a tentative step in building a bridge between studies of organizational identity change and those of organizational change, such as those of Pierce and Gardner (2004) and Schwarzer and Schmitz (2004), which stressed the necessity to further consider the role of collective self-efficacy in organizational change. In addition, these findings represent a tentative step in investigating the role of collective self-efficacy in organizational identity studies, as suggested by van Rekom (2002) and Soenen and Moingeon (2000), and addressing the highly debated criticism of Albert and Whetten's (1985) statement on the sameness over time. This 20-

year-old criticism (see, for example, Corley et al., 2000 for further examples) refers to the practicability of Albert and Whetten's assertion that the concept of central traits' continuity over time does not now well suit the reality of organizations in turbulent environments, where changes of core, distinctive, and enduring traits somehow happen. Referring to many past studies, such as Dutton and Dukerich (1991) and Scott and Lane (2000), Corley et al. (2000) state that "reasonable consideration suggests that identity changes [are] behind a façade of endurance" (:108). The present research clarifies the importance of collective self-efficacy in phenomena related to organizational identity, providing one possible explanation of why the sameness over time of organizational identity—despite being a reality—is not radical. The difficulty in changing organizational identity can be overcome by a high level of collective self-efficacy in the organization.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

An important limitation of this research is that the research design does not permit a longitudinal view. The model was tested in a changing organization, but it was not possible to replicate the test. This restriction results from the limited availability of organizations allowing only one internal survey. Future efforts should be made to develop a longitudinal study. Moreover, Harman's one-factor test was conducted in order to test the issue of common method bias. This test was a necessary precaution to prove that the variance that existed was not associated with the same method used to assess the same variables. At any rate, it is important to underscore that Harman's one-factor test represents only one of the various tests that can complement others. To address this limited statistical remedy proactively, this research took additional procedural

precautions as suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Therefore, the potential problem of common method variance was addressed, although in a restricted manner.

In addition to these critical points, it is also important to highlight that these findings should be considered in light of the study's context. The organization's identity traits were reconstructed inductively, and they specifically apply to the study context. Even if the model can be applied to other contexts, since it has been theoretically defined on the basis of studies carried out in different fields, results of the present research cannot be generalized. Efforts should be made to show the applicability of the theoretical model in other situations of organizational change. Therefore, robustness remains an issue.

CONCLUSION

The research model presented in this paper provides a potentially new source of insight into why organizational identity is so difficult to change. Indeed, while confirming previous studies that debate about what creates threat perception to change in organizational identity, the present research also discusses what lowers this perceived threat. Thus, it gives insight into why organizational identity is hard to change but not immutable. In light of this research, managers should plan changes in organizational identity by managing the level of collective self-efficacy through the management of the resources in facing an unforeseen situation. Toward that end, managers should encourage members' feelings of a positive environment, thereby lowering their threat perception to change to that which is central, distinctive, and enduring of the organization in which they work.

In light of these results, further investigation of the interrelationship between collective self-efficacy and organizational identity becomes even more interesting. Indeed, the degree to which members perceive a positive environment in which they can cope with unexpected aspects could be important not only in lowering their threat perception to change in organizational identity, but also in identifying these aspects. As for the other elements illustrated in this section, wholly beyond the possibilities of this research, this element provides an interesting basis for future research.

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Figure 1: Research model on what increases and what lowers members' threat perception to change in organizational identity

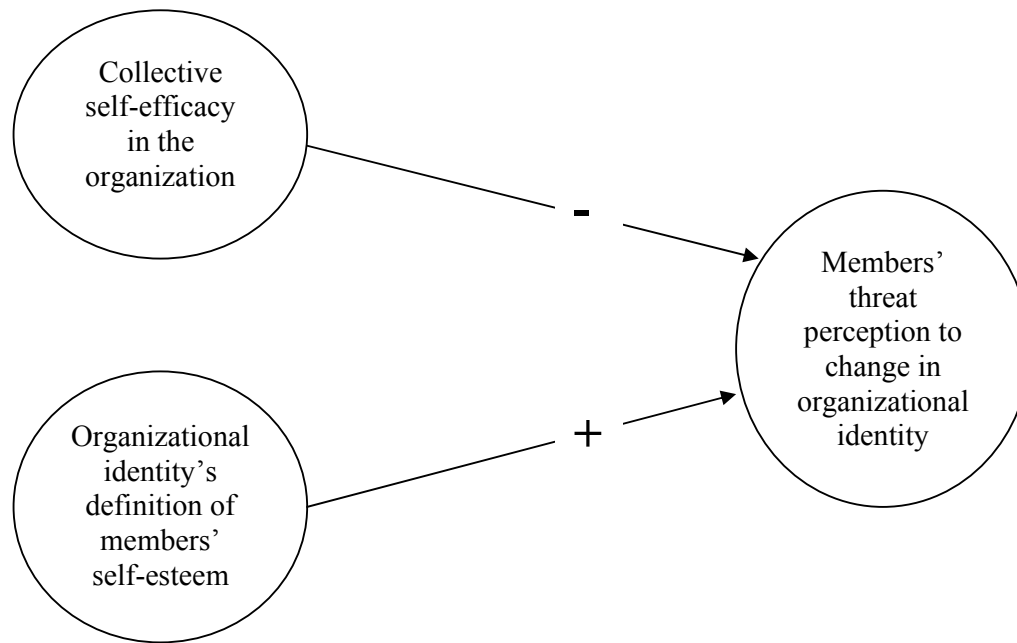
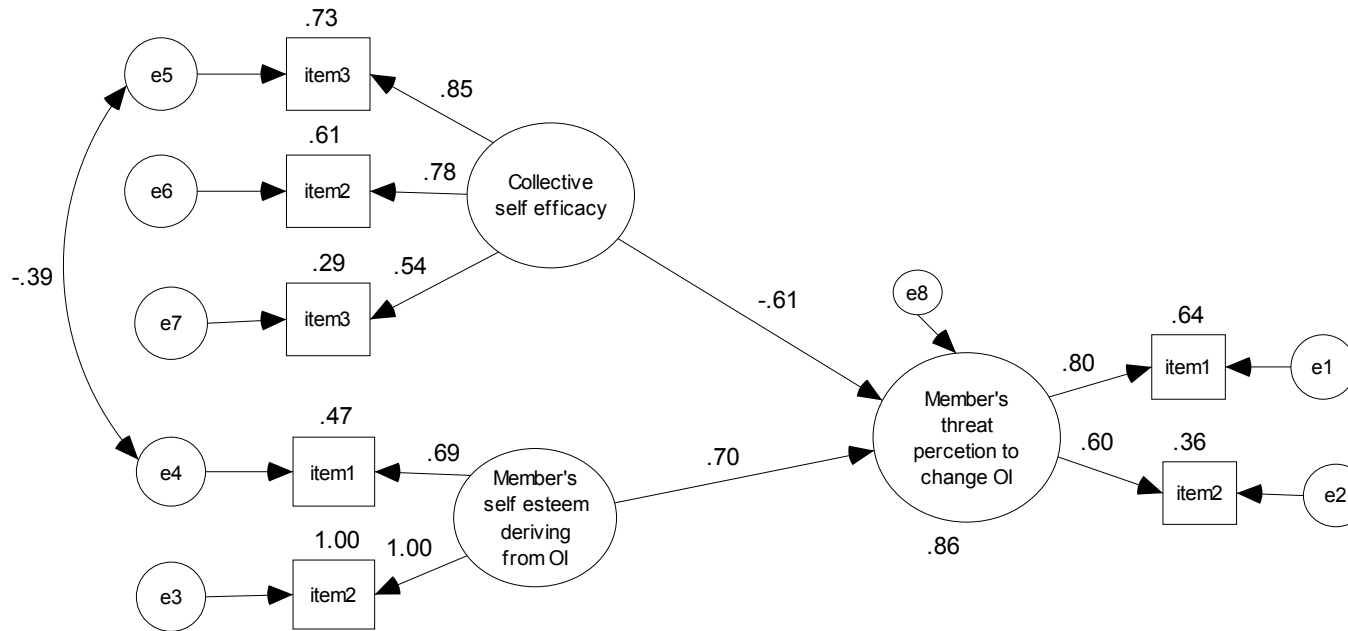


Figure 2: Test of the hypothesis with SEM structural model



Standardized estimates
chi-square=13.138 df=12 p-value=.359
gfi=.948 agfi=.879 rmsea=.040 pclose=.490 rmr=.076

Model	AIC	BCC	RMSEA	CAIC
Default model	45.138	50.258	78.319	.379
Saturated model	56.000	64.960	114.171	142.171

Table 1: Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha, and Correlations between items of the latent constructs

	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Threat perception OI feature 3	2.28	1.027	.61	1						
2. Threat perception OI feature 4	2.28	1.321		.454(**)	1					
3. self-esteem of OI feature 3	3.20	1.195	.81	.337(**)	.353(**)	1				
4. self-esteem of OI feature 4	3.09	1.269		.535(**)	.363(**)	.694(**)	1			
5. General self-efficacy Item 1	4.00	.796	.76	-.089	-.277(*)	.175	.135	1		
6. General self-efficacy Item 2	3.38	.820		-.290(*)	-.201	.042	.130	.485(**)	1	
7. General self-efficacy Item 3	2.88	1.100		-.388(**)	-.347(*)	-.109	.065	.410(**)	.674(**)	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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