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## Identity negotiation at work

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### Abstract

Upon initiating relationships, people engage in a process of *identity negotiation* through which they establish their respective identities. Once established, people's identities define their mutual expectations, obligations, and indeed, the very nature of their relationships. This chapter presents a rudimentary theory of identity negotiation, with emphasis on how such negotiations unfold in the workplace. We first discuss the nature and history of identity negotiation, noting similarities and differences between identity negotiation and related constructs. Next we describe the successive phases of the identity negotiation process and identify the principles that ideally govern how that process operates in work contexts. We then discuss how identity negotiation processes may be leveraged for organizational change and how the state of identity congruence may contribute to innovation. We conclude by noting questions that remain for future research on identity negotiation.

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53 People can be amazingly flexible in the identities that they assume. The same woman, for example, may be warm  
54 with her children, chilly with her employees, and a mixture of both with her in-laws. This can create a problem for  
55 social actors who are trying to predict what their interaction partners are going to do next. We suggest that people solve  
56 this problem through *identity negotiation*: the processes whereby relationship partners reach agreements regarding  
57 “who is who.” By enabling people to establish mutual expectations of one another, these processes transform  
58 disconnected individuals into collaborators who have mutual obligations, common goals, and often, some degree of  
59 commitment to one another. Identity negotiation processes thus provide the “interpersonal glue” that bonds people to  
60 one another and to their organizations.

61 Given the vital role that identity negotiation processes play in organizational life, it is surprising that they have  
62 received scant attention from scholars who study organizational behavior. Continued neglect of these processes could  
63 become increasingly costly in the future, as several emerging trends – including increases in globalization,  
64 diversification of the labor force, telecommuting, and worker mobility – will likely pose challenges to identity  
65 negotiation processes. The resulting difficulties may be compounded by increased reliance on emotionally  
66 impoverished modes of communication such as e-mail, instant messages, and text messages. Together, these  
67 developments may compromise identity negotiation processes and foster misunderstanding and conflict in the  
68 workplace. Those organizations that are equipped with a thorough understanding of identity negotiation processes will  
69 not only be prepared to overcome these challenges, they will recognize how to structure the workplace so as to foster  
70 identity congruence and reap the benefits associated with such congruence. As a result, their employees will be happier  
71 and more productive, lending the organization a competitive advantage.

72 In this chapter, we focus on how the identity negotiation process unfolds in the workplace. We begin with a brief  
73 discussion of the nature and history of identity negotiation, noting similarities and differences between identity  
74 negotiation and related constructs in the sociological and organizational behavior literatures. We then elucidate the  
75 unique phases of the identity negotiation process, and discuss the principles that ideally govern how these phases  
76 unfold. Following this, we suggest how identity negotiation processes may be leveraged for organizational change and  
77 how the state of identity congruence may contribute to innovation. We conclude with a discussion of the ways in which  
78 future research might further illuminate identity negotiation processes and develop strategies for tapping the “identity  
79 capital” inherent in the stable identities of workers.

80 Our formulation may advance theory and practice in organizational behavior in several ways. First, to the best of  
81 our knowledge, ours is the first attempt to offer a systematic process model of how the identity negotiation process  
82 ideally unfolds in the workplace. This article may thus help fill a theoretical void within the social psychology and  
83 organizational behavior literatures. Moreover, whereas past empirical investigations of identity negotiation  
84 emphasized non-organizational relationships between roommates, married couples, and participants in laboratory  
85 research (e.g., McNulty & Swann, 1994; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994; Swann & Ely, 1984), our analysis  
86 extends the approach to relationships between coworkers and management in organizations (see also Swann, Milton,  
87 & Polzer, 2000; Swann, Polzer, Seyle, & Ko, 2004). As such, this chapter contributes to an increasing awareness of the  
88 importance of employee identity in the dynamics underlying diverse organizational phenomena such as leadership  
89 (e.g., Lord & Brown, 2004), organizational commitment (e.g., Johnson & Chang, 2006), group performance and  
90 functioning (London, Polzer, & Omeregic, 2005), reactions to justice (e.g., De Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Wiesenfeld,  
91 Swann, Brockner, & Bartel, 2007), and changes in the nature of the workplace (e.g., Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). Finally,  
92 the chapter also considers the utility of identity negotiation processes for addressing two prominent challenges for the  
93 workplace of the future, namely fostering innovation and capitalizing on diversity.

## 1. The nature of identity negotiation<sup>1</sup>

The identity negotiation formulation can be traced to the theory of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), particularly the notion that people derive self-knowledge from social interaction. After observing themselves repeatedly enact particular roles, the argument goes, people construct role-specific self-conceptions (Stryker & Statham, 1985). These ideas laid the groundwork for Goffman's (1959, 1961) dramaturgical approach, which likened people to actors in a play. Goffman asserted that the first order of business in social interaction is establishing a "working consensus" or agreement regarding the roles each person will assume. Weinstein and Deutschberger (1964) built on this work by elaborating the interpersonal processes that unfold after interaction partners reach an initial working consensus. Later scholars further expanded the formulation, emphasizing the tendency for people to maximize interpersonal harmony by gravitating toward social settings that seem likely to offer support for their identities or self-views (McCall & Simmons, 1966).<sup>2</sup>

In social psychology, ideas related to identity negotiation were introduced by Secord and Backman (1965) and elaborated by Swann (1983) and Schlenker (1985). Swann (1987) suggested that the process of identity negotiation serves to reconcile two competing processes in dyadic interactions. On the one hand, one person (arbitrarily dubbed the "perceiver") may use his or her expectancies to guide behavior, thereby encouraging the target to provide behavioral confirmation for the perceiver's expectancies (e.g., Miller & Turnbull, 1986; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Snyder & Swann, 1978; Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977). Meanwhile, the other person (arbitrarily dubbed the "target") may strive to bring the perceiver to treat him or her in a manner that provides verification for the target's self-views (e.g., Secord & Backman, 1965; Swann, 1983, 1999). When the expectancies of perceivers clash with the self-views of targets, a "battle of wills" may ensue (e.g., Swann & Ely, 1984), with each party vying to persuade the other to see things his or her way.

The research literature suggests that when such "battles of wills" occur, they are typically resolved with perceivers and targets developing higher levels of congruence (e.g., Felson, 1980, 1985; Felson & Reed, 1986; Hoelter, 1984; Lundgren, Jergens, & Gibson, 1982; McNulty & Swann, 1994; Schafer & Keith, 1985; Swann et al., 2000; Swann & Read, 1981; for a review, see Kenny, 1994). Not surprisingly, although perceivers can develop surprisingly accurate impressions of targets on the basis of little information (e.g., Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993; Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002), congruence increases with the length of the relationship (Funder & Colvin, 1988; Funder, Kolar, & Blackman, 1995).

Activities of either perceivers or targets can contribute to congruence. For example, perceivers who are seen as highly credible are especially likely to bring targets' self-views into alignment with perceivers' initial appraisals. This phenomenon could emerge because simply being labeled with a quality (e.g., "You are a slow learner") can, of itself, cause targets to internalize the expectancy. Alternatively, the expectancy may cause perceivers to behave in ways that constrain the responses of targets, thereby eliciting "behavioral confirmation" for the expectancy (e.g., McNulty & Swann, 1994; Shrauger & Shoneman, 1959). In either case, we refer to the process that produces such perceiver-induced congruence as an "appraisal effect" (Shrauger & Shoneman, 1975).<sup>3</sup>

The flow of influence in identity negotiation may also move in the opposite, target-to-perceiver, direction. Research on self-verification, for example, indicates that targets who are highly certain of their self-views behave so as to bring perceivers to confirm their self-views (e.g., Pelham & Swann, 1994; Swann & Ely, 1984). In addition, targets may elicit self-verifying reactions by displaying highly visible markers of a particular identity or "looking the part." In fact, targets with highly certain self-views elicit congruent evaluations even when they have had minimal contact with

<sup>1</sup> For many readers, the word "negotiation" may call to mind those processes that occur when people strive to reach agreements regarding the exchange of materials, expertise, or services (e.g., Lempert, 1972–1973; Rubin & Brown, 1975; Thompson, 2005). Although such "asset negotiations" have some similarities to identity negotiation, they are distinct in many important ways (for a discussion, see Swann & Bosson, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, we define *identities* as beliefs about the self, and we use this term interchangeably with *self-views* (Swann, 1983, 1999). In our usage, identities imply behaviors but they are not, of themselves, behaviors. As such, when we use phrases such as "assume an assertive identity," we are employing it as a short hand for the longer and more cumbersome phrase "enact behaviors associated with the identity of an assertive person."

<sup>3</sup> We use the term "appraisal effect" rather than "reflected appraisal effect" here because the former term does not require conscious mediation and there is little evidence that these effects are consciously mediated (e.g., Kenny & DePaulo, 1993; McNulty & Swann, 1994; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979).

134 the perceivers who evaluate them (Pelham & Swann, 1994). We refer to the process that produces such target-induced  
135 congruence as a “self-verification effect.”

136  
137 The research literature suggests that self-verification effects are somewhat more common than appraisal effects  
138 (e.g., McNulty & Swann, 1994; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann et al., 2000). This is fortuitous, as there is considerable  
139 evidence that people prefer self-verifying evaluations over non-verifying ones. For example, college students whose  
140 roommates confirm their chronic self-views report stronger intentions to continue living with the roommate, and this is  
141 true even among students who view themselves negatively (Swann & Pelham, 2002). Similarly, married people with  
142 positive and negative self-views are more satisfied with spouses who confirm their self-views (e.g., Burke & Stets,  
143 1999; De La Ronde & Swann, 1998; Ritts & Stein, 1995; Schafer, Wickrama, & Keith, 1996; Swann et al., 1994). In  
144 fact, people whose spouses disconfirm their (positive *and* negative) self-views run an elevated risk of separation and  
145 divorce (e.g., Cast & Burke, 2002). Moreover, controlled laboratory studies show that just as people with positive self-  
146 views prefer interaction partners who appraise them positively, people with negative self-views prefer partners who  
147 perceive them negatively (e.g., Bosson & Swann, 1999; Hixon & Swann, 1993; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992;  
148 Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, 1990; Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989). Finally, when people receive  
149 feedback that challenges their self-views, they behaviorally resist such challenges, and such resistance activity  
150 stabilizes their self-views (e.g., Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann & Predmore, 1985).

151 More recently, researchers have begun to ask if identity congruence might also benefit group functioning.  
152 Presumably, when workers know and understand one another, they can count on each other to enact the same identity  
153 day in and day out. As a result, interactions will unfold smoothly and seamlessly. Consistent with this reasoning, a  
154 study of MBA students in Texas indicated that in groups that enjoyed high levels of congruence, members were more  
155 identified with their groups, and more creative in their work (Swann et al., 2000). Furthermore, as in the research with  
156 dyads, the benefits of congruence extended to negative self-views as well as positive ones, presumably because  
157 communication and collective tasks proceeded more efficiently to the extent that coworkers recognized one another’s  
158 strengths *and* weaknesses. Indeed, as long as congruence reigns, it seems that the identity negotiation process will  
159 govern the relationship routinely and automatically, leaving employees’ conscious attention free to address the work at  
160 hand (see, for example, Swann’s [1983] distinction between routine and crisis self-verification and McAdams’ [1999]  
161 discussion of the waxing and waning of the self-narrative process). In contrast, when incongruence emerges,  
162 interpersonal relations will be turbulent and difficult, to the detriment of individuals and the larger organization.

163 For readers familiar with the literature on person–organization fit (e.g., Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson,  
164 2005; O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Swartzentruber, Jackson, & Johnson, 2007), this discussion of the benefits  
165 of identity congruence may evoke a feeling of déjà vu. Whereas we emphasize the benefits of a match between the self-  
166 views of targets and the appraisals of perceivers, work on fit extols the benefits of matching the values, abilities, and  
167 goals of the individual with the values and culture of the organization (Kristof, 1996). Although both identity  
168 congruence and fit involve a matching process, the two phenomena feature distinct causal pathways. Whereas self-  
169 verification often occurs when targets shape their experiences within organizations so as to confirm their identities, fit  
170 typically occurs when targets select established (and hence relatively immutable) organizations that match their  
171 personal characteristics (e.g., Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995).

172 In addition, many common ingredients in fit – i.e., values and abilities – are thought to be relatively fixed (in some  
173 cases, genetically determined), undifferentiated, and independent of situational influences. In contrast, identity is  
174 multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, and relatively sensitive to situational influences (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Markus &  
175 Kunda, 1986). As a result, when one’s enduring values or abilities clash with the organizational culture, the most  
176 obvious option is for the individual to simply leave the organization (e.g., Schneider et al., 1995). In contrast, because  
177 identities are relatively nuanced, they offer people far more flexibility. For example, if someone receives feedback that  
178 is inconsistent with a particular identity, they may respond by substituting an alternative identity that is more  
179 compatible with the situational demands at hand. Indeed, within limits, targets can selectively activate identities that  
180 are uniquely appropriate to the situation, thus allowing them to display substantial flexibility in the identities that they  
181 assume in the workplace. We will have more to say about these issues later in this chapter when we point to ways in  
182 which identity negotiation can facilitate organizational change and innovation.

183 **Q4** But if targets activate and enact “situated identities” (Alexander & Well, 1969) that conform to the situational  
184 demands of perceivers in the organization, does this not frustrate their self-verification strivings, which have been  
185 shown to be so important? Although it seems likely that self-verification strivings play an important role in  
186 organizational life, it is noteworthy that evidence for the importance of self-verification has come exclusively from



186 studies of people who were involved in *symmetric* identity negotiation with co-equals (e.g., members of the same study  
187 groups, college roommates, or marriage partners). Such relationships afford people considerable latitude to indulge  
188 their self-verification strivings. For example, if a peer or relationship partner asks a target to adopt an identity that  
189 differs from one that the target is accustomed to assuming, the target may simply refuse. In contrast, when a superior  
190 requests an identity shift of an employee, targets will recognize that the organization has the power (and, to a degree,  
191 the legitimate authority) to ask for such a shift because it is compensating the target for his or her services. For this  
192 reason, targets engaged in such *asymmetric* identity negotiation processes may be relatively open to assuming (at least  
193 temporarily) identities that depart fairly sharply from their chronic identities (cf. Morris, Podolny, & Ariel, 2001  
194 discussion of horizontal vs. vertical relationships in organizations).

195 To be sure, significant departures from chronic identities will take a psychological toll on targets, so there will be  
196 limits on their duration and pervasiveness. For example, some relationships undergo a “qualifying stage” that  
197 encourages people to suspend their desire for self-verification until a commitment has been made. A case in point is  
198 dating and marital relationships. Targets prefer that their dating partners are oblivious to their flaws, but this preference  
199 is replaced by a desire for self-verifying evaluations once they get married (e.g., Swann et al., 1994). Similarly, targets  
200 in organizations may tolerate incongruent appraisals in the context of asymmetric relationships with superiors until  
201 they have “proven themselves.” Once the relationship is stabilized, they may take steps to elicit reactions that are more  
202 self-verifying. In the meantime, targets may compensate for non-verifying feedback from a superior by cultivating  
203 self-verification from their coworkers. In this way, targets may ensure that they at least receive a steady supply of self-  
204 verification from the people who know them the best.

205 Whether the relationship happens to be symmetric or asymmetric, identity negotiation is a fundamentally iterative  
206 process that involves a series of transactions between targets and their interaction partners. In the section that follows,  
207 we examine each successive link in the chain of events that make up the identity negotiation process. We move from  
208 the identities and goals of the target and perceivers, to their negotiations with one another, their situated identities and  
209 appraisals of one another, and finally to the objective and psychological outcomes of these processes.

## 2. The road to identity congruence: a process model of identity negotiation

210 Before proceeding, we must add a few caveats. First, we should note that the title of this section, “The road to  
211 identity congruence,” has at least two potential referents. Whereas past researchers typically used identity congruence  
212 to refer to agreement between the beliefs of perceivers and the chronic self-views of targets, here we also allow for  
213 congruence between the beliefs of perceivers and the “situated” (i.e., situation specific) identities of targets. Second,  
214 the distinction between “perceivers” and “targets” in our discussion is sharpest in the early stages in the model, for  
215 initially perceivers have already established themselves in the organization and targets are just entering. Once targets  
216 join the organization, they become perceivers as well as targets. Third, although some linearity is implied by the fact  
217 that most of the lines in the model in Fig. 1 point downward, a considerable amount of recursiveness is implied by: (a)  
218 the bi-directional arrows moving from “target’s and perceiver’s negotiations” to “situated identity/appraisal” and (b)  
219 the arrows moving upward from both “situated identity/appraisal” and “ensuing identity and goals” to the top of the  
220 diagram.

### 2.1. The target’s identity and goals

221 All organisms tend to gravitate toward environments that routinely satisfy their needs (e.g., Clarke, 1954; Odum,  
222 1963). Members of organizations are no exception to this rule. Of greatest relevance here, people seek and enter  
223 “opportunity structures” (e.g., Hawley, 1950; McCall & Simmons, 1966) that satisfy their *relationship goals*—the  
224 desired end states that people pursue when they enter relationships. At the most general level, people pursue goals that  
225 satisfy their needs for *coherence* (a sense that the world fits with past experiences) and *connectedness* (positive  
226 relations with valued others). In organizational settings, the desire for *agency* (a sense of competence) also takes on  
227 special importance. As we will show, each of these goals is intimately related to the manner in which the identity  
228 negotiation process unfolds.

229 The need for coherence appears to be a basic human motive (e.g., Guidano & Liotti, 1983; Lecky, 1945; Popper,  
230 1963; Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003). To meet this need, people will seek experiences that are familiar and  
231 predictable, and that match their expectations, especially their firmly held identities. There are two key reasons why

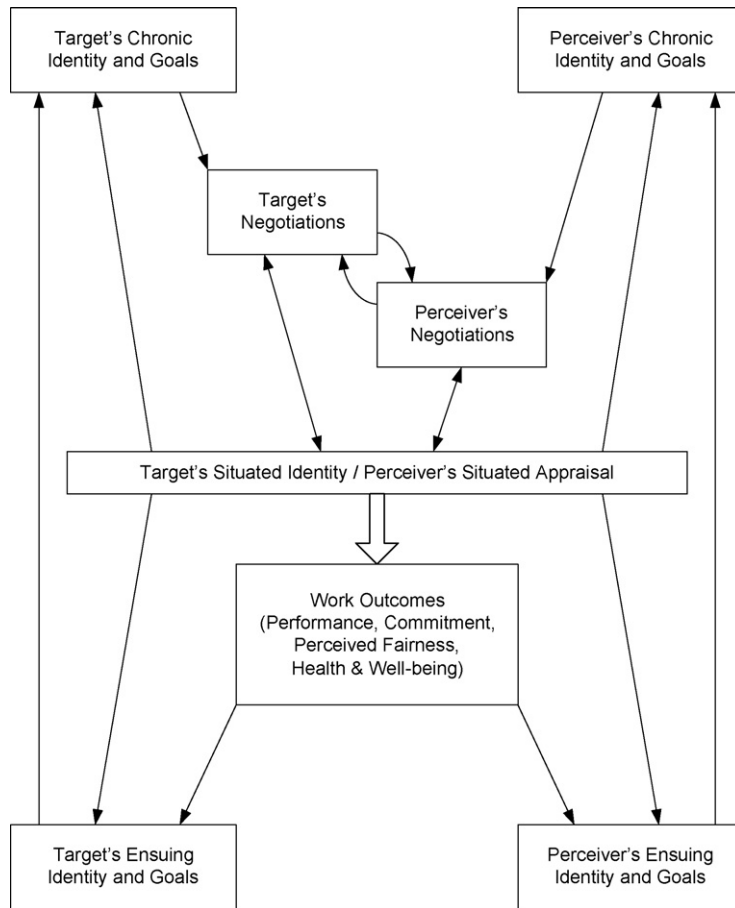


Fig. 1. A process model of identity negotiation in the workplace.

234

235 targets might prefer and seek perceivers who see them congruently. From an epistemic perspective, self-verifying  
 236 evaluations feel “right,” diminish anxiety, and foster stability in the identities of targets. Stable identities afford people  
 237 a sense of psychological coherence, a sense that they know what to do and the consequences of doing it. From a  
 238 pragmatic perspective, stable identities inject a certain degree of orderliness into people’s interpersonal relationships  
 239 by encouraging them to display continuity in their behavior. Continuity makes targets more predictable to their  
 240 partners, who will, in turn, become more predictable to them.

241 The need for connectedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969) is also very important in organizational  
 242 settings. In fact, some have asserted that, beyond satisfying economic needs (e.g., Brief, Brett, Raskas, & Stein, 1997),  
 243 one of the key functions of work is that it allows people to establish and maintain social connections with others  
 244 (Jahoda, 1981, 1982; Levy, 2006). Once they have joined an organization, targets can satisfy their desire for  
 245 connectedness by negotiating identities that attach them in various ways to the organization. For example, targets may  
 246 not only cultivate identities such as “proud employee of Company X” at a broad level, but they may also perceive  
 247 themselves as dedicated members of particular branches, divisions, or work teams within the organization. At an even  
 248 more specific level, targets may negotiate identities such as the “cheerleader” of the work group, the one others can  
 249 count on to remain optimistic and encouraging at the eleventh hour of a challenging project.

250 Finally, people’s need for feelings of agency (or competence, autonomy, self-efficacy, self-determination; Bandura,  
 251 1986; Bowlby, 1988; Deci & Ryan, 1980; Franks & Marolla, 1976; Harter, 1982; Ryff, 1989; Tafarodi & Swann, 1995)  
 252 will run particularly high in organizational settings. Indeed, workers who feel that they are effective in the organization  
 253 and enjoy high levels of organization-based self-esteem express more job satisfaction and perform better (Freedman &  
 254 Phillips, 1985; Judge & Bono, 2001; Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, & Dunham, 1989; Tharenou & Harker, 1982). To  
 255 avoid feelings of agency, targets often strive to build repertoires of knowledge and skills by observing others in the

255 organization, especially leaders, who exemplify group member prototypicality (Hogg, 2001). Employees often use the  
256 behavior of leaders as blueprints for building work-relevant skill sets (Ibarra, 1999).  
257

## 2.2. *The perceiver's identity and goals*

258  
259 In principle, identity negotiations can take place between two or more individuals within an organization, between  
260 individuals and representatives of organizations, or even between representatives of two or more organizations. As  
261 such, in our usage, the term “perceiver” may refer to a specific other person (e.g., an individual coworker), a subset of  
262 people within an organization (e.g., a department or work team), or representatives of the entire organizational entity  
263 (e.g., AT&T).

264 When the perceiver is the larger organization, the initial focus of our analysis is the organization's identity, or the  
265 central and enduring attributes that make each organization unique (Albert & Whetten, 1985). One way that the  
266 identity of the larger organization is conveyed to its members is through its culture (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996;  
267 Whetten, 2006), which consists of the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, and traditions that characterize the  
268 organization (Ostroff, Kinicki, & Tamkins, 2003; Schein, 1985). For example, Apple is recognized as having a casual,  
269 rebellious corporate culture, one where even the CEO walks around barefoot clad in jeans (Rose, 1990). In contrast,  
270 military organizations are marked by strong norms for obedience and stringent lines of command and control within a  
271 hierarchical bureaucratic structure (English, 2004). The values and ideologies underlying an organization's culture are  
272 communicated through several channels, including symbols (e.g., physical objects and settings), language (e.g., jargon  
273 and slogans), and practices (e.g., rituals and ceremonies; Trice & Beyer, 1993). By making its culture known to  
274 outsiders, the organization conveys its identity to potential employees (Dennison, 1996; Trice & Beyer, 1993).

275 Ideally, the organization will attract applicants whose identities fit the organization's preferred appraisals of them.  
276 Organizations take various steps to realize this goal. For instance, an organization may structure the recruitment  
277 process so as to communicate its identity, thus letting applicants know what identities they are expected to embrace  
278 should they join the organization. Furthermore, intra-organizational sources (e.g., employee referrals) may  
279 communicate further details about the organization's identity to potential new employees (Zottoli & Wanous, 2000).  
280 The organization may also provide applicants with information about its identity through the interview process.  
281 Consider, for example, the realistic job preview. In this exercise, the organization's representatives strive to provide  
282 applicants with accurate expectations about the organization by describing unfavorable as well as favorable aspects of  
283 the job and organization (Cascio, 1998). Together, these and similar strategies may increase the likelihood that  
284 applicants will be ready and willing to adopt identities that match the organizations' preferred appraisals of them.

## 2.3. *The target's negotiation strategies*

285  
286 Once they join an organization, targets may begin communicating their identities to other members of the  
287 organization before they even open their mouths by displaying *identity cues*, or nonverbal signs of who they are. For  
288 example, targets' work attire, accessories, and office or cubicle décor all convey specific identities to their colleagues  
289 (Goffman, 1963; Gosling et al., 2002; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997; Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993; Swann, 1983). Whereas a framed  
290 Harvard diploma communicates intelligence and status, a framed picture of one's children conveys a strong parental  
291 identity.

292 Targets convey identity information in other ways as well. Paralleling their tendency to seek identity-consistent  
293 vocations and jobs, targets also seek identity-confirming opportunity structures within organizations (e.g., Serpe &  
294 Stryker, 1987). For example, people may join work teams and committees which feature identities to which they  
295 aspire. People can also express their identities through salient, repeated behaviors. Just as employees who see  
296 themselves as “rebellious” or “non-conformist” may skip work or break rules, those who perceive themselves as  
297 “green” might initiate an office recycling program. Most important, people use explicit and subtle statements as well  
298 as nonverbal behaviors and cues to communicate their identities (Elsbach, 2003; Goffman, 1963; Swann & Read,  
299 1981; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & McNulty, 1992). Such messages are delivered through channels that range from the  
300 formal (e.g., self-evaluations during performance appraisals) to the informal (e.g., conversations around the water  
301 cooler).

302 Upon communicating their identities, targets will often receive feedback from individual coworkers or the larger  
303 organization. In ideal cases, perceivers' appraisals will allow targets to meet simultaneously their needs for coherence,

303 connectedness, and agency. For example, a woman who desires connectedness with other members of her work team  
304 may achieve it, at least in part, by cultivating a workplace identity as a skilled and conscientious team member. To this  
305 end, she may make a point of arriving to meetings on time, taking careful notes, and volunteering to take on difficult  
306 assignments. If this workplace identity is at least reasonably similar to the target's chronic identity, and she routinely  
307 behaves in line with it, she should ultimately earn self-verifying (positive) appraisals of her agency from teammates.  
308 As such, the target's needs for agency and coherence will also be met. Thus, competent performance of one's job can  
309 be viewed as a general strategy for achieving connectedness and coherence in an organization.

310 At times, however, perceivers will respond to targets' identity-relevant behaviors by offering appraisals that conflict  
311 with targets' firmly held identities. When this happens, targets must decide whether to acquiesce or to utilize a more  
312 forceful strategy in order to elicit the desired appraisal. In some cases, targets strive to reaffirm the initial identity by  
313 behaving in an even more extreme fashion (Stets & Burke, 2003; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann &  
314 Read, 1981). For example, if arrogant employees' sense of superiority is not verified by those around them, they may  
315 amplify their self-aggrandizing behaviors (Silverman, Shyamsunder, & Johnson, 2007) in an effort to bring perceivers  
316 to recognize their virtues. Likewise, individuals who consider themselves submissive will exaggerate their  
317 submissiveness during interactions with a perceiver who views them as dominant (Swann & Hill, 1982).

318 Such compensatory behavior seems to be particularly common when the workplace is structured in ways that  
319 discourage identity displays. Research on employees' reactions to "non-territorial" office environments suggests that  
320 some workers bristle against rules that prevent them from claiming a permanent workspace that they can decorate with  
321 personal possessions (Turner & Myerson, 1998). Cut off from the use of workspace décor as an identity negotiation  
322 strategy, targets in these environments report feelings of distress, threat, and sadness over their inability to  
323 communicate their unique skills and identities (Elsbach, 2003). Some compensate by communicating their identity  
324 through different channels. For example, just as some workers amplified their use of self-descriptive language during  
325 casual workplace conversations, others responded by breaking the rules, marking their territory with forbidden  
326 personal possessions such as photographs and books.

327 Targets whose self-verification strivings have been frustrated may also react by omitting behaviors that elicit  
328 incongruent appraisals. Witness the results of a case study of female lawyers working in male-dominated firms.  
329 Attorneys who wanted to be perceived as more competent and ambitious – and less stereotypically feminine –  
330 sometimes made conscious efforts to curtail their enactment of female-typed behaviors in front of coworkers. One  
331 woman noted that she eventually stopped expressing her genuinely felt insecurities to colleagues because "Men don't  
332 do that" (Ely, 1995, p. 619).

333 This example highlights the conflict that targets sometimes experience when their need to feel competent or  
334 connected to the organization outweighs their desire for verification of their chronic identities. The woman quoted by  
335 Ely (1995) had less-than-positive self-views regarding her job abilities, but gradually learned not to reveal these self-  
336 views to others because of her needs for agency and connectedness to her law firm. Thus, try as they might, targets  
337 cannot always satisfy their desires for coherence, agency, and connectedness simultaneously. Perhaps the most  
338 obvious consideration is practical. Employees are generally aware that employers can fire them – or at least refuse to  
339 promote them – if the employer loses confidence in the employees' potential for contributing to the organization. To  
340 prevent this, employees may sometimes suppress identity related motives in their negotiations. For example, targets  
341 with negative self-views may encourage their peers to recognize their areas of incompetence, but suppress their desire  
342 to have their superiors recognize their flaws. Similarly, targets may express their desire for connectedness with their  
343 coworkers but suppress it with their supervisors. The identity negotiation formulation assumes that people are sensitive  
344 to such contingencies and generally learn to negotiate identities that minimize tensions between pragmatic  
345 considerations and their identity related needs. Clearly, however, the suppression of important identities will  
346 sometimes create tension that can ultimately prove costly.

347 Once targets have received and reacted to perceivers' feedback, negotiations should continue in an "offer-  
348 counteroffer" fashion until an agreement is reached regarding who is who. For example, a target who reasserts his  
349 identity as highly intelligent following incongruent feedback must now await further feedback. If the next volley of  
350 appraisals indicates that a discrepancy still exists, the target has several options at his disposal. He may take an even  
351 more forceful approach to communicating his identity, he may accept the appraisal and change his situated self-views  
352 accordingly, or he may even ignore the incongruent appraisal temporarily and compensate by seeking confirmation of  
353 other important identities. Ideally, in interactions characterized by cooperation, targets and perceivers will each make  
354 counteroffers that successively approach a mutually agreeable common ground. Thus, although the target may never  
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355 get his manager to view him as the genius he perceives himself to be, he may convince his manager that he is at least  
356 intelligent enough to merit the competitive promotion that he desires.

357 Over time, targets' use of these corrective negotiation strategies will often yield the desired outcome—identity-  
358 congruent appraisals from perceivers. For example, in the Texas MBA study, individual targets succeeded in bringing  
359 perceivers' appraisals of them closer to their own self-views roughly twice as often as they changed their self-views to  
360 match perceivers' appraisals (Swann et al., 2000).  
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#### 362 2.4. The perceiver's negotiation strategies

363 Once targets and perceivers enter into a relationship, perceivers often present targets with a series of experiences  
364 that are designed to communicate the identities targets are to assume in the relationship. When the perceiver is the  
365 larger organization, it may communicate its expectations through formal written contracts that specify the job-related  
366 expectancies of targets and the consequences of violating those expectancies. Formal contracts, however, pertain only  
367 to those identity expectancies associated with concrete job functions, performance expectations, and compensation  
368 agreements. More expansive in coverage are the implicit, *psychological contracts* that characterize organizational  
369 interactions (Conway & Briner, 2005; Rousseau, 1995). Psychological contracts are employers' and employees'  
370 unwritten assumptions and expectations about what they "owe" one another. In contrast to formal written contracts,  
371 which sketch in a very specific way the mutual duties and responsibilities of employees and organizations,  
372 psychological contracts include informal as well as formal expectations and obligations. Psychological contracts can  
373 have wide-reaching implications for understanding target's work-related attitudes, behaviors, and affective reactions.  
374 For example, to the extent that employees perceive an organization as honoring its obligations under a psychological  
375 contract, they are more likely to perform organizational citizenship behaviors, or voluntary prosocial behaviors that  
376 benefit the organization (Moorman & Byrne, 2005; Robinson & Morrison, 1995).

377 Formal training is another mechanism through which organizations communicate the situated identities that targets  
378 are expected to assume (Kraiger, 2003; Noe, 2005). Although training typically focuses on specific knowledge, skills,  
379 and abilities, it also conveys information about the organization's values and expectations. When, for example,  
380 participants in safety-management programs receive training regarding accident prevention, they learn something  
381 about the culture of the organization—that it values employee health and well-being. Often, training programs also  
382 provide targets with information about meta-cognitive skills, including mental models and decision making strategies,  
383 that are commonly used in the organization (Smith, Ford, & Kozlowski, 1997). The products of such training are  
384 targets who ideally adopt situated, organization-specific identities that are compatible with the preferred situated  
385 appraisals of the larger organization.

386 Socialization is an informal component of the training process (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Through interactions  
387 with coworkers and supervisors, targets gain additional, "insider" information about the culture of the organization  
388 (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). Socialization also provides targets with information about the  
389 core values, goals, policies, and assumptions of the organization (Klein & Weaver, 2000; Van Maanen & Schein,  
390 1979), beyond that which they learn during recruitment and selection. Effective socialization enables targets to  
391 transition easily into their assigned organizational roles, because it supplies them with a cultural perspective that can  
392 be used to interpret novel workplace experiences (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In fact, socialization is a particularly  
393 useful negotiating tactic for organizations because, unlike recruitment and selection, socialization is a continuous  
394 process that extends beyond the initial hiring stage (Schein, 1971; Van Maanen, 1977). To the extent that the  
395 information gleaned from the socialization process is acceptably consistent with targets' chronic identities, they  
396 should be more likely to incorporate it into their situated workplace identities.

397 Experienced employees who mentor newcomers can serve as particularly powerful socializing agents by conveying  
398 information about the organization's culture, identity-related expectations, and norms within the context of a trusting  
399 and supportive relationship (Allen, McManus, & Russell, 1999). This process may bear considerable fruit: compared  
400 to their non-mentored peers, mentored employees exhibit better adjustment, more job commitment, and greater career  
401 success (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Underhill, 2006).

402 The organization's performance appraisal systems constitute another mechanism of identity negotiation. In  
403 addition to providing feedback on specific work goals, the performance appraisal system has become a broader tool  
404 that also includes information pertaining to personal development, organizational socialization, and career  
405 advancement (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995). These systems, when properly executed, specify what is expected of

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targets and offer suggestions for improvements. As such, performance appraisals can constitute a crucial pathway through which identity related information is communicated to targets (as long as they occur relatively frequently; Meyer, 1991). Optimally, organizations should provide continual feedback to targets and encourage them to seek feedback routinely (Steelman, Levy, & Snell, 2004). For the identity negotiation process to unfold smoothly, it is therefore important that organizations motivate targets to seek and use feedback (Ashford & Cummings, 1985; Miller & Jablin, 1991). Indeed, evidence suggests that feedback seeking is associated with high quality performance and interactions in the workplace (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003). We suspect that some of the positive effects of feedback seeking are partly due to targets acquiring an accurate understanding of the organization’s situated appraisal of them. For example, regular feedback seeking is associated with greater agreement between self- and supervisor-evaluations of performance (Williams & Johnson, 2000).

Compensation is yet another mechanism through which organizations can influence the identities of targets. For example, organizations that desire employees with highly cooperative self-views can reward targets who perform prosocial behaviors such as helping coworkers and championing the organization to outsiders (e.g., Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Organ, 1997). More generally, organizations can facilitate a wide array of behaviors and associated self-views by compensating targets who display the desired behaviors (Kerr, 1975).

Through repeated iterations of such processes, perceivers communicate their desired appraisals to targets, and offer feedback to targets concerning their identity relevant behaviors. In doing so, perceivers may gradually elicit identity change from targets. As noted earlier, however, the tendency for perceivers to bring targets’ self-views into alignment with their initial or ideal appraisals seems to be weaker, on average, than the tendency for targets to bring perceivers’ appraisals into line with their strongly held self-views (e.g., McNulty & Swann, 1994; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann et al., 2000).

### 2.5. *The target’s situated identity and perceiver’s situated appraisal*

After Alexander and Well (1969), we use the term “situated identity” to refer to a target’s identity within a specific, circumscribed context or situation, such as the work environment. Akin to Markus and Kunda’s (1986) notion of the “working self-concept,” the situated identity is the currently accessible and active portion of a target’s identity (cf. Lord & Brown, 2004). In this article, we introduce the sister concept, “situated appraisal,” to refer to a perceiver’s impression of a target within a specific context or situation.

As shown in Fig. 1, the situated identities of targets reflect not only their contributions to the identity negotiation process but also inputs from perceivers in the organization. Similarly, the situated appraisals of perceivers are influenced by inputs from targets as well as their own expectations and goals. The wide array of potential influences on these identities creates the possibility of several distinct types of discrepancies, two of which are particularly important. First, targets’ situated identities may conflict with their chronic identities. Second, targets’ situated identities may conflict with perceiver’s situated appraisals of them. We consider each of these types of discrepancies in turn.

Targets who are fortunate enough to enter organizations whose cultures match their own firmly held chronic self-views will find that their situated identities usually support their chronic self-views. This happy state of affairs is far from universal, however. In some instances, for example, people are unable to enter organizations that support their identities, or they unwittingly enter organizations that are less supportive of their identities than they had hoped. In other cases, people will enter organizations that support their identities initially but the organization itself, or their position within it, changes. In still other instances, people may enter organizations with an eye to changing some aspect of their identity. In each of these instances, targets will encounter feedback that challenges their chronic self-views. Such feedback will be especially impactful insofar as the source of the feedback seems highly credible, certain of the appraisal, and trustworthy (e.g., Josephs, Bosson, & Jacobs, 2003; Mayer & Davis, 1999; Steelman et al., 2004; Swann & Ely, 1984).

Discrepancies between targets’ situated and chronic identities will also emerge when targets are forced to satisfy some identity concerns at the expense of frustrating others. This may occur because some phenomena within organizations elicit multiple identities (e.g., transformational leadership activates followers’ collective and relational identities; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). When multiple identities are salient, people must sometimes deal with competing motivations. For example, the stress some organizations place on dependent, interconnected situated identities may force targets who see themselves as independent to relinquish their desire for verification of their independent self-views.

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456 Organizations are not the only source of discrepancies between the chronic and situated identities of targets, for  
457 sometimes targets themselves may accept or even actively create such discrepancies. If targets are highly motivated to  
458 work in a particular position, they may intentionally embrace new identities that contradict their chronic identities.  
459 Indeed, there is growing evidence that targets monitor and sometimes purposely distort the situated identities they  
460 assume at work (Bolino, 1999; Gardner & Martinko, 1988), especially when seeking employment (Birkeland,  
461 Manson, Kisamore, Brannick, & Smith, 2006; Mueller-Hanson, Heggstad, & Thornton, 2003; Snell, Sydell, &  
462 Lueke, 1999). For example, to obtain and maintain an attractive job, a shy person might suppress her ‘true’ identity and  
463 act more sociable and outgoing in her workplace role. Targets may also make conscious decisions to emphasize job-  
464 relevant self-views (competence, confidence, conscientiousness, etc.) and deemphasize irrelevant ones, even though  
465 this may necessitate acting out situated identities that differ from their chronic ones.

466 There are, of course, limits to such phenomena. First, the situated identities must not be too different from the  
467 associated chronic identity (Swann, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002). Second, targets should perceive the chronic identity  
468 that is being overridden by the discrepant situated identity as relatively uncertain, unclear (Campbell et al., 1996;  
469 Maracek & Mettee, 1972; Pelham & Swann, 1994; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann, Pelham, & Chidester, 1988), or  
470 unimportant (Markus, 1977; Pelham, 1991; Swann & Pelham, 2002).

471 Although targets will sometimes tolerate discrepancies between their situated identities and chronic self-views, the  
472 identity negotiation model assumes that it is generally desirable to maximize overlap between situated and chronic  
473 identities (Buss & Briggs, 1984). For one thing, behaving in a manner that is too discrepant from a chronic identity  
474 may be uncomfortable and distracting for targets. Such feelings could undermine performance. To illustrate, MBA  
475 students whose chronic self-views were challenged by the members of their study groups were less committed to their  
476 study groups and less productive than students whose self-views were confirmed (Swann et al., 2000). Other research  
477 suggests that if acting out a discrepant situated identity undermines targets’ feelings of authenticity, emotional  
478 exhaustion may result (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002). Emotional exhaustion in the workplace has been linked, in turn,  
479 with increased job turnover, physical and psychological distress, and decreased job performance (Brotheridge &  
480 Grandey, 2002; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

481 Discrepancies between a target’s situated and chronic identities are not the only source of discomfort and stress in  
482 the workplace, as anxiety may also result from discrepancies between the target’s situated identity and the perceiver’s  
483 situated appraisal of him or her. Even under optimal circumstances, it often takes time for the individual and the  
484 organization to negotiate a mutually acceptable identity for the target to assume. In some instances, initial  
485 discrepancies between targets’ situated identities and the perceiver’s situated appraisals refuse to go away, as when the  
486 individual employee and her or his group members or coworkers are fundamentally incompatible. Such unsuccessful  
487 identity negotiations will likely leave both parties feeling dissatisfied, and may undermine employees’ work attitudes,  
488 performance (Swann et al., 2000), and interest in remaining with the organization (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005;  
489 Schneider et al., 1995). These and related outcomes of the identity negotiation process will be considered next.

## 490 2.6. *Work outcomes of the identity negotiation process*

491 When targets successfully negotiate situated identities that are reasonably similar to their chronic identities, a  
492 “working consensus” is achieved (Goffman, 1959). Such a consensus sets the stage for targets and perceivers to  
493 pursue the goals that brought them together in the first place. The extent to which the working consensus “works” for  
494 both parties will influence a wide array of outcomes.

### 495 2.6.1. *Job performance*

496 Identity negotiation theory assumes that people perform best when their chronic identities (or at least, their situated  
497 identities) are supported by the organization. In support of this proposition, there is evidence that study group members  
498 who are evaluated congruently outperform those who do not and this was true whether the evaluations confirmed  
499 negative or positive self-views (Swann et al., 2000).

500 As noted earlier, targets sometimes experience discrepancies between their chronic and situated identities, as when  
501 a job they want requires qualities or proficiencies that are inconsistent with their self-views, abilities, or both. Although  
502 such discrepancies may degrade the performance of many people, others (e.g., high self-monitors; Snyder, 1987) may  
503 not only tolerate situated identities that are discrepant with their chronic ones, they may actually flourish. For example,  
504 in jobs that emphasize interpersonal competition (e.g., financial brokers), non-assertive targets who are high in self-

504 monitoring (and thus acutely sensitive to situational cues to performance) may feign aggressiveness and thus perform  
505 well. Similarly, in positions that require a high degree of interdependence and interpersonal sensitivity (e.g., virtual  
506 teams that use groupware), high self-monitors may successfully negotiate a highly sociable situated identity even if  
507 they are normally shy and withdrawn. In these and similar instances, the capacity for targets to free themselves from  
508 their chronic identities may facilitate job effectiveness.

509 Thus far, the discussion has been limited to the impact of identity negotiation processes on *task* performance, as in  
510 duties that contribute directly to the products or services that the organization provides (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997).  
511 Job performance also entails extra-role behaviors that may be influenced by the identity negotiation process. For  
512 example, a strong match between the organization’s culture and the target’s situated identity may predict more  
513 frequent performance of organizational citizenship behaviors (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006), such as volunteering at  
514 company functions and staying late to assist coworkers (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Employees who perform such  
515 prosocial behaviors benefit both their coworkers and organizations (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Organ, 1997;  
516 Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bacharach, 2000).

517 Likewise, the breakdown of the identity negotiation process may foment a host of interpersonal difficulties  
518 (Campbell, McHenry, & Wise, 1990). For example, targets whose identities are disconfirmed by the appraisals of  
519 others in the organization may react with verbal aggression and bullying that could undermine performance (see Bies  
520 & Tripp, 2001). Such counterproductive behaviors might also emerge due to faulty person perception processes.  
521 Consider, for example, a supervisor who unwittingly “rewards” a shy subordinate by asking her to deliver a  
522 prestigious speech. Such failures of the identity negotiation process may degrade feelings of trust in the organization  
523 and thereby undermine productivity.

### 525 2.6.2. Organizational commitment, withdrawal, and turnover

526 In addition to job performance, identity-congruent appraisals may also affect targets’ attachment to coworkers and  
527 the organization. For example, targets who receive feedback that verifies their chronic identities report higher levels of  
528 commitment to their work team (Swann et al., 2000) and organization (Swartzeneruber et al., 2007).

529 Interestingly, different situated identities may lead to qualitatively different types of organizational commitment.  
530 Johnson and Chang (2006, 2008), for example, found that employees with salient interdependent self-views placed  
531 greater emphasis on their level of *affective* commitment to their organization (i.e., genuine emotional attachment to the  
532 organization and acceptance of organizational goals and values). In contrast, employees with salient independent self-  
533 views displayed *continuance* commitment (i.e., commitment stemming from recognition of the personal costs  
534 associated with leaving one’s organization; Allen & Meyer, 1990). Thus, situated identities that are more  
535 interdependent may foster a form of organizational commitment that is more genuine and relatively unconditional  
536 (Johnson, Chang, & Yang, 2007; Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004).

537 Because commitment is a key antecedent of employee withdrawal (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979;  
538 Steers & Rhodes, 1978), it is not surprising that incongruence between targets’ situated identities and the appraisals of  
539 the organization predicts absenteeism and tardiness (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). More extreme forms of withdrawal,  
540 such as turnover, may also result when targets’ identities contrast with organizational appraisals (Hoffman & Woehr,  
541 2006). For example, in a longitudinal study, among employees with high self-esteem, those who failed to receive pay  
542 raises were most apt to quit their jobs. In contrast, among employees with low self-esteem, attrition was highest among  
543 those who received raises (Schroeder, Josephs, & Swann, 2006). Apparently, people become dissatisfied and leave  
544 their jobs when they receive professional feedback – in the form of financial compensation – that is inconsistent with  
545 their identities. And in those instances in which practical considerations preclude quitting, targets who feel  
546 misunderstood may nevertheless withdraw effort and performance will suffer accordingly.

### 547 2.6.3. Relationship quality

548 In general, the self-verification literature suggests that people’s satisfaction with their relationships increases to the  
549 extent that their partners view them in a manner that confirms their chronic self-views (e.g., Swann et al., 1994). There  
550 exists at least one key class of exceptions to this rule, however. If the survival of the relationship depends on targets’  
551 possession of a certain quality (e.g., “physical attractiveness” for people in a romantic relationship), people eschew  
552 their chronic identities in favor of situated identities that insure the survival of the relationship (Swann et al., 2002).

553 The consequences of identity negotiations in organizations may be magnified by the fact that such settings offer  
554 targets opportunities to verify multiple self-views, with multiple different relationship partners (Swann et al., 2004).



554 For example, a manager may receive confirming appraisals pertaining to her technical expertise (personal self-view),  
555 her ability to mentor a protégé (relational self-view), and her role as an executive officer of a Fortune 500 company  
556 (collective self-view). Identity verification at multiple levels should be especially effective in creating harmonious  
557 interpersonal relationships and satisfied employees (e.g., London, 2003; Swann et al., 2000, 2003).  
558

#### 559 2.6.4. Perceived fairness of the organization

560 In general, when people are treated in ways that are consistent with their expectations and with normative standards  
561 (e.g., Folger & Cropanzano, 1998), they perceive that they are being treated fairly. Identity negotiation is relevant here  
562 because one source of perceived fairness may be the perception that one's identity is honored by interaction partners.  
563 When targets and perceivers establish mutually acceptable situated identities, it creates the expectation that one's  
564 identity will be honored (Goffman, 1959). Employees typically gauge fairness at three levels (Colquitt, 2001;  
565 Greenberg, 1993): *distributive* (e.g., Do my outcomes reflect what I deserve?), *procedural* (e.g., Do the rules that guide  
566 organizational actions meet my expectations?), and *interpersonal* (e.g., Am I being treated as I should?). A breakdown  
567 in identity negotiations at any of these levels would contribute to perceptions of unfairness (Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005;  
568 Blader & Tyler, 2005).

569 Targets' chronic self-views may influence the types of cues that they emphasize in gauging the fairness of  
570 organizations (Johnson, Selenta, & Lord, 2006; Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999). Those who view themselves as  
571 independent may focus on the fairness of objective outcomes and how they are allocated. Conversely, targets with  
572 interdependent situated identities are more attuned to the interpersonal treatment that they receive from the  
573 organization (Johnson et al., 2006).

574 The positivity and certainty of targets' self-esteem can also influence their reactions to justice in the workplace. For  
575 example, narcissistic people, who possess exalted but uncertain self-views, punish unfair treatment with aggression  
576 (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004; Penney & Spector, 2002). Similarly, people with true high  
577 self-esteem display less commitment to organizations that treat them unfairly, as they feel deserving of fair treatment.  
578 In contrast, people with low self-esteem tolerate unfair treatment and even indicate that they feel more known and  
579 understood by organizations that treat them unfairly, apparently because such individuals are not convinced that they  
580 deserve fair treatment (Wiesenfeld et al., 2007).

#### 581 2.6.5. Health and well-being

582 Identity negotiation theory assumes that a lack of correspondence between targets' identities and the appraisals they  
583 receive from perceivers will have unfavorable consequences for affect and well-being. In general, even when identity-  
584 disconfirming events are more positive than expected, they increase anxiety (Burke, 2004; Wood, Heimpel, Newby-  
585 Clark, & Ross, 2005), trigger physiological stress reactions (Ayduk, Mendes, Akinola, & Gyurak, in preparation) and  
586 predict decreases in physical health (Brown & McGill, 1989; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004). Although none of this  
587 research was conducted in organizational settings, there is reason to believe that similar effects will arise there as well.  
588 For example, role ambiguity (i.e., uncertainty about others' appraisals) and role conflict (i.e., incompatibility among  
589 the appraisals of others or between one's own identity and others' appraisals) are common stressors that employees  
590 encounter on the job (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Such role stressors are associated with high levels of anxiety  
591 and tension and other psychological and physiological strains (Jackson & Schuler, 1985). Moreover, as noted earlier,  
592 employees report heightened levels of psychological distress when they are forbidden from displaying personal  
593 possessions that communicate unique aspects of their identity to others (Elsbach, 2003). Presumably, the inability to  
594 communicate identity relevant information in this manner creates distress because it promotes real (or perceived)  
595 discrepancies between targets' chronic and/or situated identities and perceivers' situated appraisals of them.

#### 596 2.7. The target's resulting identity and goals

597 As shown in Fig. 1, the final steps in our model consist of the resulting identity and goals of targets and perceivers at  
598 the conclusion of a given iteration of the identity negotiation process. We consider targets first. Although targets' final  
599 identities will usually resemble their initial identities, identities can shift during the identity negotiation process,  
600 especially when one considers that identity negotiation is an iterative process that may repeat itself over a period of  
601 months or even years. In this sense, the identity negotiation model can accommodate change as well as stability of self-  
602 views. Consider the case of work groups in which the group's situated appraisals of its individual members gradually

602 encourage those individuals to change their self-views. In one investigation of such processes, a substantial minority of  
603 the dyads exhibited identity change over a 3-month period, with targets' self-views gradually shifting toward the initial  
604 appraisals that group members held of them (Swann et al., 2000).

605  
606 The foregoing discussion points to both personal and situational variables that will increase the probability of  
607 relatively permanent identity change. Personal variables that are associated with change include initial identities of  
608 targets that are relatively unimportant or uncertain. Relevant situational variables include the degree to which targets  
609 recognize that they can meet some important need only by relinquishing one or more identities. For example, if a target  
610 decides that to be competent in her new job she must become more directive with her subordinates, she may relinquish  
611 her easygoing identity in favor of a more assertive one.

### 612 2.8. *The perceiver's resulting identity and goals*

613 The organization's culture, and the identity it fosters, is largely dependent upon the industry and business context in  
614 which the company is embedded (Ostroff et al., 2003). For this reason, change in organizational identity is often  
615 triggered by environmental disruptions such as industry discontinuities (e.g., drastic change in political or  
616 technological conditions; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985). Nevertheless, it is also true that the organization's identity is  
617 based on the cumulative self-views of its individual members (Schneider, 1987, 1990), making internally directed  
618 change possible (Cummings & Worley, 2001). Hence, to the extent that targets negotiate situated identities that are  
619 incompatible with the organization's culture, individual perceivers within the organization, and even the larger  
620 organization itself, may be compelled to adopt new identities and goals as well.

621 Having said this, we must add a qualifier. When one considers changes in the identities of perceivers in the  
622 organization, it is important to consider exactly which perceiver one is referring to. In general, changing the identities  
623 or goals of individual perceivers (e.g., coworkers) will be far easier than changing the identity of the larger  
624 organization. After all, an organization's culture and identity can often be traced to founders who possess charismatic  
625 personalities, unwavering values, and well-articulated visions (Furnham & Gunter, 1993; Tushman, Newman, &  
626 Nadler, 1988). The situated appraisals communicated by these powerful figures can override competing appraisals,  
627 and disproportionately shape how other members of the organization think and act. Nevertheless, it is possible to  
628 change an organization's identity, particularly if the organization is in its infancy, there is discontentment and identity  
629 change among its members, and "resisters" (i.e., champions for the status quo) are terminated (Cummings & Worley,  
630 2001).

## 631 3. The interpersonal roots of congruence: principles of identity negotiation

632 In this section, we identify and discuss several principles that theoretically guide the process of identity negotiation.  
633 Largely through trial and error, people learn rules of social interaction and communication that ensure that most  
634 identity negotiations unfold smoothly (cf., Athay & Darley, 1980; Goffman, 1959; Grice, 1978). Although people  
635 routinely conform to these rules, the rules themselves remain implicit and adherence is typically unwitting and non-  
636 conscious (Jones & Pittman, 1982). We should emphasize, however, that this is an idealized model that is designed to  
637 describe how this process should occur *optimally* as compared to how it operates ordinarily. Also, although we believe  
638 that the four principles that we list here are particularly important, the list is not intended to be exhaustive.

### 639 3.1. *The clarity principle*

640 During organizational identity negotiations, clarity concerning the identities that targets will assume is important if  
641 they are to successfully satisfy their desires for coherence, connectedness, and agency. Ambiguity regarding matters of  
642 identity throws interaction partners off balance and can undermine trust among coworkers. In extreme cases,  
643 ambiguity may result in miscommunications that, in turn, undermine job performance and organizational  
644 commitment. Although there are contexts in which ambiguity is unavoidable (e.g., when optimal role assignments are  
645 unclear), in most instances it is best to strive for clarity in the identities people will assume in the organization. By the  
646 same token, targets should avoid negotiating identities that are irrelevant to their relationship with the perceiver. This is  
647 to say that the clarity principle applies only if targets intend to assume a particular identity with the perceiver (see also  
648 the compatibility principle below).

648 To foster clarity of identities, organizational leaders should promote a culture in which organizational roles, and the  
649 behaviors associated with them, are clearly delineated (Adler & Borys, 1996; O’Connell, Cummings, & Huber, 1976).  
650 Likewise, once targets have determined the identity that they plan to assume, they should communicate this identity to  
651 others as quickly and clearly as possible. Moreover, targets should communicate their desired identity via as many  
652 channels of communication as possible, as redundancy provides others with corroborating information and thereby  
653 diminishes the probability of misunderstanding and conflict. For example, as noted, people may simultaneously  
654 communicate their preferred identities through both verbalizations and the display of identity cues (Goffman, 1959;  
655 Gosling et al., 2002; Schlenker, 1980; Swann, 1983).  
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657 Of course, maximal clarity is only possible insofar as targets are certain about the identity that they want to  
658 negotiate. If targets are uncertain of a given situated identity either for situational reasons (e.g., they are unfamiliar  
659 with the job requirements) or dispositional reasons (e.g., they are uncertain of their ability to deliver performances  
660 associated with a given role), assuming that identity may provoke anxiety. In such instances, targets may choose to lay  
661 back and search for additional cues regarding the identity that they should assume. As a result, such individuals may be  
662 particularly inclined to adopt identities that behaviorally confirm the expectations of perceivers (e.g., Snyder & Klein,  
663 2005; Snyder & Swann, 1978).

664 In addition, at times, targets may intentionally *conceal* cues to an identity. For example, if targets fear that the cue  
665 that they are using to signal a valued social identity has been or might be “poached” by members of an outgroup, they  
666 may simply refrain from displaying that cue. Although we know of no direct tests of this hypothesis, there is evidence  
667 that when an identity cue has been appropriated by members of an outgroup, targets abandon its use. In one study, for  
668 example, a group of college students stopped wearing a fashionable wristband when members of a geeky dorm began  
669 wearing it (Berger & Heath, 2007, 2008). Although withholding identity cues may seem to violate the clarity principle,  
670 the spirit of the clarity principle is being followed if the intent is to ensure that an identity cue is not contaminated by  
671 association with a disliked outgroup.

### 672 3.2. The cooperation principle

673 Members of organizations should cooperate with one another by honoring the identities they offer one another.  
674 Failing to honor others’ important identities may be perceived as violating norms of interpersonal fairness in the  
675 organization (Lamertz, 2002) and may thereby undermine feelings of connectedness. Moreover, violations of the  
676 cooperation principle may undermine targets’ sense of agency (if they receive appraisals that fail to verify a favorable  
677 identity related to job performance) and coherence (if they receive appraisals that fail to verify chronic identities).

678 Organizations often have formalized structures urging coworkers, managers, and subordinates to honor the  
679 identities that others negotiate. For example, clear-cut hierarchical roles (such as those found in bureaucratic  
680 organizations) often mandate subordinate behaviors that confirm the identities of their superiors (Burns & Stalker,  
681 1961; Merton, 1940). Even informal structures – such as psychological contracts – can facilitate cooperation by  
682 shaping people’s expectations about the benefits that will accrue if they honor others’ identities (Rousseau, 1995).  
683 Relatively unstructured organizations that lack formalized hierarchies (e.g., organic organizations; Burns & Stalker,  
684 1961) may be at greater risk for violations of the cooperation principle. Such violations can sow seeds of discord in  
685 organizations. For example, employees who fail to honor important aspects of their supervisor’s identity are likely to  
686 undermine leader-member exchange (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), perhaps inspiring ostracism from the leader’s in-  
687 group.

688 An organization’s culture and structure are not the only (and may not even be the primary) factors that influence  
689 cooperation during identity negotiations, however. For example, *climate strength* – the extent to which organization  
690 members agree about the practices, policies, and values of the organization – may contribute substantially to  
691 cooperation. This may occur because the compatible viewpoint shared by employees in organizations with strong  
692 climates fosters effective interactions between targets and perceivers and creates a sense of esprit de corps. It is thus  
693 encouraging that high levels of climate strength can be achieved in both bureaucratic and organic organizations  
694 (Dickson, Resick, & Hanges, 2006).

695 The likelihood of cooperation may also vary as a function of the target’s job status or rank. In relationships between  
696 leaders and subordinates, for example, subordinates will experience more pressure to honor the leaders’ identities than  
697 vice versa. Furthermore, regardless of position, targets will be more motivated to elicit confirmation for firmly held and  
698 important identities than uncertain or unimportant identities. Similarly, those with strongly held expectations about a

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coworker's identity will be especially reluctant to honor an identity claim that violates their expectancy. In such instances, cooperation is still possible, provided that both parties are able and willing to be flexible. When both parties are strongly invested in conflicting conceptions of a given target's identity, however, cooperation may not be possible and conflict may result.

### 3.3. The continuity principle

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In their personal relationships, perceivers expect a certain degree of predictability and consistency from targets (Athay & Darley, 1982; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). Organizations also prefer predictability and continuity from employees, and will often institutionalize this preference in the form of explicit and implicit expectations for individual behavior, as well as rules that define the larger organizational culture. For all of these reasons, the identity negotiation process will proceed more smoothly insofar as people maintain continuity across time in the identities that they negotiate.

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A challenge to the continuity principle may occur when targets shift to a different position, as occurs during promotions (or demotions), or when different self-views become salient, as when a job requires that the target display a novel skill set (interpersonal skills as compared to number crunching). Such shifts can pose problems for targets, as they must reconcile the new identity with their existing identities, a process that can be stressful and anxiety provoking (Hill, 1992; Ibarra, 1999). Ordinarily, such transitions are finessed through cognitive gymnastics that are designed to maximize the apparent overlap between the old and new identities. One such strategy is discussed by McAdams (1996, 1999), who suggests that people may facilitate overlap between old and new identities by structuring their multiple identities around underlying cognitive or affective themes. For example, themes of efficacy characterize many of the identities targets negotiate in organizations, providing cognitive unity to the multiple roles that they enact. Similarly, targets may imbue their various identities with a common affective tone, such as optimism, humor, pessimism, or passive acceptance. Using such higher level cognitive and affective themes, targets may perceive continuity between two or more identities that outside observers might perceive as conflicting. Depending on the particulars of the relationship between such targets and the observers who perceive the discrepancy, this state of affairs could jeopardize the identity negotiation process.

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Cognitive gymnastics notwithstanding, problems can emerge when targets are promoted to positions in which they are supervising former coworkers (e.g., Hill, 1992). Not wanting to threaten existing social connections or alienate coworker friends, promoted targets may attempt to enact, simultaneously, the incompatible identities of buddy and boss with their subordinates. Such discontinuity can threaten the quality of relationships between coworkers, as well as undermine job performance and even threaten worker morale. Such instances are theoretically interesting because they simultaneously violate not only the continuity principle, but also the compatibility principle described in the next section.

### 3.4. The compatibility principle

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Whereas the continuity principle refers to the relationship of the same identity at two or more points in time, the compatibility principle refers to the relationship between different identities at a single point in time. Although some relationships within organizations are highly constrained and one dimensional (e.g., the relationship between an executive and the custodian who cleans her office), most relationships require people to relate to one another as multi-dimensional human beings. In such cases, people will negotiate a wide range of identities of a more idiosyncratic and personal nature, and these identities will define who they are as human beings as well as employees in particular roles.

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The compatibility principle states that there should be coherence to the different identities that targets negotiate, both within a single relationship and across multiple relationships. Several different forms of compatibility are of interest here. One common form occurs within a given relationship when two people know one another in separate contexts that call for distinct identities. Just as friends or married people who happen to be coworkers know one another on both a personal and professional level, coworkers sometimes know one another within several different units in the organization (e.g., academics may know one another as colleagues within a department but also as members of various organizations within a university). In these and similar instances, people should avoid negotiating identities that are fundamentally incompatible with each other because such incompatibility can create confusion and undermine trust. For example, the senior executive who treats her junior colleague like an equal during one-on-one



746 meetings, but assumes an authoritarian role during faculty meetings, risks being perceived by the junior colleague as  
747 an untrustworthy and capricious relationship partner.  
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749 Compatibility issues may also arise when individuals must negotiate discrepant identities with two or more  
750 relationship partners in different contexts. Between-relationship incompatibility may occur, for example, when the  
751 identity that a target negotiates with coworkers is fundamentally inconsistent with the identities that he or she  
752 negotiates with relationship partners outside the workplace. Consider the individual whose work role calls for  
753 assertiveness, competitiveness, and rigid adherence to a tight schedule, and whose family role calls for warmth,  
754 patience, and flexibility. Research on work–family conflict indicates that perceived incompatibility between work and  
755 family roles predicts diminished job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Lambert, Pasupuleti, Cluse-Tolar,  
756 Jennings, & Baker, 2006; Williams & Alliger, 1994). Problems associated with work–family incompatibility may be  
757 particularly threatening for individuals high in work centrality (Paullay, Alliger, & Stone-Romero, 1994), because  
758 these individuals' work-related identities are so central to their self-concepts.

759 One final form of incompatibility arises because social interaction typically occurs over several different channels  
760 at once. Usually some aspects of the identity negotiation process occur over the verbal channel, as when people  
761 introduce themselves to one another or disclose background information. Large amounts of information are also  
762 communicated nonverbally, however. Careful analyses of social interaction, for example, have revealed that nonverbal  
763 cues – such as extremely rapid facial expressions and body language – can convey more meaning than verbalizations  
764 (Birdwhistell, 1970). Cues such as facial expressiveness, distance from others, vocal interruptions, and physical touch  
765 can all communicate information about the status and power associated with a given identity (Hall, 1996; Hall, Coats,  
766 & LeBeau, 2005).

767 Although the information communicated in different channels will often be redundant, it can also be distinct. For  
768 example, people may sometimes communicate one message verbally yet precisely the opposite message nonverbally.  
769 In one study, people interacting with low self-esteem persons refrained from communicating their disdain for such  
770 individuals in the explicit, verbal channel but unwittingly conveyed their disliking in the implicit, nonverbal channel  
771 (e.g., Swann et al., 1992). The ambivalent reactions that individuals with low self-esteem elicit may be sufficiently  
772 bewildering that they contribute to these individuals' tendency toward self-uncertainty (e.g., Baumgardner, 1990;  
773 Campbell, 1990). In an organizational setting, such mixed messages could create confusion about one's job  
774 performance, and perhaps even undermine job satisfaction, interpersonal harmony, and commitment to the  
775 organization.

776 In many cases, however, people deftly avoid confronting the implications of conflicts between their various  
777 identities. Targets may, for example, carefully compartmentalize their relationships so that perceivers with whom they  
778 negotiate some specific identities never realize that they have negotiated incompatible identities with other perceivers.  
779 Biases in information processing may also help avoid strain due to incompatible identities. Targets may, for example,  
780 selectively attend to aspects of their identities that are compatible with one another and ignore or deemphasize areas of  
781 incompatibility (Swann & Read, 1981; Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987). Moreover, people may create  
782 overarching identities – or meta-self-schemas – that lend higher-level coherence to identities that are incompatible at a  
783 lower level. In these and similar ways, people are often able to impose order on seemingly disharmonious clusters of  
784 identities.

785 In summary, in a perfect world, identity negotiators will faithfully adhere to the principles of clarity, cooperation,  
786 continuity, and compatibility. The result will be congruence between perceivers' situated appraisals and targets'  
787 situated (and sometimes chronic) identities. Nevertheless, the world is seldom perfect, which means that identity  
788 negotiators will sometimes encounter various threats to congruence.

#### 789 4. Threats to identity congruence

790 At the most general level, perceivers will develop incongruent impressions of targets when targets fail to follow the  
791 cooperation principle. Such failures often occur when perceivers develop firmly held expectancies that are non-  
792 verifying, such as erroneous social stereotypes or idiosyncratic impressions. Whatever form they take, expectancies  
793 can encourage perceivers to overlook unique features of targets, harbor inaccurate beliefs about them, or both. The  
794 result will be that targets are deprived of self-verification. For example, in the Texas MBA study, perceivers who  
795 formed relatively negative initial impressions of targets on several personal qualities (e.g., intelligence, sociability)  
796 failed to individuate them (Swann, Kwan, Polzer, & Milton, 2003a). Such failures to individuate, in turn, meant that

796 targets received relatively little self-verification later in the semester. In this study, then, negative initial impressions set  
797 the stage for incongruent impressions several weeks later.

799 In a related investigation of the factors that prompt perceivers to relinquish their gender stereotypes, perceivers who  
800 individuated targets on gender-related qualities were more apt to verify the gender-related self-views of targets later in  
801 the semester. The extent of self-verification was, in turn, positively associated with the extent to which perceivers  
802 eventually abandoned their gender stereotypes (Swann, Kwan, Polzer, & Milton, 2003b).

803 Incongruence may also emerge when targets fail to follow the clarity principle. Targets who are uncertain of a self-  
804 view, for example, are less likely to elicit self-verifying evaluations than their highly certain counterparts (Pelham &  
805 Swann, 1994; Swann & Ely, 1984). Targets may also fail to elicit self-verifying evaluations if they are lower in status or  
806 power than the perceiver. Low status minorities, for example, may fail to express themselves because they fear that  
807 members of the dominant group will reject them for being different (e.g., Polzer & Caruso, 2007). In addition, those in  
808 positions of power may fail to note cues from targets that would foster individuation (e.g., Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, &  
809 Gruenfeld, 2006; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003).

810 In addition, minority targets may recognize cues that signal devaluation of their social identities in their workplace,  
811 such as low minority representation in positions of power (e.g., Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Crosby,  
812 2008). Such cues may foster the perception that others believe that they cannot perform adequately, which may trigger  
813 anxiety. This anxiety may diminish targets' ability or willingness to fully disclose their identity and associated feelings  
814 and perceptions—a "stereotype threat" effect (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1994). And even if low status targets are not  
815 members of minority groups, they may suffer evaluation apprehension due to the knowledge that their fate is  
816 controlled by a superior who may not have their best interests at heart.

817 Minorities who find themselves in diverse groups may try to cope with their anxiety by relying on "safer," implicit  
818 modes of communicating their identities instead of verbal, explicit modes (e.g., Polzer & Caruso, 2007). Unfortunately,  
819 because implicit modes of communication typically rely on indirect, nonverbal signals, they are more prone to  
820 misinterpretation and misunderstanding than direct, verbal signals. For example, when a target attempts to communicate  
821 group membership through the clothes she wears or by the way she speaks, she is banking on the assumption that  
822 perceivers will know and understand the implicit rules that guided her choice of clothing or speaking style—an  
823 assumption that may often be inaccurate. No wonder, then, that researchers have discovered that explicit (i.e., verbal)  
824 identity negotiation strategies promote more congruence than implicit negotiation strategies (e.g., Polzer, Caruso, &  
825 London, 2006).

826 In the foregoing example, in which the target's insecurity due to low status led her to display identity cues with  
827 which the perceiver was unfamiliar, it would appear that the target sabotaged her own self-verification efforts.  
828 Nevertheless, one could argue that the perceiver also played a role in this failure of self-verification, for a perceiver  
829 who was more knowledgeable about the target's culture or subculture would have been able to correctly decode her  
830 identity cues.

831 In related scenarios, perceivers and targets may not only see the same behavior as indicative of different identities,  
832 they may also associate the same identity with different behaviors. For example, whereas a manager may believe that  
833 fairness is communicated by displaying equivalent amounts of warmth to all employees, his employees may believe  
834 that fairness is defined by the amount of money different employees receive in their paychecks. In these instances and  
835 related ones, targets may fail to receive self-verifying feedback because perceivers and targets are speaking "different  
836 languages" of identity negotiation.

837 Finally, incongruence may arise when organizational policies or norms are structured in ways that reduce the  
838 likelihood of recognizing targets' unique identities. This may often occur when the target's identity has a low base rate in  
839 the population. Examples include ethnic or religious identities that are relatively rare. A more common example is targets  
840 who have low self-esteem. For example, although most people have highly favorable self-views (e.g., Diener & Diener,  
841 1995), including flattering beliefs about their work-related skills and job performance (e.g., Atwater, 1998; Harris &  
842 Schaubroeck, 1988; Meyer, 1980), roughly a third of people have relatively negative beliefs about themselves  
843 (e.g., Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007). This means that the indiscriminate use of praise will be experienced  
844 as non-verifying for employees whose self-views tell them that they do not deserve praise. Instead, recipients of feedback  
845 must perceive it as *contingent* on their actual identities and accomplishments. To this end, feedback should communicate  
846 accurate, detailed information about mastery (or lack thereof) of specific job-relevant tasks. This is especially important  
847 when providing feedback to employees with low global self-esteem, as such individuals have, paradoxically, been shown  
848 to be ambivalent about feedback that connotes worthiness (Wiesenfeld et al., 2007).

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849 A key assumption underlying the foregoing discussion is that identity congruence is adaptive and desirable.  
850 Nevertheless, skeptics might challenge this assumption by contending that although congruence makes targets more  
851 comfortable with the organization, it suffers from the same crucial disadvantage that plagues person–organization fit.  
852 Specifically, like fit, identity congruence might encourage people to remain in their patterns and resist change, thereby  
853 impeding innovation (e.g., Nemeth & Staw, 1989; Sutton, 2001). In the next section, we challenge such speculations  
854 by arguing that they are based on a failure to appreciate fully the implications of the target-to-perceiver flow of  
855 influence that typifies the identity negotiation process.

## 856 5. Is there a down side to identity congruence? Leveraging identity negotiation for organizational 857 change and innovation

858 Critics of person–organization congruence or fit (e.g., Nemeth & Staw, 1989; Sutton, 2001) contend that, in the  
859 interests of fit, the organization labels potential dissenters as “deviants” who must be eliminated lest they obstruct the  
860 organization’s ability to achieve its goals and devise a shared solution. Although this strategy may minimize conflict,  
861 critics assert that eliminating dissent can be costly. That is, even when wrong, dissent is thought to encourage groups to  
862 think more divergently and ultimately to solve problems more creatively (Nemeth & Kwan, 1985; Nemeth &  
863 Wachtler, 1983). In the end, the organization that places a high priority on fit may create a homogeneous climate in  
864 which creative ideas are never expressed. Be this as it may, it does not appear that these same arguments apply to  
865 identity congruence.

### 866 5.1. Identity congruence and creativity

867 Investigations of the impact of identity congruence paint a very different picture of its relationship to creativity than  
868 the one painted by critics of person–organization fit. Instead of stifling creativity, identity congruence actually seems to  
869 promote creativity. Consider findings from the Texas MBA study, in which identity congruence stemmed from either  
870 self-verification or appraisal effects (Swann et al., 2000). As noted earlier, when congruence grew out of self-  
871 verification (i.e., the extent to which targets brought perceivers to see them as they saw themselves), performance on  
872 creative tasks improved—precisely the opposite of the pattern predicted by critics of fit. Furthermore, even congruence  
873 that stemmed from appraisal effects (which occurred when perceivers brought targets to see themselves as perceivers  
874 initially saw them) was beneficial in that it predicted improved performance on computational tasks. In short,  
875 congruence that reflected target-to-perceiver influence optimized creativity and congruence that reflected perceiver-  
876 to-target influence optimized performance on non-creative tasks. Furthermore, because verification effects tend to be  
877 more common than appraisal effects (e.g., McNulty & Swann, 1994; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann et al., 2000), one can  
878 conclude that identity congruence typically fosters creativity.

879 How did congruence foster creativity? Evidence from the Texas MBA study indicated that feeling that one is known  
880 and understood by other members of the organization makes people feel more connected to the group (Swann et al.,  
881 2000), which, in turn, presumably allays social anxiety. This is significant because anxiety may cause people to “clam  
882 up” and suppress innovative but “iffy” ideas. Feeling connected may thus embolden targets to open up and express  
883 ideas and hypotheses that would have otherwise been suppressed. The result is that group members who enjoy  
884 congruence share a relatively wide array of ideas with the group, and these ideas serve as grist for the creativity mill.

885 Identity congruence may not only reduce *social* anxiety by fostering feelings of connectedness, it may also bolster  
886 feelings of coherence and thereby reduce *epistemic* anxiety—that is, anxiety associated with doubt regarding the  
887 validity of one’s knowledge system. Indeed, researchers have provided converging evidence that congruence  
888 diminishes anxiety, even when it involves confirming identities that are negative. For instance, one study demonstrated  
889 that whereas high self-esteem persons were relieved by success, low self-esteem participants reported feeling less  
890 anxious after failure, apparently because success was surprising and unsettling for those low in self-esteem (Wood  
891 et al., 2005). A separate team of researchers reported parallel results using an implicit (cardiovascular activation) index  
892 of anxiety: Whereas people with positive self-views grew anxious when they received negative evaluations, people  
893 with negative self-views grew anxious when they received positive evaluations. Moreover, people with negative self-  
894 views seemed “galvanized” (aroused, but in a positive manner) by negative feedback (Ayduk et al., in preparation).  
895 Still another study offered evidence that providing depressed people with negative but congruent feedback may  
896 actually lay the groundwork for raising self-esteem (Finn & Tonsager, 1992). In this study, depressed college students

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897 enjoyed improvements in self-esteem when they received verifying (i.e., negative) feedback paired with social support  
898 from a therapist. Apparently, validating targets' identities fostered a sense of coherence and diminished anxiety. This  
899 increased targets' readiness to internalize supportive feedback into their self-views. In short, identity congruence  
900 fosters feelings of connectedness and coherence, which in turn inoculates targets against a powerful enemy of change  
901 and innovation: anxiety.

902 In addition to considerations involving the direction of causal influence in the group, there may be an independent  
903 set of reasons why achieving identity congruence does not impede change and innovation as person–organization fit  
904 may. As noted earlier, identities are profoundly different from the variables that fit researchers focus on, which include  
905 values, abilities, and goals. Most important, identities are multi-faceted, flexible, and supremely nuanced. In fact,  
906 when workers seek self-verification, they can select, from a wide palette of identities, the particular identity that is best  
907 suited for meeting their needs in that specific context.

## 5.2. Identity substitution

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909 When organizations change, workers must often adopt new identities so that they can assume new roles in the  
910 organization. Although identity change can pose a threat to the target's feelings of coherence, anxiety can be  
911 diminished by encouraging the target to substitute an existing identity for the one that they must relinquish. Identity  
912 substitution can take several different forms. In the simplest case, targets who are promoted to a new position may be  
913 encouraged to shift from emphasizing the verification of one personal identity (e.g., “organized”) to one that is more  
914 compatible with the new position (e.g., “assertive”). Alternatively, targets may be encouraged to suspend efforts to  
915 verify a *personal* identity and shift instead to focusing on the verification of a *relational* or *collective* identity. Consider  
916 an illustrative case study of workers on offshore oil platforms (Ely & Meyerson, 2008). In such dangerous settings,  
917 members of the largely male workforce historically placed a premium on displays of “manliness”: toughness,  
918 proficiency, and detachment. Nevertheless, when management initiated a movement that was designed to make the  
919 workplace safer, workers abandoned their efforts to maintain their “manly” personal identities and instead embraced  
920 “safe worker” social identities. The result was that the group members began to exemplify non-masculine qualities  
921 that promoted safety, such as disclosing personal limitations and displaying empathy toward coworkers.

922 A common trigger for the identity substitution process is a shift in the identity related motive that happens to be  
923 most salient to targets. In the study of oil platform workers, for example, workers' desire for connectedness prompted  
924 them to shift to a “safe worker” social identity that overrode their desire to verify their self-perceived masculinity.  
925 Hence, the desire for connectedness trumped the desire for coherence.

926 In other instances, management may need to bring workers to prioritize their connectedness needs over their agency  
927 needs in the service of identity substitution. Consider a member of a team of office workers who must be persuaded to  
928 perform an essential but colorless “background” role during an inter-office competition. To this end, her supervisor  
929 may try to persuade her that her connectedness needs must take priority over her agency needs. If successful, the target  
930 will abandon her usual emphasis on personal achievement and “take a hit for the team” that will enable the team to  
931 succeed.

932 Although the identity substitution process can often be used effectively, employers should stop short of asking workers  
933 to assume identities that are beyond their “latitude of acceptance” (Jones, Rhodewalt, Berglas, & Skelton, 1981). A case  
934 in point can be found in an unfortunate practice in the history of flight attendant instruction. In particular, at one time Delta  
935 airlines specifically trained flight attendants to suppress their normal emotional reactions and adopt personas designed to  
936 please and reassure the passengers (Hochschild, 1983). This practice placed fledgling flight attendants in an unenviable  
937 position, for the situated identity they were required to negotiate clashed dramatically with their “true” feelings and  
938 beliefs, producing feelings of incoherence and inauthenticity that became exhausting (Hochschild, 1983).

939 Even when workers are asked to adopt a new identity that is within their latitude of acceptance, the process of  
940 identity change can be psychologically wrenching. One strategy for smoothing the transition from a chronic identity to  
941 a substitute identity is to form a “provisional identity”: a temporary identity that people use to bridge the gap between  
942 their current and new identities (Ibarra, 1999). Thus, for example, instead of asking workers to move from being a rank  
943 and file member of an organization to a leading member of management, the organization may initiate a series of  
944 promotions that help minimize the shock that would inevitably accompany a more dramatic promotion. Another  
945 strategy for smoothing the process of identity change might be to encourage the person undergoing change to enlist the  
946 help of friends and coworkers. To this end, they should signal others that they are undergoing identity change.



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### 5.3. Signaling identity change

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Whether one is engaged in strategic identity negotiation or identity substitution, the trauma associated with the change can be minimized if the social environment provides targets with opportunity structures (e.g., social networks, physical and psychological resources) that nourish the new identity. To this end, targets can invoke a “signaling machinery” that is designed to enlist accomplices (e.g., friends, coworkers, and management) who can support an anticipated, ongoing, or completed identity change (Cammuzzo, 2008). If successful, targets will receive a steady stream of feedback from their interaction partners that will help consolidate and nurture the identity change.

In summary, although identity negotiations will ideally result in congruence between the impressions of perceivers and the chronic self-views of targets, the dynamic and interactive nature of the identity negotiation process enables it to accommodate change when the goals of targets or perceivers require doing so. Nevertheless, even when the target is undergoing a change, it is essential that all parties are clear about the situated identity that the target is attempting to claim. With this in mind, in the next section we suggest that a major direction for future research will be to consider systematically those processes that may thwart effective identity negotiation.

## 6. Remaining questions

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Given that ours is a *rudimentary* theory of identity negotiation in the workplace, it should not be surprising that it raises as many questions as it answers. One such question centers around one of the most surprising findings in the identity negotiation literature: self-verification effects lead to more creativity than appraisal effects (Swann et al., 2000). On the face of it, the apparent importance of self-verification seems at odds with some influential exemplars of symbolic interactionism. In his dramaturgical approach, for example, Goffman (1959) likened identity negotiators to actors in a play, actors who presumably could enact any role that the play required. Evidence linking self-verification to creativity suggests that individuality and a stable sense of self is more important to performance than Goffman’s formulation implies. Indeed, such findings suggest that fostering congruence in the workplace may represent an effective means of tapping the “identity capital” inherent in the stable identities of workers.

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Having said this, we hasten to add that Goffman clearly captured a portion of social reality. For example, the same research (the Texas MBA study) that provided evidence that self-verification predicted creativity also showed that appraisal effects predicted optimal performance on computational tasks (Swann et al., 2000). The latter finding suggests that when the task is computational in nature, improvisation on the part of targets is not only unnecessary, it may actually degrade performance. It thus appears that there exists a class of instances in which outcomes will be maximized when targets simply take on the identities that perceivers expect, or want, them to enact.

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Of course, the fact that many jobs require workers to perform tasks that are relatively un-engaging poses a challenge for managers responsible for motivating such workers. In some settings, managers may strike a compromise that is mutually satisfactory. A case in point is offered by a field investigation of managers in a French manufacturing plant (Anteby, 2008). Recognizing that technological advances had encroached on the ability of workers to practice their “craft,” managers learned to look the other way when craftsmen-workers illegally made “homers” (objects such as kitchenware and toys that the workers would take home with them). In such instances, an implicit contract was established wherein managers allowed workers to enact a valued identity (craftsman) in exchange for compliance and hard work.

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The provocative research initiated by Polzer and colleagues on identity negotiation processes in diverse groups (e.g., Polzer, Milton, & Swann, 2002; Polzer et al., 2006; Polzer & Caruso, 2007; Swann et al., 2004) raises a host of issues that have only begun to be addressed. We are especially intrigued with Polzer et al.’s (2006) recent evidence that minorities tend to rely on implicit rather than explicit modes of identity negotiation when they feel that they are low in social power. This finding is interesting in itself, but it also raises more general questions involving the conditions under which people deploy these two modes of identity negotiation and the consequences of doing so. It seems likely, for example, that people are more likely to use explicit modes of identity negotiation during symmetric identity negotiation and implicit modes of identity negotiation during asymmetric identity negotiation. In addition, evidence that groups which enjoy high levels of self-verification are able to capitalize on diversity (Polzer et al., 2002) will hopefully inspire researchers to build upon recent evidence that it is possible to systematically increase the amount of self-verification in groups (Seyle, Athle, & Swann, 2008).

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996 With a few exceptions, most studies of identity negotiation have been conducted with dyads. Although the identity  
997 negotiation processes that unfold in groups undoubtedly share many of the same properties as those that occur in  
998 dyads, the dynamics of group relationships are unique in many respects. This raises the possibility that new and  
999 distinctive phenomena may emerge in groups. For example, under the right circumstances, groups of low status people  
1000 can consolidate their collective resources and become activists who demand that their personal and group identities are  
1001 recognized and verified. Indeed, the mere fact that members of diverse groups are often numerical minorities will  
1002 encourage them to focus attention on themselves (dubbed the “solo effect” by McGuire, McGuire, & Winton, 1979)  
1003 and this may, in turn, increase the salience of their stable self-views and felt need for self-verification. For this reason,  
1004 they may be inclined to rally together as a group and demand verification from the leaders of the group or organization.  
1005 In the end, it seems possible that despite their relative powerlessness, under the right conditions minorities may  
1006 sometimes receive more, rather than less, self-verification.

1007 Still another set of issues includes the role of identity negotiation processes among individuals or organizations that  
1008 are undergoing change. We speculated that there are several qualities of the identity negotiation process that facilitate  
1009 change and thus contribute to the process of innovation. We are particularly intrigued with extending recent  
1010 investigations of signaling identities (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2008) to the phenomenon of identity change.

1011 Although the outcome of these and related tests are difficult to predict, one thing is certain: Just as identities define  
1012 people and make them viable, so too does the process of identity negotiation define organizational life and make it  
1013 viable. For this reason, as continued increases in globalization, diversification of the labor force, worker mobility, and  
1014 reliance on electronic modes of communication place unprecedented demands on the identity negotiation process, it  
1015 will become increasingly important to gain deeper insights into this process. Indeed, these insights may be  
1016 fundamental to ensuring the smooth and efficient functioning of the workplace of the future.

#### 1017 **Uncited references**

1018 Alexander and Knight (1971) and Mischel and Shoda (1999).

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