EMOTIONS AND IDENTITY

RESEARCH ON EMOTION IN ORGANIZATIONS

Series Editors: Neal M. Ashkanasy, Wilfred J. Zerbe and Charmine E. J. Härtel

Recent Volumes:

RESEARCH ON EMOTION IN ORGANIZATIONS VOLUME 13

EMOTIONS AND IDENTITY

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emerald PUBLISHING

United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2017

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78714-438-5 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-78714-437-8 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-78714-931-1 (Epub)

ISSN: 1746-9791 (Series)

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INTRODUCTION: EMOTIONS AND IDENTITY

The theme we have chosen for this volume, "Emotions and Identity," addresses the role of emotions in defining who people are, and understand themselves to be, within organizations. Although definitions vary, organizational identity can be considered as a construct that "defines who one is in relation to [their work] role or position within a network of relationships" (Shaffer, Joplin, Bell, Lau, & Oguz, 2000, p. 442). Given that emotions influence perceptions and behaviors (and subsequently the very interactions that define the importance of identity), the chapters in this volume demonstrate the importance of emotion in forming and sustaining both individual and collective identities at work.

Identities, like emotions, are constantly evolving and shifting in relation to the complex interplay between individuals and their environments. Internally, entities negotiate their identities in relation to the dual influence of emotions and cognition. Socially, entities renegotiate their identities in relation to others and shared understandings of social roles and norms. On a broader level, institutions also affect identity by prescribing sets of preferred behavior and internalizing the organization's behavior through factors such as organizational culture. Ashkanasy (2003) notes further that emotions play an important role within all levels of organizations and can shape, interact with, and be affected by, the identities that emerge throughout organizations.

Scholars have long understood attitudes to be evaluative cognitions about elements in an individual's environment (Breckler, 1984). As such, attitudes are our assessment of the value (on some evaluative dimension) of the current state of those elements (of their degree of goodness, for example). Attitudes are how we feel about objects or people outside of ourselves. Frijda (1986) notes that emotion is in fact what happens when individuals evaluate themselves when they assess their own goodness or rightness. Thus, emotions of happiness or sadness or anger or calm or embarrassment and so on arise when we evaluate ourselves against our expectations. Arguably, the most important expectation we hold is that of our self-identity (Tyler, Kramer, & John, 2014); thus the importance to and centrality of identity in understanding the dynamics of emotions in organizations.

Recognizing the multi-level implications of both emotions and identities, the authors of the chapters in this volume address emotions and identity on individual, group, occupational, and social role levels. Specifically, they investigate micro-level topics such as how individuals respond to injustice to identify as a collective, in addition to how broader occupational and gender identities influence emotions. In doing so, we organize this volume into four sections: Section 1: Identity, Anger, Diversity; Section 2: Public Sector Settings; Section 3: Gender, Emotions and Identity; and Section 4: Emotions and Identification with Work.

THE 2016 EMONET CONFERENCE

The chapters in this volume are drawn primarily from the 2016 International Conference on Emotions and Organizational Life (EMONET X), which took place in Rome, Italy, supplemented by additional invited contributions to complement and to complete the theme of this volume. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of conference paper reviewers in this process (see Appendix).

CHAPTERS

Section 1: Identity, Anger, Diversity

In the opening chapter, authors Johanna Raitis, Riikka Harikkala-Laihinen, Melanie Hassett, and Niina Nummela outline a case study of an organization undergoing major change following a Finnish acquisition of a British firm. Drawing upon in-depth interviews with 32 employees of the British firm, Raitis and her colleagues focuse on identifying positivity in the change process. They found that positivity was indeed present; and identified how individuals in this firm were able to construct positive identities in the context of their changing environment. These positive identities in turn enabled employees to establish a sense of belongingness that helped them to adjust to their new employer. The results challenge the usual notion that employees find their participation in acquisition-led change to be stressful and negative. Instead, through adopting a positive identity with the acquiring organizations, the employees interviewed for this study were able to adapt to the (sometimes challenging) demands of the merger.

In the next chapter, Eugene Y. J. Tee, TamilSelvan Ramis, Elaine F. Fernandez, and Neil Paulsen present the results of a survey of 112 Malaysian citizens who were asked to respond to a widely publicized incident involving embezzlement on a massive scale from the government-owned development fund (IMDB) by their Prime Minister, Najib Razak. The authors set out to test a model, founded in social identity theory, which they refer to as the SIMCA (Social Identity Model of Collective Action). The model holds that intentions to engage in collective action stem from feelings of anger in response to perceived injustice. The hypothesized effects are, in turn, hypothesized to be moderated by followers' group identification (strengthens the effect of injustice on anger) and perceptions of group efficacy (strengthens the effect of anger on intentions to take action). Results supported the hypothesized effects with the exception of the moderating effect of group efficacy, which they found to weaken, rather than to strengthen, the effect of anger on intentions to take action. The authors argue that this may be because followers may have simply assumed there was little need to take action of the group was seen to be efficacious. Overall, however, the findings support the idea that emotions and identification are important precursors of intentions to engage in collective action in response to perceived injustice.

The research outlined in Chapter 3, by Kati Järvi and Mikko Kohvakka, deals with institutional logics in the context of a Finnish University, or more specifically, how the organization's members cope with a "plurality" of institutional logics. Based on the results of interviews with 47 organizational members across a wide range of functions, the authors reach two main conclusions. The first is that members deal with the circumstances of their employment in different ways, depending on their status, their knowledge and information, and their experiences and interactions with others both within and without the organization. The second is that this process is inherently emotional. The authors illustrate the different logics by presenting six in-depth case studies of organizational members who differ in terms of status and motivation. In particular, each of the six appears motivated by an over-arching emotional reaction to the organization and the circumstances surrounding their position in it.

Section 2: Public Sector Settings

In Chapter 4, Leighann Spencer suggests that the behavioral response to particular anger-triggering events at work can differ depending on whether the situation is "self-relevant," namely personal anger, or "other-relevant," namely moral anger. Drawing upon the Dual Threshold Model of anger and using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, the author addresses the following research questions on a sample of nurses. (1) What are the triggering events that lead to the experience of anger? (2) Given the appraisal of the anger-triggering event, when do nurses suppress or express their anger? Findings confirm that nursing identity is tied to relationships with the patients as well as caring and compassion. Consistently, results also indicate that different behavioral anger responses (suppression vs. expression) are diversely triggered by concern for others (i.e., an other-centered and moral form of anger) as opposed to personal concern for conflict and disrespect (i.e., a self-centered form of anger).

Bettina Lampert and Christine Unterrainer explore in Chapter 5 the emotion-generative process of detached concern (i.e., employees' concern toward and detachment from their clients) that arises during client-interaction in people-oriented work environments. Using a two-stage approach, the authors first examined the two-dimensionality of the detached concern concept across different human service professionals via a cross-sectional survey on a heterogeneous sample of 1,411 employees. Next, they focused on a subsample of 43 physicians and assessed intra- and interpersonal effects of professionals' detached concern on patient-centered care quality by using a two-source design that included patients' ($N = 332$) perceptions of satisfaction with care quality. Findings suggest that different types of detached concern exist, depending on the various combinations of levels of concern and detachment, which apply to all sectors of human service professionals. Further, findings show that balanced employees (scoring high on both concern and detachment) yield lower burnout levels compared to imbalanced professionals. They also found that patients' perception of care quality is positively related to their physicians' concern and detachment, and is significantly higher for the balanced than for the imbalanced physicians. Overall, this study calls attention on how identification and engagement with work are part of developing a professional identity; and affect how employees balance their concern and detachment.

Section 3: Gender, Emotions and Identity

In Chapter 6, Sunita Ramam Rupavataram reports findings from an online study of 217 Indian managers aimed at identifying whether self-construal of psychological gender (i.e., sex roles) influences emotional intelligence (EI) more than biological gender. She measured sex-role perceptions using the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) and measured emotional intelligence using the EIA, which assesses the four main dimensions of Goleman's model of EI (i.e., self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship management). The results revealed no difference in EI scores for binary biological gender categorization but significant differences based on sex-role perspective, with scores on the feminine and masculine scale of the BSRI accounting for 35.6% of the variance in EI scores. Interestingly, masculine sex-role participants scored significantly higher on EI than feminine sex-role participants. This contradicts the traditional belief that EI is a feminine intelligence. An alternative explanation for the finding could be that respondents with feminine sex-role orientation are constrained by the interdependence aspects of their sex-role (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), leading them to respond to the need to integrate the self into a group rather than the situational need.

In Chapter 7, authors Leonidas A. Zampetakis, Maria Bakatsaki, Konstantinos Kafetsios, and Vassilis S. Moustakis outline a model of how gender traits (masculinity and femininity) play a role in subjective entrepreneurial success (SES). SES refers to the individual's evaluation of their business accomplishment. The authors surveyed a random sample of 572 Greek entrepreneurs, with equal numbers of both genders using the short form of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1981) for gender role orientation. They assessed anticipated affect from business success using Larsen, Norris, McGraw, Hawkley, and Cacioppo's (2009) evaluative space grid and evaluated SES using five items from Wach, Stephan, and Gorgievski (2015). Using a Bayesian approach, the authors confirmed that gender traits are both positively related to SES, with femininity having a greater impact. This shows that gender role orientation affects entrepreneurs' evaluation of their accomplishment above and beyond other motivating variables such as need for achievement (which were control variables in the study). Zampetakis and his colleagues also found that gender traits were both positively related to positive anticipated affect and again the effect of femininity is stronger. This could be because the gender-role expectation placed on males for entrepreneurship is more a part of their core motivation compared to females. Entrepreneurship may simply be a role for males; but for females, it represents a choice so they anticipate more positive emotions from their business success. Finally, the authors report finding that positive anticipated affect is positively related to SES, and partially mediates the relationship between gender traits and SES. This sheds light on how gender traits affect SES – it is partly through the cognitive mechanism of entrepreneurs' affective forecast. Such evidence bolsters our understanding of the increasingly significant relationship between gender traits and entrepreneurship

In Chapter 8, Alberto R. Melgoza, Neal M. Ashkanasy, and Oluremi B. Ayoko tested a model that portrays the moderating influence of gender self-categorizations on individual emotional experiences and prejudicial attitudes. The model also reflects the nature of emotional experiences and how they affect individual prejudicial attitudes and, later, experiences of aggression. In the study, a random sample of 603 employees from a male-dominated global workplace completed an online survey of their individual gender self-categorizations, emotional experiences (using single item measures), prejudicial attitudes (using an implicit association test), and experience of aggressive behavior (Overt-Covert Aggression Scale). The authors found that individuals who self-categorize as either males or females experience different powerful emotions such as anger and contempt. Moreover, they found a positive correlation between anger experienced by employees and female prejudicial attitudes among participants who self-categorized as male, but not for those who self-categorized as female. As for contempt experienced by employees, the authors report finding that this was negatively correlated with prejudicial attitudes toward females, but not mediated by self-categorized gender. They explain the difference in the effect of anger and contempt on female prejudicial attitudes in terms of how anger is an active powerful emotion associated with confrontation, whereas contempt is a passive powerful emotion associated with indifference and exclusion. Melgoza and his associates also found that individuals with prejudiced attitudes toward females are more likely to experience aggressive behavior from females compared to participants with prejudicial attitudes toward males, and vice versa. This is salient because the experience of aggressive behavior triggers turnover and stress (especially in developed economies' industries).

Section 4: Emotions and Identification with Work

In Chapter 9, Richard McBain and Ann Parkinson conceptually explore workplace friendships in relation to workplace engagement and emotions. Specifically, the authors review the literature on engagement, finding that friendship at work links to emotion and attachment. They also discuss several areas of the literature in depth, such as the formation and various categories of friendship at work. In turn, the authors suggest that workplace friendships and their related emotions can provide an overall context for personal engagement at work. Overall, McBain and Parkinson outline paths for future research, and suggest a stronger focus on qualitative work to understand the complexities of friendships, emotions, and work engagement. In particular, they suggest that traditional quantitative approaches to studying engagement often focus heavily on tasks, whereas a qualitative approach should allow for a more holistic understanding of personal engagement.

Sara Bonesso, Fabrizio Gerli, Anna Comacchio, and Laura Cortellazzo focus in Chapter 10 on the positive impact of emotional, social, and cognitive (ESC) competencies on leadership effectiveness, and address how higher education can favor leadership development at the early stage. By adapting intentional change theory (ICT) to the academic context, the authors collected a two-source assessment of ESC competencies in order to compare ideal self and real self-profiles of students attending two seminars ($N\text{s} = 37, 59$) with different intent in terms of leadership (entrepreneurial vs. managerial career path). Findings supported the authors' prediction that, through reflection on the ideal and real self, students can develop self-awareness as well as self-regulation of emotional and social competencies, which are preconditions for the discovery and the development of their leadership skills. In summary, this study demonstrates how the processes of identity formation and self-regulation during higher education are associated to different trajectories in future leadership development.

Finally, in Chapter 11, Vishal Rana, Peter J. Jordan, Zhou Jiang, and Herman H. M. Tse discuss job design in relation to job crafting, emotional state, and extra-role discretionary work behavior. The specific aspect of job design of interest to the authors is non-preferred work tasks (NPWT), which refers to tasks that may be significant to the job but are nevertheless not enjoyed by the employee. Using conservation of resources (COR) theory, the authors develop a testable model that suggests that NPWT reduce the likelihood that employees will engage in extra-role behavior (contextual performance). Furthermore, they propose that job crafting and the individual's emotional state moderate this relationship. Specifically, Rana and his team suggest that task, relational and cognitive job crafting will weaken the negative relationship between NPWT and contextual performance. Similarly, they suggest that positive affect will weaken this relationship, while negative affect will strengthen it.

Overall, the chapters in this volume show the importance of emotions in identifying with work at various levels and the role of identity in the emotional reaction of individuals to their work. Whether it is developing a collective identity through the catalyst of negative emotions or the interplay between emotion and gender to influence perceptions of personal success, identity is constantly being shaped by affective experiences. In turn, identity can also create and influence emotion, such as identifying with others through workplace friendships, and in reactions to workplace events that enhance or threaten identity. These contributions show the complex interplay between emotion and identity and highlight identity and emotion as rich areas for additional future inquiry. Taken together, this volume is a compilation of the latest research on emotion and identity from a diverse range of perspective, which shows the importance of considering the crucial role of emotion within and among identities at work.

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SECTION 1
IDENTITY, ANGER, DIVERSITY

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CHAPTER 1

FINDING POSITIVITY DURING A MAJOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: IN SEARCH OF TRIGGERS OF EMPLOYEES' POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS AND FEELINGS

Johanna Raitis, Riikka Harikkala-Laihinen,
Melanie Hassett and Niina Nummela

ABSTRACT

This study explores the sources and triggers of positivity during a major organizational change. The qualitative research methodology is developed around discovering and interpreting employees' perceptions in a mergers & acquisitions (M&A) process. The results lead us to suggest that change may be perceived in at least three positive ways to constitute positive identity construction. Implications for work-related identity and identification research are discussed.

Keywords: Positive identity; emotions; identification; qualitative research; mergers & acquisitions

Emotions and Identity
Research on Emotion in Organizations, Volume 13, 3–16

ISSN: 1746-9791/doi:10.1108/S1746-979120170000013001

INTRODUCTION

There is increasing interest in positivity in the field of organizational studies. Emphasizing goodness and positive human potential, the recent emphasis on positive organizational scholarship (POS), which focuses on positive outcomes, processes and attributes within an organizational context, demonstrates this interest well (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). Similarly, in the organizational identity literature, the new domain of *positive identity* has emerged (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2009). Focusing on the positive is suggested to cultivate collective identities that mobilize collective action and enable valued organizational outcomes (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Glynn & Walsh, 2009). In the fast-paced global economy, gaining a deeper understanding of positive identity is vital. Thus, scholars have put forward that positive identities and identification enable and facilitate organizational changes (Glynn & Walsh, 2009), such as mergers and acquisitions (M&A) (Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, Monden, & de Lima, 2002).

However, positivity is not a new concept in the organizational identity and identification literature. The basic assumption in the field has always been that people strive to see themselves and wish to be seen in a positive light. The positive perceptions, based on individuals' evaluations, meanings and motivations, are the basis for individual and collective identities (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Cornelissen, Haslam, & Balmer, 2007; Tajfel, 1982). Although positivity may be seen as a pre-condition for identity construction and maintenance, surprisingly few studies have addressed it (Dutton et al., 2010). In the literature, there is substantial emphasis on the factors threatening identity construction (e.g. Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Kreiner, Ashforth, & Sluss, 2006), rather than on the matters enforcing it. Although studies in the positive identity domain are emerging (Roberts & Dutton, 2009), there is still much to be done to address and understand positivity in the organizational context. In particular, there is a need for a specific focus on the content, processes and outcomes of positive identity (Dutton et al., 2009).

What creates positivity in an organization in the midst of changes? The present study was aimed at addressing this question. We chose positive emotions as our pathway to understanding positive identity construction and maintenance. In particular, we sought to explore which emotions are linked to identity content and processes and identify the sources or triggers of these emotions (Dutton et al., 2010). Following Humphrey, Ashforth, and Diefendorff (2015), we defined emotions as signals of what is important to individuals in organizations (p. 754). Moreover, we regarded emotions as reactions to stimuli, leading to (positive) organizational behaviour and outcomes (cf. Frijda, 1988). The theoretical framework of the study was built around the literature on positive organizational identity, emotional identification and emotions. Empirically, we explored the positive feelings that employees attach to the organization and their membership within it.

Major opportunities exist to expand and develop the identity research in organizational contexts. By exploring positive emotions relating to organizational identification and identity, we expect to contribute to the development of a theory of work-related identities and emotional identification. Our focus on positivity instead of negativity (e.g. threats) will also counterweigh the overriding negative trend in the research. Given the challenges that exist in the contemporary business environment, understanding the sources and triggers of positivity will help managers to form and manage stronger organizational identities and facilitate employees' identification with the organization. In a fast-paced and constantly changing global business world, finding positivity in organizational membership is expected to strengthen employees' bond with their employer (Dutton et al., 2009). Moreover, considering the dynamic and changing nature of the business environment, finding positivity in the midst of major changes is a topical theme.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Constructing Positive Identities in Organizations

Identity is a central construct in organizational studies. In the literature, organizational identity is defined as those things or characteristics of an organization that are perceived as central, distinctive and enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Accordingly, the prevailing social construction perspective posits that organizational identity is constituted by members' subjective understanding and interpretation of what is central, distinctive and enduring about their organization (Albert, 1998; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Thus, organizational identity is the members' collective understanding of these features rendering a common understanding of who they are (Raitis, 2015).

Social identities require both cognitive and emotional aspects (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Glynn & Walsh, 2009; Tajfel, 1982). Similarly, identification – i.e. the process by which individuals come to define and connect themselves within the organization – evolves through cognitive and emotional phases (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Cognitive identification occurs when a member of the organization defines him- or herself according to the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Further, the strength of the identification is determined by the level of 'oneness' portraying the extent of the overlap between these individual and organizational attributes (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Dutton et al., 1994). However, this identification is not exclusively a cognitive process; it also requires an emotional bond (Pratt, 2000), as 'full' belongingness cannot be attained by mere perception (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Thus, emotional identification entails employees' emotional attachment and the feelings they experience in relation to their organization and membership in the organization. Consequently, feeling oneness is distinct from perceiving oneness (Albert, 1998; Johnson, Morgeson, & Hekman, 2012).

Emotion and attachment have long been recognized as having a positive influence on self-esteem (Pratt, 2000; Tajfel, 1982). Several decades ago, emotion was assigned a central role in the construction of one's perceptions of the world and the self (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). According to Fredrickson (2003), positive emotions lead to optimal individual- and organizational-level functioning over the long term. Concerning identification, emotions can be 'felt to isolate or to unite' (cf. Frijda, 1988). Emotional identification is associated with positive feelings about one's membership, including pride, enthusiasm and a sense of affiliation or belongingness with others (Albert & Whetten, 1985). On the negative side, studies have shown that emotional dissonance may occur when an emotional experience is evaluated as a threat to a person's identity (Jansz & Timmers, 2002). Negative emotions may also lead to individuals' dis-identification or decreasing levels of identification. The more central one's social identity is to one's identity, the greater the threat of emotional costs will be (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

Identity is associated with a broad range of self-relevant emotions and attitudes (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). When discussing the positivity of emotions, it is important to remember that an emotion as such cannot be straightforwardly labelled as 'positive' or 'negative'. Rather, how the individual interprets the emotion – i.e. its personal relevance – is positive or negative. For example, one can be happy about being angry, or ashamed of feeling personal pride (Lazarus, 1991). In the workplace, emotions can be triggered by myriad stimuli. For example, positive emotions can be prompted by interpersonal contact with colleagues or customers (Rafaeli & Worline, 2001), by positive feedback, through meeting goals (Fisher & Ashkanasy, 2000), through perceived task significance or through task autonomy (Saavedra & Kwun, 2000). In addition, artefacts can trigger emotions; for example, employees can react positively to colours, such as the environmentally friendly symbolism embedded in the colour green (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004).

In their recent study, Dutton et al. (2010) highlight four distinctive sources of positivity in an organizational context. The sources of positive work-related identities and identity construction processes through which individuals can cultivate positive self-definitions are positive virtues, self-evaluations, self-development and a structural approach. The virtue perspective highlights that work-related identity is positive when the identity content includes virtuous qualities that can be defined as inherently good and positive. While the virtue perspective focuses on identity content, the evaluative perspective is based on members' positive self-evaluations, sense of worth and meaning of their work-related identity. The third perspective takes into consideration the development of members' self-definition over time. It may evolve either progressively as individuals proceed through different career and identity steps towards higher levels of the ideal self. Alternatively, it may occur adaptively when an individual develops and achieves a more appropriate fit with a set of internal and external standards. The fourth path, the structural perspective, states that an individual's identity structure is more positive when the multiple facets of the identity are in a balanced or complementary relationship with one another, thus reducing identity conflict (Dutton et al., 2010).

This study was grounded in the notion that positive identities elicit positive emotions. Thus, in order to uncover what creates positivity in an organizational context, we needed to identify the sources and triggers of positive emotions that create and uphold organizational identification. Emotions are rarely, if ever, elicited by isolated stimuli. Emotional reactions are meaningful and always tied to the particular spatial and temporal contexts in which they occur (Frijda, 1988). In our study, we explored positivity and positive emotions during an acquisition process. Major organizational changes, such as M&A, may create contexts in which it is difficult to distinguish positivity. According to Kreiner and Sheep (2009), however, threats caused by major changes can be turned into positive opportunities when individuals reframe identity-threatening situations into positive and forward-looking growth opportunities. This 'positive jujitsu' (Kreiner & Sheep, 2009) served as the starting point for this study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research applied a qualitative, single case study approach. A qualitative approach was chosen to obtain a deeper understanding of the grounds of positive identity formation during M&A. Further, case studies create rich opportunities for exploring positive emotions and discovering the triggers behind those emotions (cf. Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). The case study strategy was appropriate because it would enable a rich and contextualized description of the phenomenon under scrutiny (cf. Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1995).

The case was a Finnish–British acquisition conducted between two companies in 2013. To respect the anonymity requirements of the companies involved, the names are withheld and replaced with pseudonyms. The acquired, BuildIT, is a Finnish firm operating in the building and construction industry. In 2011, BuildIT was acquired by Omega Group, which is based in California, and became part of Omega Group's Building Division. However, since BuildIT was Omega Group's biggest acquisition, it was decided to leave BuildIT as a relatively autonomous company.

In 2013, Omega Group's Building Division acquired a small, privately held, UK-based company named Alpha. Alpha's products include software solutions for the analysis and design of steel and concrete buildings, and it complements well Building Division's offering. Alpha has been a structural software and technical support provider to structural engineers for more than 35 years, and has a strong presence in the United Kingdom, Asia, South Africa, the Middle East and the United States. It was soon decided that to achieve the best synergies, Alpha needed to be integrated into Omega Group's Building Division's largest unit, BuildIT. At the time of the acquisition, Alpha employed approximately 60 employees and BuildIT, nearly 600 employees. The acquisition can be described as a friendly deal, where Alpha's main motives were to ensure growth and internationalization, and Building Division was looking for complementary assets.

Data Collection

The data collection was based on qualitative interviews, and the primary data comprised 32 semi-structured interviews. Interviewees were selected from a list of informants from UK-based Alpha, provided by the integration manager and the UK managing director. All interviewees were either part of the acquisition or the integration process and had, therefore, been exposed to the change – that is, the stimuli eliciting feelings.

The interviews were conducted in English, the mother tongue of the interviewees. We did not encounter linguistic challenges during the interviews, even though the interviewees had a linguistic advantage (cf. Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004). The interviews lasted, on average, an hour, and they were all tape recorded. The majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, but due to conflicting schedules and travel issues, two interviews were conducted via Skype; to ensure a good connection, the video was not switched on. However, the interviewee managed to create a relaxed atmosphere, and apart from the lack of personal, face-to-face interaction, these interviews did not differ much from the face-to-face interviews. The interviewees could freely select the location of the interview; most of the interviews took place in one of the conference rooms in the office, which allowed the interviewers to observe the interviewees' offices and work environment.

Data Analysis

The 32 interviews were all transcribed. Most interviews were transcribed by one member of the research team, but due to the large number of interviews, one-third of the interviews were transcribed by a professional agency. Transcribing from a second language into a second language was the most challenging part of this process; with English being the second language of the transcribers, it was sometimes difficult for them to understand the different dialects and nuances of the native speakers. The transcribers clearly marked the difficult sections in the transcribed interviews, enabling the researchers to double check the tape. One of the researchers was living in the United Kingdom while conducting the interviews, and she was used to hearing the North-West English accent used in the interviews (cf. Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004).

The transcribed interviews were analysed using NVivo 10 software. Three researchers participated in the coding process to increase the trustworthiness of the analysis. Despite the qualitative nature of the study, we did not adopt a purely inductive approach (cf. Gioia et al., 2013); rather, we let our observations and analysis be partially guided by initial hunches and frames of reference, keeping 'an open mind' (see Siggelkow, 2007). Consequently, our coding scheme was initially heavily reliant on our research questions and loosely on the frames of reference presented in our literature review. Our analysis and coding followed an iterative process between the data and the literature, in which each analysis round took us deeper and deeper into the analysis.

Our iterative approach was reflected in our coding strategy as well, and our codes included both a priori codes derived from the literature and in vivo codes derived directly from the data (e.g. Bazeley, 2007). In the first round of analysis, we relied on a priori codes and had only one node — namely 'positive emotions related to M&A'. Hence, anything referring to positive emotions related to M&A was coded in this node. The coding was intentionally kept rough during the first round of analysis. In the second round, the coded nodes were analysed more in-depth with the help of the literature, and the codes were organized according to the emerging emotions of *happiness*, *pride and relief*. This method enabled us to go deeper and deeper into our data in each round. In the final data analysis phase, we identified the triggers of the prevailing emotions and compared them with the existing literature on positive identity in an organizational context.

FINDINGS

Based on our analysis, we were able to identify three positive emotions from the data: happiness, pride and relief (Lazarus, 1993). Furthermore, we found different triggers and drivers of these emotions in the context of a major organizational change. In the following, we present some illustrative quotations of the positive emotions (Table 1) and their triggers as experienced by the informants. Then we discuss and explain how they are linked to identity content and

Table 1. Positive Emotions in the Context of a Major Organizational Change.

Positive emotions	Illustrative quotations from the data
HAPPINESS (enthusiastic, happy, optimistic, encouraged, pleased, relieved)	'I was really *glad* after that I'd gone, and it was very positive, and I felt very positive about the future, and about joining these people that I thought were very similar, that I thought I would like to work with. And I thought, we could make something great.' 'I'm very positive and *excited* about the future and the things we can do.' 'I'm particularly *happy* because for my particular circumstances, I've been listened to; I've had good dialogue, and we're moving slowly and we're making changes where it makes sense.' 'So, for me, the *excitement* of going into a completely new role, being, frankly, out of my depth, was very exciting – very exciting indeed. It took me a while to adjust to it and I'm still adjusting now, but these 18 months have been a rollercoaster. There's been exciting things; there's been some fantastic experiences; I've met some great people in this business.'
PRIDE (respect, admiration)	'The gravity, to be honest, didn't hit you. The role I had and the responsibility I was being given, out of every [the acquired company] employee, coming into [the acquiring company], I probably got, if not the best opportunity, I was very lucky to get the opportunity I got and I *respect* the role enormously.' 'I was very *impressed* with their technical expertise. Really impressed, very impressed with Finnish people. I think they're very highly educated. Also, I think one thing that stood out to me was that in the [acquired company] or engineering in the UK in general, it's all men, sadly. But that wasn't the case at [the acquiring company]. A lot of the people, and the high-up people, are women. I'm very impressed with powerful, clever women. So, I was very impressed by that. I thought it was really cool.'
RELIEF	'I've done the same kind of job for a long, long time, and I was quite vocal in [the acquired company] that we needed to exit the business and move on. *I didn't see any future*. I didn't see, where it was going, and I was *bored*. I was doing my job in my sleep; it wasn't challenging, paid well. It was a nice job, but I was bored.'

processes using Dutton et al.'s (2010) theoretical framework of positive work-related identity.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH TO POSITIVE IDENTITY

Progressive Identity Development

Based on the empirical findings, happiness and pride were the most prevailing positive feelings among the informants. This finding is in line with previous identity and identification literature, where emotional identification was associated with enthusiasm, pride and respect (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Likewise, Glynn and Walsh (2009) suggest that positive identities are seen as attractive and aspirational. Consequently, happiness, which connotes making reasonable progress towards realizing a goal (Lazarus, 1993), can be linked to the developmental approach to positive identity.

The triggers of happiness and pride were found to be related to personal self-development at work. These findings are in line with extant literature which states that career development and growth are recognized as means through which individuals develop their own identities (Hall, 2002). Furthermore, the data in the present study indicate that personal growth and development occurred, for example, through performing a new role and handling the added responsibilities residing with it. The sensation of self-advancement was explained by one informant as follows:

> So, for me, the minute the deal was done, my new role started … two days into my new job, I was in India doing a seminar for 200 people, and that's just not something I've ever done before, so first impression for me, like, wow! This is different, this is exciting!

This progressive identity development may evolve through natural progressions and passages, where individuals over time pass through career stages towards their ideal selves (Dutton et al., 2010). However, in this study, career growth occurred swiftly, as it was seen to evolve due to a major organizational change caused by the company's acquisition by a bigger entity. For the informants, the acquisition and the change implied potentially faster progression and a larger leap in the direction of a more developed work-related identity. In addition, the big size, bigger budget and potential continuum and increase of success reasserted by the new entity were obvious triggers for the employees to feel positive about the change (see also Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

According to Dutton et al. (2010), the development perspective of positive identity formation assumes that identity is dynamic and capable of changing. However, in this process, the old identity is not discarded; instead, new elements are added to the old, signifying work-related self-definition. Career development is, in fact, the enhancement of the work-related identity (Hall, 2002). An example of a concrete add-on is the increased travel that was highlighted by one informant: 'A lot of international travel certainly with the job, which is an exciting part of the role, certainly.' Likewise, some informants experienced a feeling of relief, as they had perceived their former situation as 'boring' or non-satisfying, and therefore welcomed the change. Various informants commented that they were 'happy to move on' and that they believed the bigger size of the acquiring company would provide them with a meaningful continuation.

The positive outlook on changes and the perceived opportunities resulting from them were suggested to be linked to personal characteristics. Thus, being able to see the future as positive may be mediated by the employee's positive outlook on life in general. As one informant suggested, 'I'm very positive and excited about the future and the things we can do. Part of that is my own nature. I'm an optimistic person, not a pessimistic person. So, generally, I look on the bright side of things'. Kreiner and Sheep (2009) suggest that positive jujitsu always requires some level of risk-taking from the individual. Hence, instead of experiencing changes in work-related matters as threatening, an optimistic and adventurous person would be able to see the change through a positive lens as offering future opportunities.

THE STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF POSITIVE IDENTITY

Balanced and Complementary Identity Structure

Another pathway for positive identity development is through a balanced identity structure, implying that the positivity of an identity lies in the balance between personal and social identities (Dutton et al., 2010). Implicit in this approach is that individuals are in a constant process of trying to achieve an optimal balance. Accordingly, our findings suggest that becoming part of a larger organization balanced some employees' perceptions of themselves and their inherent desires for work-related identity. For one informant, becoming part of a bigger organization created feelings of contentment and happiness, as he became a member of a collective with like-minded colleagues:

> I sometimes struggled with the old management team, who primarily were from sales backgrounds and not development backgrounds. There were different cultures, in the sense of disciplines, and we spent a lot of our time battling, arguing about certain things that we knew had to happen from a development point of view. Whereas going to [the acquiring company], a more established, much bigger development team, I just spent the whole week talking to the development people and everything just resonated. It was nice, you know [laughs].

Individuals who strongly identify with their organization or occupation regard their role as central and salient, and feel valued for their individual identity. In other words, when fulfilling their role, individuals are being truly themselves (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Gecas (1982) refers to identity contents as anchors tying the self to the social system. Similarly, a positive identity can be achieved through a sense of authenticity, coherence and assimilation (Glynn & Walsh, 2009; Kreiner & Sheep, 2009). According to the literature, authenticity on a deep level appears when there is consistency between behaviour and identity (Humphrey et al., 2015). The above quotation as well as other informants' perceptions of the generated 'natural fit' or 'logical fit' between the organizations, teams and individuals support the members' perceptions of, and need for, authenticity at work. The gender-related remark by one informant on women's powerful presence at the acquiring company and the inclusion of both men and women in the organizational core can also contribute to the coherence between the collective and personal identities. According to the literature, a work-related identity becomes more positive when multiple identities are viewed as compatible (Rothbard, 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the triggers of positivity in an organizational context during a major organizational change. For this purpose, we investigated the individually experienced positive emotions that we believed would reveal the sources and triggers of positive work-related identity. By focusing on the interfaces between individual, organizational and contextual (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), we observed how the contextual characteristics and features may moderate and generate individual-level positive feelings. Thus, our main findings contribute to the understanding of how companies can construct positive identities by suggesting what can be conceptualized as positive in an organizational context during major changes. Building on the work of Dutton et al. (2010), we propose how their framework of positive work-related identity may be applicable in such contexts. Primarily, our findings lead us to suggest that positivity during a major organizational change may be found in progressive, balanced and complementary identity work.

In the literature, emotional identification is seen to provide a strong sense of belongingness with the group (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Johnson et al., 2012). By suggesting that positivity may be found in positive emotions, we also highlight the relevance of emotions in the processes of emotional identification. Enriching this literature, we have identified three positive emotions – happiness, pride and relief – that may influence individuals' self-concepts and strengthen their attachment to the organization. Evidently, identification carries an emotional risk (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), and focusing on positive feelings and triggers may mitigate self-alienation and instead enhance individuals' well-being and identification with an organizational collective. In addition, this discussion may contribute to the construct of deep acting (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) by presenting actual emotions that individuals feel and express at work. Moreover, our findings show how legitimate identities can also be dynamic and adaptive (Dutton et al., 2009). Our findings illustrate how individuals built on or complemented their work-related identities with new features and extensions. As such, our findings may be seen as contributing to the discussion on adaptive instability as facilitating the implementation of organizational changes and adaptation to internal and external demands (Gioia et al., 2000).

Our study suffered from the usual limitations relating to qualitative case studies, such as a lack of generalizability. Further, the inability to give an extensive case description due to the case company's wish for anonymity may limit the transparency and context familiarity of the study. As for future research avenues, we would suggest focusing more on how different types of organizational environments and contexts influence individual identity formation and strength. In addition, it may be of interest to study individuals' different approaches to change – that is why some perceive change as an opportunity, while others perceive the same situation as threatening.

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