

# PARADIGMS OF ORGANIZATION IDENTITY

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## **Abstract**

Organization identity shapes and sustains the operational organization processes as against the structurally defined ones. Few organizations really operate with the structurally defined processes. Similarly, activation of role processes of individual managers is often a function of the interface of identity of individual managers and organization identity.

The identity enables the organization to draw boundaries against impingements and to generate internal contexts to sustain stability in the turbulent environment. It promotes proactive and dynamic processes to operate against the potential inertia and structural tendencies to reach stagnation. It would be valid to state that organizations which stagnate and become sick are examples where the management has ignored to foster an organization identity.

**Key words:** Organization, Identity, Internal Source and External Source, Introduction

No single definition can encompass the many nuances acquired by the term identity. Erickson defines identity as a 'subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity'. While, Erickson's definition helps to understand the dynamics of individual identity, it cannot be extended to the level of collectivities. For it can leave us with a group or society without an identity, at which stage the exploration of its character, its action potential and its active life principle can no longer be assessed or estimated.

We must therefore, define identity as the playing out of the vital life force with all its motives, reassertions and constraints.

## **Framework of Identity based Organization**

Every organization has its mission, chosen task and stated goals. These, along with the appropriate technology, structure and people are selected by certain organizational processes. These processes have been often referred as 'Power'. These processes become manifest in the pattern of managerial interfaces and the quality of transactions in the living and working of the organization. One of the emergent aspects of these processes is to generate a set of 'meta-rules' (see Figure 1: Framework of Identity based Organization) which

determines how any of the framed rules of the organization is to be applied, which we prefer to call them as 'primary processes for the framework of organization identity'.

The nature of these primary processes determines the profile of power distribution in the organization. In an identity based analysis, it is important not just to ascertain whether power distribution is skewed or even, but to discover the set of assumptions that creates the specific pattern of the distribution of power.

(See Figure 1) The primary processes are anchored in what may be loosely termed the 'ego of the organization'. This ego is the focal point of those parts of the organization which are already relatively stable. The component of 'ego' include decisions about product, volume and size, values and beliefs that determine responses to conflicts and differences; the role the organization has chosen to play in the environment; the mission it has adopted as a purposive collectivity.

Process shifts in the being of the organization occur when intervention and deliberate changes are induced in the various interrelated elements of identity. While identity is influenced by a number of variables in conjunction with each other, the most direct impact on identity is exerted by the primary processes.

(See Figure 2)

## **Source of Organization Identity**

An organization identity, or the sense of being, can originate in two locations: Internal to the organization and external to the organization. Each source may actually evolve different identities, that is, the organization may represent a different set of characteristics to each source.

## **Internal Source of Identity**

The internal identity is formed by the managers and employees of the organization. The organization comes to represent something to each person working within. Employees may think of the organization as autocratic, mean and stifling, while manager may view the organization as tolerant, rewarding and progressive. Different images emerge even though the sources are all within the same organization.

Evidence of an internal image which the organization

is attempting to cultivate can be found in policies and procedures. Written documents which outline how and who to hire, what employee training programme are offered, the wage and salary structures, and minutes of meetings, all these lend tangible evidence to determining the internal image.

### **External Source of Identity**

Elements which are outside of the organization also form an identity or image of the organization. Those that come into contact with the organization, either directly or through word of mouth or rumor, form an image of the organization. Examples like other organizations, competitors, government agencies, customers and the public. Each point of contact with the organization is an opportunity for the organization to extend its identity and for the receiver to form an impression of the organization.

However, if we accept that an organization can have an identity, then we raise some important questions about that identity:

1. The first questions are whose definition of identity are we going to use? There can be multiple audiences and multiple interpretations about the organization, which one is 'best'?
2. Secondly, what impact does identity have on an organization? Lastly, can an organization identity be changed?
3. Can an organization identity be changed?

Answer to the first above mentioned question is that various people and groups develop separate and different interpretations of an organization's identity. The identity developed and cultivated by the top manager may not be interpreted in the same way by competitors or employees. Top management may not that the same identity exists in the eyes of everyone, but it might be willing to acknowledge differences. However, in view to the above mentioned answer, another question arises of why is it important to recognize different identities? The reason is because if we are talking about changing or working with an identity or the impact of an identity, we need to know who the audience, what do they currently think, and how does that help or hinder us? In becoming aware of the identity, we recognize what contributes to that identity, then we can go on to determine what can be done to change the identity.

### **Impact of organization identity**

The impact of identity can be felt on the organization on those who have formed an image of the organization. The identity that currently exists or that management wishes to cultivate shapes the actions taken within and by the organization. For instance,

assume the identity involves being a contributor to social programme. Then the organization must contribute time, effort and resources to schools or meetings or activities which support social programme. In the same sense, the identity would restrict actions which would be counter to the desired identity. Therefore, identity can determine which actions will or will not be pursued.

Identity also influences the way an organization might interact with others, by the people, government or other organizations. Just as policies and procedures are used to shape an identity, these same policies and procedures are a result of an identity.

Third influence of identity is how the management views and interprets events within the framework of the identity of the organization. Activities in the environment are interpreted by us in terms of our beliefs and experiences. The identity of the organization also acts as an interpretation filter.

### **Can an organization identity be changed?**

As discussed above an identity can be managed and therefore changed. If we consider that identity may evolve from the actions and policies of the organization, then change might occur through changing those actions and policies. If the identity comes from industry characteristics or broader interpretations of the organization, the identity is much harder to manage, but still might be possible. The organization might take extraordinary steps to counter the industry identity in order to substitute a specific image for the industry.

In short, the underlying message about managing or changing an organization identity is to first understand what that image is composed of, what contributes to establishing that identity. If the composition of the identity is identified, then changing that identity can be assessed in terms of how difficult it is to alter the framework of identity.

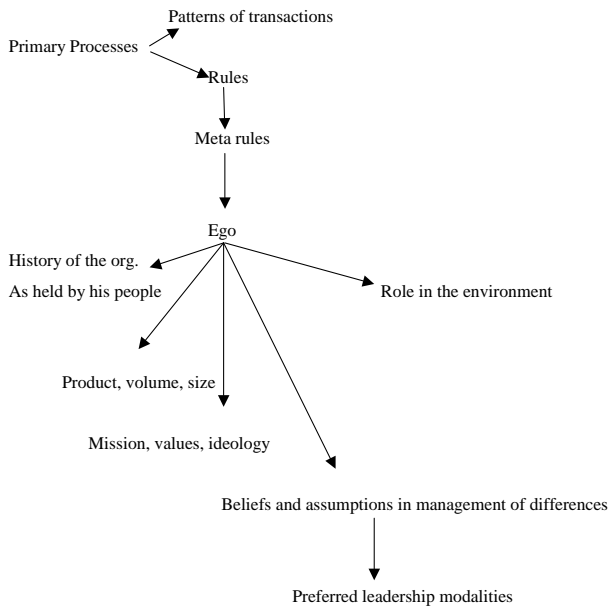
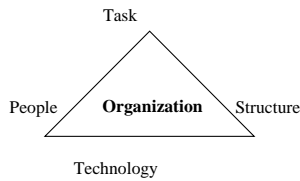
### **To sum up**

Organization identity can be defined as the set of processes of meaning-making, choice-making, role-taking and replenishment. These processes operate to create correspondences between organization elements and congruence's between variant objectives of people, departments and corporate functions. And finally, the identity processes provide the context for the organizations to have a sense of consistency while changing and to hold multiplicity of objectives and processes in their style of operations.

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**Figure 1  
Framework of Identity based Organization**



**Figure 2  
Organization Identity**

Systematic Context	Particular Context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Business Performance</li> <li>• Environmental Forces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Product, Volume, Size</li> <li>- Transactional Processes</li> <li>- Meta rules</li> <li>- Ideology</li> </ul>

Identity of the Organization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mission</li> <li>- Beliefs and Assumptions in management Of differences</li> <li>- Preferred Leadership Modalities</li> <li>- Primary Processes</li> <li>- Role in the Environment</li> <li>- People</li> <li>- History of the Organization</li> </ul>