

Erasmus
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Organisational mergers

A behavioural perspective
on identity management

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Organisational mergers

A behavioural perspective on identity management

Steffen R. Giessner

Address delivered at the occasion of accepting the appointment as endowed professor of Organisational Behaviour and Change on behalf of the Vereniging Trustfonds, Erasmus University Rotterdam, at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University on Friday, 1 April 2016

Rotterdam School of Management
Erasmus University
P.O. Box 1738
3000 DR Rotterdam
E-mail: sgiessner@rsm.nl
www.rsm.nl/giessner

Samenvatting

Organisatorische fusies zijn een van de meest extreme vormen van organisatorische veranderingsprocessen. De gewijzigde omstandigheden binnen de organisatie hebben vaak aanpassingsproblemen van werknemers tot gevolg. Dit zorgt er dikwijls voor dat werknemers een lage mate van medewerkersbetrokkenheid hebben bij de na de fusie ontstane organisatie. Hierdoor zien we bij fusies meer conflicten, minder gemotiveerde werknemers, een hogere omloopsnelheid en lagere prestatieniveaus. De lage mate waarin werknemers zich na de fusie met de organisatie identificeren, leidt er dan ook vaak toe dat de beoogde strategische en financiële doelstellingen in gevaar komen. Ik betoog dat een organisatiegedragsperspectief dat zich tijdens een organisatorische fusie op het managen van de medewerkersbetrokkenheid richt, belangrijke praktische inzichten voor personeelsmanagement kan bieden. Ik begin met een toelichting op mijn fascinatie voor dit onderwerp. Vervolgens bespreek ik een perspectief voor identiteitsmanagement bij organisatorische fusies. Hierbij ga ik in op drie belangrijke aspecten: (1) identiteitsvormingsprocessen, (2) interne groepsstructuur en (3) leiderschap. Ten slotte geef ik een overzicht van de mogelijke uitdagingen en toekomstige richtingen voor onderzoek op dit gebied.

Abstract

Organisational mergers are one of the most extreme forms of organisational change processes. Consequently, they often result in difficulties for employees to adjust to the altered organisational conditions. This is often reflected in low levels of employee identification with the post-merger organisation. As a result, merging organisations experience more conflict, less employee motivation, higher turnover and lower performance levels. These low levels of post-merger identification thus often put the strategic and financial goals of the merger at risk. I argue that an organisational behaviour perspective focusing on the management of identity levels during an organisational merger provides important practical insights for employee management. I will first explain why I am personally so fascinated by this topic. I will then present an identity management perspective on organisational mergers. Here, I will consider three key aspects: (1) Identity processes; (2) Intergroup structure; and (3) Leadership. I will conclude by giving an overview of the potential challenges and directions for future research in this field.

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1. Introduction

Dear Rector Magnificus of Erasmus University
Dear board members of the Vereniging Trustfonds,
Dear dean of Rotterdam School of Management
Dear family, friends, colleagues and students,
Dear distinguished guests.

In 1990, the German Democratic Republic reunited with the Federal Republic of Germany to form the nation of Germany. I was born in East Germany and, thus, became part of this historical merger between two nations. At the age of 15, I joined the peaceful demonstrations for freedom. It is rather difficult for me to put into words how my family and I felt when the wall fell on 9 November 1989. Although we were excited and looking forward to our new future, we were also uncertain about this future, about the actual stability of the situation and about how this would affect our lives.

Years later during my PhD, my fascination with this event motivated me to study why many inhabitants - especially in East Germany - were disappointed by the merger and why they felt that they were not part of the reunited Germany. Although this was a unique societal merger, I realised that many insights I gained in my research were also relevant for organisational mergers and their employees. So I have spent the last decade studying the conditions that enable employees to adjust to organisational changes due to organisational mergers¹.

Insights from a behavioural management perspective are truly needed, given that, on the one hand, the economic value of M&A activities worldwide was approximately 4 trillion US dollars in 2015 (Cristerna & Ventresca, 2015), while, on the other hand, the majority of all mergers can be considered as financial failures (Faulkner, Teerikangas, & Joseph, 2012). We can assume that some mistakes were probably made in the choice of merger partners and in the strategic and financial planning of these mergers. However, I can hardly believe that financial and strategic experts did such a bad job as to explain such high failure rates. As a psychologist by education and from my own experiences during the East-West merger, it might not come as a surprise to you that my explanation is rather different. I argue that many organisations underperform in their efforts to manage the identities of their employees. As a result, employee motivation and performance is suboptimal. It is also not surprising that I am not the first to recognise this situation. Nearly ninety years ago, James O. McKinsey identified the “development of a proper esprit de corps among the employees of the new organization” (McKinsey 1929: 334, italics in original) as one of the major challenges for merging organisations.

1 Note that I do not differentiate between mergers and acquisitions in this speech. While there may be legal and financial differences between these two types of organisational changes, the consequences for employees can be considered as being rather similar (Hogan & Overmyer-Day, 1994)

In this inaugural address², I will first outline why identity management should be a key focus for managing post-merger integration. Second, I will summarise how identity processes, intergroup structures, and leadership can shape the post-merger identification of employees. In doing so, I will summarise the broad literature in this area, describe some of my own past and ongoing research, and discuss specific practical suggestions resulting from these insights. Finally, I will outline a few important theoretical, empirical and methodological gaps in the literature.

² The content of this speech is partly based on a recent review of Giessner, Horton, & Humborstad (2016) published in *Social Issues and Policy Review*.

2. An identity management perspective on organisational mergers

Humans are social animals and, consequently, we like to be part of social groups. These groups give us access to resources and provide meaning as to who we actually are. In other words, humans define themselves not only on the basis of their individual characteristics that distinguish them from other individuals (i.e. personal identity) but also in terms of the characteristics of the social groups to which they belong (i.e. social identity). This assumption forms the basis of the Social Identity Theory developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner at the University of Bristol in the 1970s (see Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Most of the research on identity management in organisational mergers is based on this perspective (Giessner et al., 2016; Giessner, Ulrich, & van Dick, 2011, 2012).

While our self is defined by multiple group memberships, one central identity during our working life is certainly our membership of an organisation – our organisational identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This should be no surprise given that we spend one-third of our daily life at work. The stronger employees identify with their organisation (i.e. their degree of self-definition in terms of the organisational identity), the more their thinking, feeling and behaviour are driven by the goals, norms and characteristics of this organisation. Consequently, many empirical studies consistently find that organisational identification predicts employee behaviours both within one's formal contract and outside of this contract (e.g. helping colleagues and being a good citizen) (Riketta, 2005; Riketta & van Dick, 2005). To give an example: The more an employee of the Rotterdam School of Management identifies with his/her employer, the better he/she fulfils his/her contract work but also the more he/she engages in unrewarded activities such as administrative or representative tasks.

Identification with a group such as an organisation also serves several of our human needs. It fulfils our need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), it increases our self-enhancement motive by providing us with a positive self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and it decreases our uncertainties by providing us with meaning and guidelines for taking action (Hogg, 2007). As such, organisational identification also reduces turnover behaviours and improves employee job satisfaction and health (Riketta, 2005).

So why am I telling you so much about organisational identity and identification? The reason is that organisational mergers are essentially a construction site for organisational identities. If two organisations merge, different identities are at stake: the identities of the two merger partners and the identity of the post-merger organisation (Giessner & Mummendey, 2008). Employees have different choices. They can identify with the new post-merger organisation, they can identify with their original pre-merger organisation, or they may even decide to forsake both of these identities and leave the organisation. From an organisational perspective, the goal of a merger should be to foster one strong common organisational identity with which employees from both organisations can identify (Giessner et al., 2011, 2012). Unfortunately, the reality looks rather different.

During most organisational mergers, employees tend to identify more strongly with their pre-merger organisation, which hinders the development of a joint post-merger identity (Giessner et al., 2016). And it seems that this effect often happens at the beginning of the merger process – sometimes even as early as the merger announcement itself. This is because the announcement of the merger makes employees aware of the other merger partner, resulting in a comparison process that often increases awareness of one's organisational membership and leads employees to think in "us-versus-them" terms (Blake & Mouton, 1985; van Dick, Ullrich, & Tissington, 2006). Furthermore, mergers often involve dramatic organisational changes and, thus, a high degree of uncertainty for the workforce. One way to reduce uncertainty is to identify with a social group. Given that the organisational identity of the newly merged organisation is often vague and the cause of this uncertainty, employees tend to feel more comfortable identifying with their original organisation – an identity which provides certainty and clarity (cf. Hogg, 2007). How can a behavioural perspective on identity management during an organisational merger help to solve this dilemma? I provide a few answers by taking different but certainly overlapping perspectives.

3. Identity processes

A behavioural perspective on identity management allows researchers as well as practitioners to predict which conditions enable employees to identify with and, thus, integrate into the post-merger organisation. One major component of mergers is that there is often an asymmetrical status relationship between the merger partners. In other words, it is not a merger of equals. By 'status' I am referring to how the organisations compare to each other (i.e. in terms of size, reputation, profit, sales, stock exchange price, etc.) before the merger. Most often the high-status merger partner assimilates the low-status partner or has at least the strongest position in the newly merged organisation – an assimilation merger pattern. Nevertheless, we see many mergers that at least aim to be equal in their power relationships during the merger – an equality-integration merger pattern. DaimlerChrysler is an example. Equal power perceptions between merger partners are also fostered by introducing a completely new organisational identity – a transformational merger pattern. Novartis is a case in point – being a merger between Ciba-Geigy and Sandoz. What are the effects of such status differences between merger partners and the different power relationships associated with the merger patterns of assimilation, integration or transformation?

My colleagues and I applied principles from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to explore this question (Giessner, Viki, Otten, Terry, & Täuber, 2006). Both merger partners want to either gain or ensure a positive identity for their organisation. Consequently, the low-status organisation aims to increase its power position in the post-merger organisation, whereas the high-status organisation wants to defend its superior position. In a series of experimental studies, we showed that employees of the low-status organisation preferred a transformation or an equality-integration pattern – both of which foster a perception of equal power relationships. In contrast, employees of the high-status organisation preferred to assimilate the low-status partner or to integrate the organisations in a way that guaranteed they would retain the more powerful position in the post-merger organisation (i.e. proportionality-integration pattern). Follow-up field and experimental studies (Gleibs, Täuber, Viki, & Giessner, 2013) provided evidence that employees from low-status and high-status organisations differ in their preference for a merger pattern, and that a match between the preferred and actual merger pattern has positive consequences for employee support at the beginning of the merger. In summary, whatever merger pattern is chosen, employees from one organisational partner are likely to oppose it. Thus, where merger partners are unequal, there seems to be no ideal merger pattern.

Organisational changes per se are not threatening. Actually, employees are aware that changes happen and may even expect these. Imagine, for instance, that you get a new computer. I guess most of us would welcome this change in technical equipment. Previous identity research indicates that changes are not threatening to the degree that employees feel that their merged organisation feels like a continuity of their previous organisation. This feeling is termed "sense of continuity" and many studies show that

employees transfer their pre-merger identification to the post-merger organisation if their sense of continuity is high (e.g. Boen, Vanbeselaere, Hollants, & Feys, 2005; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, Monden, & de Lima, 2002; van Leeuwen, van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 2003). These findings are in line with the previously mentioned research on status and merger patterns. Both streams of research indicate that the merger partners aim to be well represented in the post-merger organisation. However, research on merger patterns indicates that it might be difficult to find a merger pattern that satisfies this need for both merger partners. Consequently, we should rather focus on the question of how to increase post-merger identification for those employees who perceive low levels of continuity.

I addressed this question in a study of an organisational merger between water management organisations (Giessner, 2011). What would help employees when they expect dramatic changes to their organisation and, thus, to their organisational identity? Thinking back to the German reunification, many East Germans thought that their political system was no longer sustainable and that change was necessary. A similar feeling of necessity for change might help in an organisational merger. In other words, employees might accept discontinuity if this is deemed to be a necessary step to either grow or to survive as an organisation. Some studies have already indicated that a feeling of necessity is positively related to post-merger identification (Boen et al., 2005; Ullrich, Wieseke, & van Dick, 2005). My study of the water management organisation confirmed this finding. In addition, my results indicated that the perceived necessity of the merger was especially important in increasing the post-merger identification of employees who had a low sense of continuity.

On a practical side, these empirical findings have various implications. First, we need to invest in human resources during organisational mergers. Although this is neither a surprising message nor one that is relevant only for the current perspective, I feel that it is still an important one to make. Unfortunately, managers often underestimate the importance and the costs of human resource management during organisational mergers (Bramson, 2000). The finding that employees often strongly identify with their pre-merger organisation and weakly identify with the post-merger organisation already at the start of the merger process indicates that a proper management of employees is necessary from a very early point of the merger. Second, if a sense of continuity contributes to higher levels of post-merger identification, we need to first direct communication efforts towards those employees who expect hardly any changes. This should prevent potential gossip and misunderstandings about the merger. A communication strategy should also target those employees who experience high levels of discontinuity in their organisational identity. These employees need to understand why the merger is necessary. How much communication does this require? Here I would like to refer to the thought-leader and Harvard Professor, John Kotter, who advises practitioners to always count on devoting 10 times more effort than was estimated in their original planning (Kotter, 2012).

I would also like to advise practitioners to provide HR managers with more autonomy during organisational mergers in order to deal with all the necessary steps. Their tasks

and responsibilities will increase during the merger. They will have to deal with layoffs, with recruitments, with labour relations and with all employees who undergo the change process. To be able to deal with this, they need adequate decision autonomy and the resources to manage problems fast.

4. Intergroup structure

Next, I would like to discuss how we can use intergroup structure to facilitate the human integration process during organisational mergers. How does an employee react if his/her organisation compares negatively to the other organisation? This might leave the employee with a negative organisational identity and generate an adverse reaction. For example, the employee might leave the organisation, or seek a more prestigious position in a competitor organisation. If this is not an option, the employee might start to reinterpret the situation. He/she could, for instance, find characteristics of his/her old organisation that compare more positively to the other organisation, in order to maintain a positive organisational identity. Alternatively, the worst case from a managerial perspective is if employees start to actively protest and/or to engage in behaviours like sabotage.

An advantage of the identity management perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) on organisational mergers (Giessner et al., 2011, 2012, 2016) is that it can predict when employees are most likely to engage in each of these kinds of strategies. More precisely, this perspective predicts that employees' perceptions of the permeability of organisational boundaries and the stability and legitimacy of the actual relationships in the merging organisation are key structural conditions that impact employees' behaviour. When I refer to the permeability of organisational boundaries, I actually mean two different types of boundaries. First, employees might perceive an opportunity to leave the organisation in order to join another prestigious organisation offering clearer and better prospects. This form of turnover is a huge problem during organisational mergers, because boundaries to other organisations are often most permeable for the best performing employees. Second, the boundaries between the merging organisations determine whether the employees see chances to progress in the newly merged organisation in terms of career opportunities or in terms of being recognised as valuable employees. Interestingly, however, such a situation could be potentially threatening for employees from the high-status organisation, because they might perceive that their organisational benefits are in danger. During the German reunification, the boundaries were relatively permeable and many East Germans moved to West Germany for work. This certainly increased competition for jobs in West Germany ("Wieso kommen die noch?", 1990). Thus, integration managers should not only provide permeable organisational boundaries.

Empirical evidence confirms that more permeable organisational boundaries between merging organisations increase employee adjustment (Lupina-Wegener, Schneider, & van Dick, 2011; Terry, Carey, & Callan, 2001). These permeable organisational boundaries should, however, not come at the detriment of the high-status organisation. In other words, employees from the merging partners should get access to valued resources in the post-merger organisation such as benefits, career paths and individual development opportunities.

If the boundaries between the merging organisations are seen as impermeable, employees might leave the organisation or try to adjust to the situation. One way to do this is to re-interpret the strength of the pre-merger organisation. Often employees start to evaluate the organisation as strong on peripheral organisational dimensions. For instance, if two car-manufacturers merge, the employees from the low-status partner might recognise the higher competence of the high-status organisation in terms of engineering and efficient production. However, they may start redefining their own organisation as one with a better work culture and higher morality (cf. Terry & Callan, 1998). This process, however, leads to stronger identification with the pre-merger organisation rather than with the post-merger organisation.

The most detrimental situation occurs if the relationship between the merging organisations is perceived as unstable and illegitimate. Such a situation is unfortunately not uncommon, because at this stage, the post-merger organisation is often ill-defined, while structural positions are yet to be established. In such a situation, employees might start to protest against the merger, show uncooperative behaviours, or sabotage resources and organisational processes. Indeed, a few case studies of organisational mergers show exactly such employee behaviour under similar circumstances (e.g. Buono, Bowditch, & Lewis, 1985).

So what can be recommended to practitioners based on these insights? First, human resource management has to provide permeable boundaries to allow employees access to organisational resources. This should be especially managed for the dominated merger partner, while ensuring it does not threaten the dominating partner's access to organisational resource. Second, a merger needs stability. This implies a specific implementation plan with concrete logistical information about staffing, responsibilities, and decision power, etc. The more clearly the merger is defined, the more stable it appears to be. Finally, managing the legitimacy of the merger may seem the most difficult part. But, as I already described, if a communication strategy aims to clarify the merger's necessity, employees may be more likely to accept the merger as legitimate. Another factor that can contribute to a perception of legitimacy is effective leadership.

5. Leadership

While change should be a central aspect of leadership, research on the leadership of change during organisational mergers is relatively sparse (Giessner et al., 2016; Sitkin & Pablo, 2005). However, existing empirical research does reveal some important insights. While most studies point to the importance of top management for organisational merger integration, some studies also highlight the pivotal role of mid-level managers.

A primary responsibility of top management is to provide a vision for the merged organisation. Consequently, visionary or charismatic leaders may be necessary to lead organisational mergers. Given that these types of leadership are especially effective under situations involving high uncertainty (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), it seems reasonable to assume that charismatic leadership is particularly vital during organisational mergers. But what factors might predict charismatic leadership? A social identity framework suggests two potential antecedents of both charismatic and effective leadership. First, the more a leader embodies or represents the core organisational values and characteristics, the more this leader will be able to exert influence on his or her followers (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008; van Knippenberg, 2011). Social identity theorists name this concept leader group prototypicality (Haslam, 2004; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003) and my own research indicates that those leaders who are perceived as more group prototypical are also more trusted by their followers (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008; Giessner, van Knippenberg, & Sleebos, 2009). This trust enables them to provide employees with a sense of continuity during the organisational merger – especially under highly threatening merger scenarios (Bobbio, van Knippenberg, & van Knippenberg, 2005; Venus, 2013). Furthermore, these leaders are also perceived as more charismatic (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003).

However, it seems questionable that top management can embody the values and characteristics of both merging partners. Rather, top managers might be either perceived as “one of us” or “one of them”. How can this dilemma be resolved? The identity management perspective offers a second process enabling leaders to receive trust and, thus, to become more charismatic during the merger. Leaders should demonstrate behaviours that signal group-orientedness (Giessner, van Knippenberg, van Ginkel, & Sleebos, 2013; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). In other words, all behaviours that show support for employees can increase trust in the leader. Such actions can include the fair distribution of resources, fair procedures, signalling supportive attitudes, and investing time in the communication with employees (Giessner et al., 2016). My own research indicates that the less leaders embody the essence of their team or organisation, the more they need to show behaviour that supports their team or organisation. In contrast, highly prototypical leaders seem to have a “license to fail” – enabling them to be less group-oriented (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008; Giessner et al., 2009). This insight is especially important for organisational mergers – where leaders might well embody one organisation but not the other merging partner. Leaders’ equal or preferential treatment of employees from the respective “other” organisation can potentially compensate for lower levels of group-prototypicality.

Another way leaders can increase the post-merger identification of employees is by communicating organisational visions that strengthen a sense of continuity (Venus, 2013). CEO visions can carry information about the continuity of pre-merger identities in the post-merger identity. Research indicates that employees who perceive more sense of continuity in CEO visions also show increased support for a merger (Venus, 2013). This effect is most pronounced for those employees that experience high levels of uncertainty. Thus, leaders might be able to craft visions and projections of the post-merger organisation that reflect continuity in organisational identities. In addition, as visions are generally more effective if they portray the status quo as negative and the future as positive (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), leaders' visions might also include elements that clarify the actual necessity of the merger and provide a positive picture of the organisation's future. Given that employees who experience a low sense of continuity are especially likely to increase their levels of post-merger identification if they accept the necessity of the merger (Giessner, 2011), it might be a viable strategy to craft visions that aim to (a) clarify continuity of identity for both merger partners and (b) provide strong arguments about the necessity to merge and the likelihood of a positive future (cf. Ullrich et al., 2005).

In sum, the ideal person to lead the merger would be a CEO who embodies his or her own pre-merger organisation. In addition, this CEO needs to show group-oriented actions that are either fair or even slightly preferential to employees from the merging partner. Further, top management may manage the identity of the merged organisation by conveying continuity in the identity, by clarifying the actual necessity of the merger, and by envisioning a positive future.

During the German reunification, East-Germans did not need to be convinced of the necessity. The West-German government, however, provided financial investments to the lower-status East Germany (= group-oriented actions), and Helmut Kohl promised "blühende Landschaften" (flourishing landscapes). While it proved to be difficult to keep these promises in the short-term, these actions certainly resulted in strong identification levels at the beginning of the merger.

While top management plays a pivotal role before and during merger integration, recent research on organisational change indicates that the implementation of change is not possible without the effective leadership of mid-level managers (Huy, 2002). They are in direct contact with the employees, which enables them to react directly to their needs and problems. Recent empirical research indicates that charismatic leadership of mid-level managers can increase employee adjustment during organisational mergers (Nemanich & Keller, 2007). Other research shows that mid-level managers who provide general support (e.g. give direction, answer questions, provide information) during the merger can increase levels of job satisfaction (Giessner, Dawson, & West, 2013). Given that all of these processes relate to organisational identification (Riketta, 2005), mid-level managers have a pivotal role in managing post-merger identification. However, one drawback is that they often also experience substantial changes due to the merger. Consequently, on the one hand, they are required to adjust to these changes, and on the other hand, they need to increase their level of support towards their employees.

Such a situation can result in a vicious circle. If they do not identify with the post-merger organisation, they will not provide the leadership required to increase the post-merger identification of their employees (Van Dijk & Van Dick, 2009).

Consequently, from a practical point of view, organisations need to manage the dual pressure on mid-level managers. First, top managers need to invest more time in direct communication with mid-level managers to increase their levels of post-merger identification. Second, mid-level managers need to be unburdened from some stressful tasks – so they have more resources available to lead their employees. This could be done by increasing the number of mid-level managers or by appointing a task force that supports mid-level managers during the merger integration. Certainly, every activity that increases mid-level managers' levels of post-merger identification and provides more time for mid-level managers to respond to employee needs is recommendable.

6. Challenges and future directions

I hope that my short overview of the identity management perspective on organisational mergers has provided an insightful example of how organisational behaviour research can help to manage organisational change. However, there are still many unanswered questions, providing future research challenges for my colleagues and myself.

A first issue I would like to address is time. While change in itself is essentially about transformations that happen in organisations over time, we still lack empirical insights into the impact of antecedents of post-merger identification over time. The few studies providing longitudinal quantitative or qualitative data have already produced some intriguing findings. For instance, a study by Ilka Gleibs and colleagues (2008) reveals that providing a sense of continuity for employees might be an effective strategy for increasing post-merger identification at the beginning of the merger. At a later stage, however, applying fair procedures becomes more important in increasing post-merger identification. Another example of how time can be considered in future research on organisational mergers is provided by some recent studies I was lucky to be involved in. In these studies, we looked at the buffering and compensation effects of leadership and human resource activities (Giessner et al., 2013; Rutishauser & Giessner, 2016). We examined whether pre-merger organisational capabilities (e.g. leadership and human resource capabilities) can actually buffer against changes in post-merger identification over time, and how dynamic changes of antecedents affect post-merger identification over time. To give an example, we found that increases in supportive leadership during an organisational merger led to lower decreases in job satisfaction over time (Giessner et al., 2013). Given that job satisfaction is a correlate of organisational identification (Riketta, 2005), it would be intriguing to study how such compensation and buffering effects more directly relate to post-merger identification.

A second future direction is the study of leadership during change. So far, we know very little about the interplay between top-management leadership and mid-level leadership during organisational change³, particularly during organisational mergers. What level is more important and at what stage of the merger? Who needs to show what type of group-oriented behaviours? Do both levels of leadership need to be aligned, or can they fulfil contrary requirements? I believe that the field of leadership of change in general, and organisational mergers more specifically, provide many exciting avenues and I am looking forward to addressing some of these issues with my colleagues.

To conclude, a behavioural perspective on identity management provides a helpful theoretical framework to understand employee adjustment during organisational mergers. At the same time, the empirical support for this perspective provides practitioners with an evidence-based approach to manage their human capital during

3 I am currently involved in a research project on this question with the RSM COMPOSITE team coordinated by Gabriele Jacobs (see www.composite-project.eu).

organisational mergers. While we have already discovered a lot in this field, there are still so many issues to address. And as an East-German, a German, a European and a Professor of Organisational Behaviour and Change, I am happy to be a curious explorer in this exciting research field.

7. Who shaped my identity

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to some very important people during the process of my appointment as Professor in Organisational Behaviour and Change.

First of all, I would like to thank the Vereniging Trustfonds of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Executive Board of Erasmus University Rotterdam, and the dean of the Rotterdam School of Management, Steef van de Velde, for appointing me as endowed professor. I would also like to thank all members of the steering committee and Daan van Knippenberg, the chair of my department for their support throughout this process of appointment.

There are certainly many colleagues and friends that were crucial for this achievement. I will mention a few of these key persons. If I forget to mention you, please see it as my personal joke to you on April Fools' Day.

I was inspired to become a scientist by my former supervisors of my master thesis and PhD work, Amelie Mummendey and Rupert Brown. I am really grateful to them for their discussions, challenges and inspirations. This gratitude extends to the Department of Social Psychology in Jena between 1998 and 2004.

I would like to thank my colleagues and friends at the Rotterdam School of Management. I thank especially Daan van Knippenberg who believed in my abilities and supported me to start as a post-doc at RSM more than 11 years ago. I learned from you as a student, colleague, co-author and friend.

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Steffen R. Giessner is Professor of Organisational Behaviour and Change at the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University (RSM). He holds an MSc in Psychology from the University of Kent at Canterbury, UK, and a PhD in Psychology from the Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena, Germany. His research is located at the intersection of organisational psychology and management. His primary research topics are employee support during organizational mergers, followers' perceptions of leadership, antecedents of leader behaviour, and non-verbal communication of power. He has authored and co-authored papers in the areas of organisational behaviour, management, and psychology. His research has received media coverage in outlets like the New York Times, Financial Times, The Guardian, Harvard Business Review, Harvard Business Manager and Wall Street Journal.

In his inaugural address, Steffen argues that many organisational mergers fail because organisations do not properly manage employees' post-merger and pre-merger identities. An organisational behaviour perspective focusing on the management of identity during organisational mergers can provide important practical insights for employee management. Inspired by his own involvement in the German reunification, he outlines an identity management perspective on organisational mergers. This perspective considers three key aspects: (1) Identity processes; (2) Intergroup structure; and (3) Leadership. The address concludes with an overview of potential challenges and directions for future research in this field.

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Erasmus Research Institute of Management
Mandeville (T) Building
Burgemeester Oudlaan 50
3062 PA Rotterdam, The Netherlands

P.O. Box 1738
3000 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands
T +31 10 408 1182
E info@erim.eur.nl
W www.erim.eur.nl