Exploring Positive Identities and Organizations

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Checking Your Identities at the Door? Positive Relationships Between Nonwork and Work Identities

Nancy P. Rothbard and Lakshmi Ramarajan

CONTENTS

A woman, a mother, a manager, a team member—individuals often have several identities, both in and outside of the workplace, that are important to them (James, 1890; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Rosenberg, 1997). Typically, one assumes that although individuals have many identities, identities are often triggered or activated one at a time in relevant domains. For example, one's work identity may be activated while at work, and one's parent

identity may be activated at home. However, research also suggests that identities often spill over (Rothbard, 2001; Rothbard & Edwards, 2003) or are intermingled (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000) across domains. Thus, getting a telephone call about a child while at work might trigger an employee's family identity while his or her work identity is already activated. Given the existence of multiple identities, it is important to understand how coactivation, the activation of more than one identity at a time, occurs and is managed by individuals, particularly because the ensuing relationship between identities may be positive or negative. Having positive relationships between coactivated identities is important because it can lead to beneficial outcomes for individuals such as enrichment through the generation of positive emotion (Rothbard, 2001), greater integrative complexity and problem-solving ability (Ramarajan, 2008), and greater effectiveness and resilience (Caza & Wilson, Chapter 5, this volume) or innovation (Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, & Lee, 2008). Thus, our focal question is, "under what conditions do individuals experience simultaneously activated identities positively?"

Individuals can experience identities that are simultaneously activated negatively or positively. A negative coactivation is experienced as *conflicting*, that is, identities are experienced in opposition or tension with one another. A positive coactivation is experienced as *compatible*, that is, identities are experienced as complementary or synergistic with one another (Ramarajan, 2008). In the above example of the telephone call regarding a child while at work, the employee may feel that the identity of being a parent and an employee are in contradiction with one another, or conversely that these two identities can be mutually enhancing. Although conflict between identities has been extensively studied (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), positive relationships between identities have been less investigated. The notion of compatibility between multiple identities builds on research on enrichment between multiple roles, which suggests that positive affect and synergistic information from one role or identity can spill over and be accessed in another role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001). In this chapter on positive identities, we specifically focus on compatibility between an individual's multiple identities, that is, *positive relationships between identities* when more than one identity is activated.

More specifically, in this chapter we examine factors that can enable individuals to experience positive relationships or compatibility between coactivated identities. We argue that factors such as status, respect, and

temporal control that allow for greater control over whether and when identities are coactivated, as well as factors such as cognitive routines for managing multiple identities simultaneously, can lead individuals to experience greater compatibility between multiple coactivated identities. In other words, we suggest that identity compatibility is influenced by (a) the extent to which individuals can control the coactivation of identities, and by (b) the routinization of identity coactivation, which arises as individuals cope with situations in which coactivation occurs frequently.

Although the definition of a positive identity is a question that recurs throughout this book, in this chapter, we do not examine whether identities themselves are positive or negative in content. Similarly, we do not examine the positive effects of identities. Rather, we examine individuals' experience of *positive relationships* between their many identities (i.e., coactivated identities that are experienced compatibly as complementary or amenable to synthesis).

DEFINITIONS OF POSITIVE IDENTITY AND RELATED CONCEPTS

Our explanation of compatibility among identities relies on several core concepts. We define these core concepts starting with the definition of identity itself. We next discuss the following concepts: identity activation, the existence of multiple identities and coactivation of identities, and relationships of conflict or compatibility among identities. These core concepts underlie our model of positive identity relationships.

Identity

We rely on a definition of identity as a set of subjective knowledge about the self that is considered to mean "I am" (Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994). It is how an individual defines himself or herself. Research in psychology shows that people can define themselves as members of groups (collective or group identity), as partners in close relationships (relational or role identities), and in terms of personal aspects and traits (personal or individual identities) (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). For example, individuals may define themselves based on membership in both their organization

and their profession (Johnson, Morgeson, Ilgen, Meyer, & Lloyd, 2006). Similarly, individuals may define themselves based on multiple roles such as work and family (Lobel, 1991; Rothbard & Edwards, 2003). In this chapter, we treat personal, social, and role identities as equivalent to the extent that individuals psychologically define themselves based on these various characteristics.

Activation

Because identities are a type of knowledge (knowledge about oneself), identities can be activated. Activation is the level of excitation of knowledge in the brain (Cronin, 2004; Higgins, 1991, 1996). Identity activation occurs when individuals are thinking about who they are. Activation is associated with identity salience in that salience relates to how cognitively accessible a particular identity is to the individual (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Identities are often activated by the situation, that is, particular conditions may activate a relevant identity (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996). For example, talking to one's parents or a telephone call about one's children may activate one's family identity. Identities may also be chronically activated, that is, individuals may often define themselves in a particular way, such as "woman," regardless of whether a particular situational cue, which activates one's female identity, is present.

Coactivation of Multiple Identities

As noted above, individuals often have multiple identities that are important to them (Rosenberg, 1997); indeed, individuals often hold up to five to seven important identities in general (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), although they may all be at various states of activation at a given time. Previous literature on both role and social identities has proposed that individuals primarily enact one identity at a time. For example, the role identity literature proposes the notion of a salience hierarchy, where specific situations trigger the prominence of a particular identity such that as one identity becomes activated and rises in the hierarchy in a specific situation, the level of activation of other identities falls (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Likewise, in the social identity literature, the notion of functional antagonism conveys a similar idea; a particular situation may trigger or activate one identity,

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whereas other identities are consequently suppressed (Turner et al., 1987). Because of the prominence of ideas like salience hierarchy and functional antagonism, the identity literature does not focus on the notion of coactivation, the simultaneous salience or activation of more than one identity. Coactivation builds on the logic of associative networks in cognitive psychology in which multiple knowledge nodes (in this case—identities) can be activated simultaneously. Furthermore, in contrast to identity research, which builds on the notion that one identity is activated at a time depending on a particular situation or domain, we focus on situations in which boundaries such as those between work and nonwork domains are being crossed and multiple identities are activated together. That is, in many situations, more than one identity may be activated simultaneously (Blader, 2007). For example, an individual may have a strong identity as a gay/lesbian employee but also work for an institution such as the military, and this professional identity may also be important. Clearly, both of these identities could be activated at the same time in the work domain.

As multiple identities can be activated by the situation or be chronically activated, it is likely there is also an interaction between chronic and situational activation. Whereas identities at high levels of chronic activation mean that a person's identities are activated regardless of the situation, identities at low levels of chronic activation may become more salient in a particular situation. For example, for a woman whose female identity is chronically activated, being in a work meeting with all male senior executives may make this female identity even more salient to her in this situation and may simultaneously coactivate her organizational identity.

One question that arises when considering the coactivation of identities is under what conditions are we more likely to experience coactivation of work and nonwork identities? Opportunities for coactivation may be most likely to occur when the boundaries between identities are relatively permeable. Research on boundary theory suggests that individuals cognitively and behaviorally demarcate physical, temporal, and social arenas as a way to order and organize their environment (Nippert-Eng, 1995), creating domains such as "home" and "work." Further, boundary theory suggests that individuals can separate or *segment* identities in terms of time, place, and behavior, such that there are few opportunities for values and beliefs associated with one role or identity to influence another role or identity (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1995; Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005). Boundary theory also suggests that individuals can

integrate identities, such that identities intermingle and can be enacted across different times and places (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1995; Rothbard et al., 2005).

We argue that coactivation of work and nonwork identities occurs when identities are integrated and the boundaries between identities are relatively permeable. Here, given our interest in coactivated identities, we explore only situations of integration. The definition of integration does not necessarily mean that coactivated identities need to be related to one another positively, in a compatible way. In fact, such coactivated, integrated identities could just as easily be related negatively, such that they are conflicting. Our key point is that coactivation whether it is experienced as compatible or conflicting requires integration. Without integration of identities (for instance, if identities are segmented), there is no potential for coactivation.

Another important distinction is that, in contrast to work on boundary theory and identity integration that examines role *transitions*, defined as "the psychological movement between roles, including disengagement in one role and engagement in another" (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 472), we examine identity *coactivation*. For example, a role identity transition would entail deactivating the work identity when receiving a call from home while at work. Whereas transitioning between identities entails disengaging from an initial identity when engaging in another identity, coactivation involves adding onto or engaging in a second, third, or fourth identity while other identities remain activated.

Conflict and Compatibility Between Identities

A second question that arises when considering coactivation of more than one identity simultaneously is *how* do we experience the coactivation of identities, that is, positively or negatively? In research on work-family and bicultural identities, two identities can be related to one another in terms of either conflict or compatibility. Much previous work on identities focuses on tension or opposition between identities. For instance, work-family research has examined how work and family identities may often collide (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Lambert, 1990; Lobel, 1991; Rothbard & Edwards, 2003), whereas studies of immigrant acculturation discuss conflict between cultural identities (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Berry, 1997). Building on this literature,

identity conflict occurs when the information associated with one identity acts as a constraint or is antithetical to another identity (Ramarajan, 2008). For example, when two identities such as parent and worker intermingle in the workplace, one may feel conflict because one is torn between being a parent and worker. When two identities are coactivated and conflicting, often we may suppress one of the opposing cognitions, or we may experience negative affect, stress, and tension because of opposing cognitions (Festinger, 1957). Research indicates that negative affect restricts an individual's cognitive capacity and inhibits accessible cognitions and motivation to pursue and approach multiple goals (Aarts, Custers, & Holland, 2007; Clore & Huntsinger, 2007; Isen, 1990; Staw & Barsade, 1993). In either case, individuals experiencing identity conflict are restricting their access to the full complexity of their multiple identities.

More recently, research has begun to examine how identities can relate to one another positively. Consistent with this idea is the notion that identification with and engagement in a role can be enriching to other roles and identities (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001). Building on this literature, identity compatibility occurs when information associated with one identity is complementary or amenable to synthesis with another identity (Ramarajan, 2008). In the earlier example of the intermingling of parental and worker identities in the workplace, one may instead feel compatibility because these identities are complementary to one another. For example, it may be that a lawyer brings in a new client to the practice through his involvement in his child's school functions. When coactivated identities are experienced as compatible, individuals are likely to feel positive emotion (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001). Positive emotion has been shown to be associated with a broadening and exploratory approach in terms of one's cognitive capacity, accessible cognitions, and one's actions (Clore & Huntsinger, 2007; Fredrickson, 2001; Isen, 1990). Thus, individuals experiencing identity compatibility are maintaining access to the full complexity of their multiple identities.

Boundary Crossover

As we note above, the integration of identities makes it more likely that individuals will experience simultaneously coactivated identities.

However, Ashforth et al. (2000) propose that one of the costs of integration is greater undesired interruptions (i.e., boundary violations, and these interruptions are seen as potentially detrimental, giving rise to conflict between one's identities). In fact, although the terms "boundary violation" and "interruption" seem to inherently presume a negative consequence, that is, identity conflict, it is also possible that individuals can experience multiple coactivated identities as compatible. Hence, we propose the term *boundary crossover* as a more neutral term to allow for the possibility of both identity conflict and identity compatibility. Boundary crossovers are a specific case of coactivation of identities in which the two or more co-activated identities cross a boundary such as work-family or professional-personal roles.

In sum, individuals may experience the coactivation of work and non-work identities when these identities are integrated across work and non-work boundaries (see Figure 6.1). Moreover, such coactivations can be experienced not just as conflicting but also as compatible.
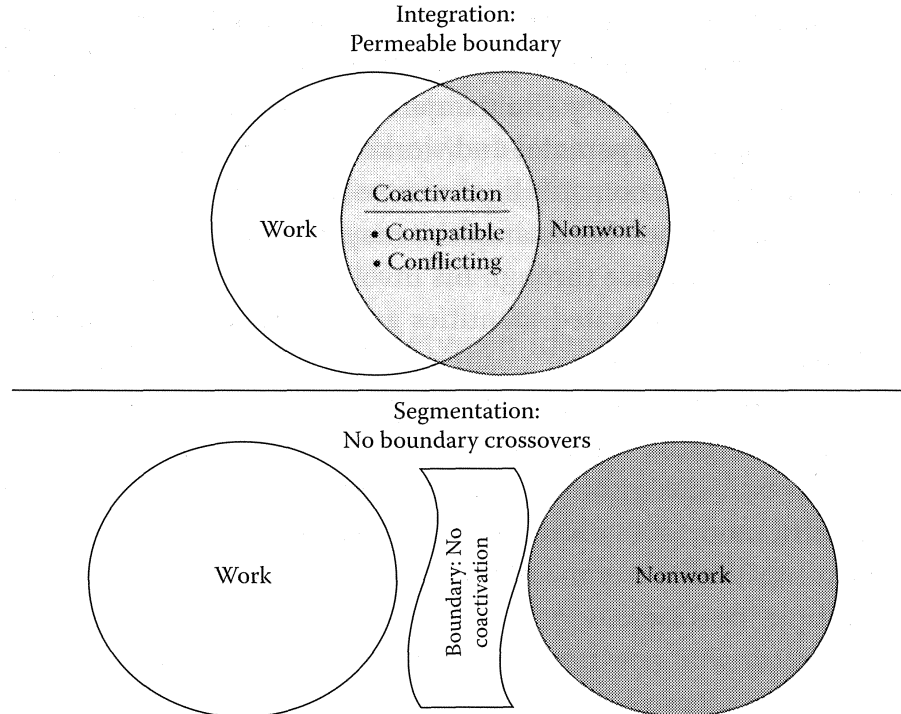

FIGURE 6.1
Boundary crossovers, integration, and coactivation between work and nonwork identities.

COMPATIBLE IDENTITY COACTIVATION

Given that individuals can experience both conflict and compatibility among their coactivated identities, we now turn our focus to compatibility. To reiterate, our research question is, "when is compatibility between coactivated identities likely to be experienced?" We propose two factors: (a) whether one has control over the coactivation of identities, and (b) whether the coactivation of the particular identities is routinized. We predict that when individuals do not have control over their environment (and thus the choice of when or which identities are activated) and the identities that are coactivated are not habitually activated together, they would experience the lowest levels of compatibility between identities. Whereas when they are in control of their environment and the coactivation of identities is routinized, they will have the highest levels of compatibility between identities (see Figure 6.2).

Control Over the Activation of Identities

The importance of agency and control over one's environment is well studied in psychology (Skinner, 1996). An individual's sense of control over
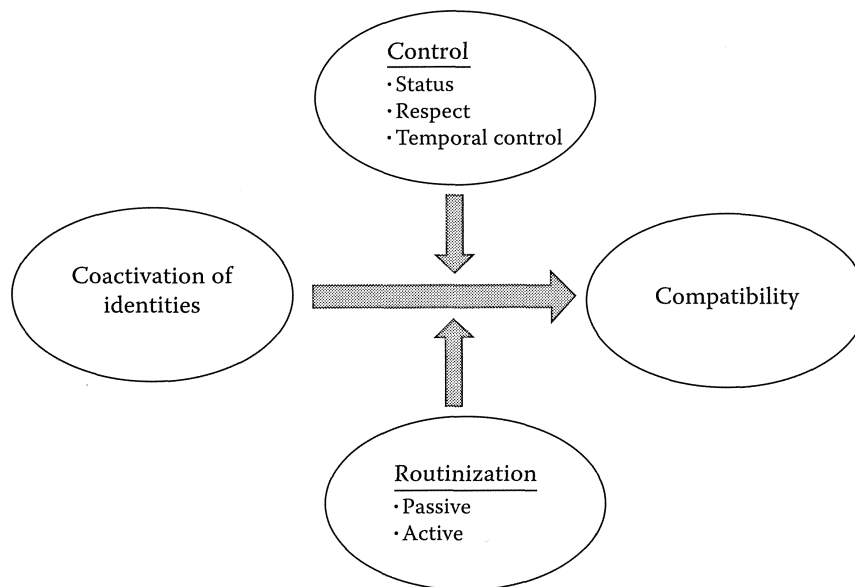

FIGURE 6.2
The relationship between coactivated identities and compatibility.

his or her own fate has been implicated in a variety of positive work outcomes, including well-being and motivation (Ng, Sorensen, & Eby, 2006). In Karasek's demand-control model for instance, high demands and high control lead to positive energy and health outcomes, not stress (1979). Likewise, to the extent that the individual experiences control over boundary crossovers, there may be potential for compatibility in situations of identity integration. This is an area of research on which boundary theory currently does not focus, but where we believe there is an opportunity for much future work. Several factors may allow individuals to experience more agency and control over the coactivation of multiple identities. Here we explore three examples of such factors that are likely to lead to greater psychological control for the individual—status, respect, and temporal control—and discuss how and why they may influence compatibility.

Status

Recent work has defined status as the respect, deference, and influence individuals have in the eyes of others (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001; Anderson, Srivastava, Beer, Spataro, & Chatman, 2006; Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; Goldhamer & Shils, 1939; Ridgeway & Walker, 1995). From a multiple identity perspective, status is an important factor to consider because higher status individuals often have more flexibility with fulfilling identity and role expectations than lower status individuals (Ridgeway, 1982). For example, a higher status person, such as a more experienced team member, may be more able to respond to a telephone call about a sick child (and experience these two identities as compatible) than a newcomer to the team, who may experience the telephone call as representing a choice between his work and family identities. Thus, higher status individuals may have the ability to act and behave in ways that create greater identity compatibility because they have more idiosyncrasy credits that allow for their behavior to be interpreted more positively by others. This freedom from fear about the negative interpretation of boundary crossovers may allow higher status individuals more positive or compatible experiences of coactivated identities.

Respect

Respect and identity are closely intertwined. An individual's identity is often an internalized reflection of the approval and recognition that is

gained from others (Mead, 1934). Individuals feel respected when they perceive they are being treated with care for their identity and positive self-regard (Ramarajan, Barsade, & Burack, 2008). Respect for one's identities is important in part because individuals have a powerful desire to have their self views verified by others (Polzer, Milton, & Swann, 2002; Swann, Milton, & Polzer, 2000). In contrast, when individuals feel disrespected, it can cause a person's self-concept to collapse (Honneth, 1992, p. 189). Status and respect are also closely related, as the definition of status above indicates. Indeed, Tyler and colleagues have argued that respect for a person is often communicated as one's status within one's group and enhances one's group identity (de Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Smith & Tyler, 1997; Tyler, 1999; Tyler & Blader, 2001). Like status, respect may also increase one's control or perceived control over the situation, increasing compatibility between identities. However, respect differs from status in that an organization might instill a culture of respect that applies broadly regardless of status distinctions (Phillips, Rothbard, & Dumas, in press). Such a culture of respect could make up for the lack of control individuals feel in low-status positions.

Moreover, although respect is a reflected appraisal based on others' responses to an individual, feeling respected may increase one's sense of control over one's identity (i.e., who one is or can be) in a given situation. Specifically, in terms of identities, research shows that respect for an individual's identities is important and influences their desire to be part of a group (Barretto and Ellemers, 2002; Tyler & Blader, 2001). For example, Barretto and Ellemers (2002) conducted an experiment in which they showed that if an individual chose a particular group identity (categorized herself in a certain group) and this choice of identity was respected, she would also be more likely to identify with *an additional* group that she had not chosen, when compared with an individual whose choice of identity was disrespected. In the above example, it seems likely that respecting individuals' important identities not only may have acted as an indicator of status but also perhaps increased individuals' feelings of control over "who they were" in a given setting, whereas disrespecting important identities reduced their sense of control. Therefore, by positively influencing one's self-perceptions, respect may enable one to enact multiple nonwork identities in the workplace rather than suppress them.

Because respecting individuals' nonwork identities can increase their sense of control in organizations, respect can provide an important buffer when organizational and nonorganizational identities are coactivated. For

example, in organizations that outsource many of their functions to overseas call centers, call center employees are often forced to take on organizational identities that imply they belong to the organization's home country as opposed to their own country. In this example, the boundary crossover occurs when one's preexisting national identity is invoked in the workplace along with an organizational identity. In such situations, if managers respected the employee's national identity, it is possible that employees would feel greater compatibility between their own preexisting identities and the various organizational identities they were asked to enact.

Temporal Control

Time also affects the extent to which a boundary crossover may be experienced as desirable or as a boundary violation and has the potential to increase one's sense of control over coactivation of identities. In the work-family literature, time-based conflict is one aspect of conflict between work and family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). However, far from simple constraints on the physical amount of time one spends enacting one's identities, time-based conflict can also be psychological; that is, a person can be enacting one identity (such as employee) physically but be consumed by thoughts of family while at work (Cardenas et al., 2004; Carlson & Frone, 2003; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). However, there is potential for such boundary crossovers to lead to experiences of compatibility rather than conflict between identities to the extent that there is control over when identities are coactivated. For example, in a qualitative study of working mothers, Morehead (2001) examined a sample of nurses who were also mothers and found that they temporally synchronized both their work and mother roles, such that they mothered at work and vice versa. Specifically, they could be thinking about a work project while at home or considering their family obligations while at work, and this synchronization allowed them to fulfill both these important identities simultaneously.

Similarly, in Hackman and Oldham's (1980) job design model, job autonomy specifically refers to the ability to schedule the pace and timing of one's tasks. Individuals with the ability to exert control over when boundary crossovers occur, for instance, by scheduling tasks and activities that require activating another identity may thus experience compatibility. For

example, scheduling regular check-ins with one's childcare provider allows one to choose when to coactivate identities; as one mother in Morehead's (2001) study notes, this checking-in allows her to be a better worker as it relieves her of worry (p. 366).

In considering temporal control and its effects on the compatibility or conflict experienced between multiple identities, an important analogy can be drawn to research on task interruptions (Jett & George, 2003). Jett and George (2003) note that various types of interruptions, such as intrusions, breaks, and distractions, can have positive and negative effects on individuals and organizations. Intrusions, which are unexpected interruptions of work flow that bring one's activities to a temporary halt, could result in a sense of time pressure and disrupt the individual's focus (negative consequence) but could also result in information sharing and feedback from the source of the interruption that could enhance one's work performance (positive consequence). Just as with these task-related interruptions, temporal control over when the boundary is breached (i.e., when coactivation occurs) is likely to enhance compatibility and lead to positive performance outcomes, such as greater information sharing and incubation of creative ideas. For example, recent work indicates that compatibility between identities can result in greater integrative complexity of thought and greater problem solving (Ramarajan, 2008).

In understanding the effects of control on compatibility between multiple identities, we note that all three factors—status, respect, and temporal control—can work in concert with one another, and all are ways and means by which individuals can gain or exhibit control in organizations, although they operate somewhat differently. For example, temporal control is different from status because one could be in a type of job where one has control over time (job autonomy) but low status based on the nature of the work, for example, a junior software programmer in an organization. On the other hand, status can afford individuals greater temporal control as they have more decision latitude around how they perform their work (Karasek, 1979). Moreover, as noted above, respect can be a marker of status or a substitute for status in conferring a sense of control.

Routine Coactivation of Identities

Whereas control over coactivation is one way in which individuals may experience compatibility among multiple identities, the routinization of

coactivation of identities can also have an effect on compatibility. For example, a person might often have a dual role as a father and manager in a family business. Although initially this boundary crossover might be difficult to manage as these two identities have the potential for conflict, over time the person might become accustomed to enacting both the father and manager roles simultaneously, thus routinizing a coactivation of identities. Research on cognitive processing suggests that over time individuals develop automatic processing, that is, "the activation of a learned sequence of elements in long-term memory that is initiated by appropriate inputs and then proceeds automatically—without subject control, without stressing the capacity limitations of the system, and without necessarily demanding attention" (Schneider & Shiffrin, 1977, p. 1). Below, we examine the effect of routine coactivation, defined as expected and familiar coactivation of particular identities, on compatibility among identities and vice versa, the initial experience of compatibility among identities which may lead to more routinized coactivations.

As identities are coactivated and boundary crossovers occur, the individual may experience these coactivations as either positive (compatible) and/or negative (conflicting). According to psychological research on behavioral activation (approach) and behavioral inhibition (avoidance) systems, individuals are motivated to seek and approach positive stimuli and affect and withdraw from negative stimuli and affect (Carver & White, 1994; Gray, 1990; Taylor, 1991). For example, research on the "positivity offset" suggests that individuals' approach systems react more strongly than their avoidance system in neutral environments, and that this might be because of evolutionary reasons, that is, those who responded with approach motivations to neutral environments were better able to explore and learn and hence survive (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999). Another more proximal reason for seeking compatibility between identities is that positive emotion and experience is inherently rewarding (Fredrickson, 1998). Thus, over time individuals will keep seeking and hence repeating the sequence of coactivation that leads to compatibility. Eventually, as a result of repetition, specific coactivations get embedded in individuals' long-term memory and become automatically executed (Schneider & Shiffrin, 1977; Smith, 1984; Smith & Lerner, 1988). On the other hand, to the extent that individuals are motivated to avoid negative stimuli and affect, identity coactivations that frequently result in conflict are likely to become suppressed or avoided.

The literature on behavioral scripts (Gioia & Poole, 1984, p. 450), that is, "a knowledge structure that fits predictable, conventional or frequently encountered situations" also supports the idea that a script can be acquired through the repetition of experience and that rewards and reinforcement are important for solidifying a particular sequence of actions into a script.[1] An evolutionary model of mental processes also suggests a similar outcome; mental processes, which meet a selection criterion (in this case, the experience of compatibility), are most likely to be retained (Campbell, 1965; Weick, 1979) and become routinized (Nelson & Winter, 1982), whereas those that do not meet the selection criteria (such as coactivations that result in conflict) are likely never to become routinized and will be experienced as nonroutinized effortful processing. Overall then, through the mechanisms of reinforcement and selection based on individuals' preference for positive affect and stimuli, a particular coactivation is more likely to be repeated, and hence more likely to be routinized, the more it is associated with experiences of identity compatibility rather than identity conflict. Importantly, because these routines evolve over time, the relationship between routines and compatibility is likely to be reciprocal, whereby compatibility fosters the development of routinized coactivation, and routinized coactivation can in turn enhance compatibility.[2]

Passive Adaptation

The relationship between compatibility and routinized coactivation can occur in two ways. On the one hand, there is a passive adaptation process, whereby individuals may be exposed to numerous situations over time where they receive feedback through which they "learn" (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Schneider & Shiffrin, 1977) which coactivations are most likely to result in compatibility versus those coactivations that are most likely to result in conflict. As individuals are motivated to seek positive experiences and affect (Carver & White, 1994; Gray, 1990; Taylor, 1991),

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[1] Similarly, in boundary theory, when discussing transitions between roles (disengagement in one role and engagement in another), Ashforth et al. (2000) discuss routinized role transitions in terms of transition scripts. Through experience over time and repeated execution of a role transition, individuals develop a transition script or routine that becomes relatively automatically executed.

[2] Routinized coactivation occurs when coactivated identities require limited cognitive processing. Chronic coactivation occurs when coactivated identities are readily accessible. Therefore, it is possible for both temporarily and chronically coactivated identities to be routinely coactivated. Thus, chronic coactivation and routine coactivation are distinct constructs.

the coactivations that result in compatibility are likely to be repeatedly evoked. Thus, over time through this selection process the individual develops a routine or automatic coactivation of identities that are experienced as compatible. In the example of the family business above, if the person frequently experiences his father and manager identities as compatible, then to the extent that individuals seek and maintain positive stimuli, the individual will be drawn to opportunities to experience his father and manager identities simultaneously, and so the coactivation of these identities is likely to become habituated and routinized. Thus, routinized coactivation and subsequent identity compatibility can occur through a passive adaptation to environmental influences.

Active Adaptation

A second way in which routinely coactivated identities may be compatible involves a more active adaptation process whereby individuals may "create" compatibility between identities. Once compatibility is established, individuals will keep seeking and repeating the coactivation of the identities that were made compatible, thus laying the groundwork for the development of a routine.

When and how might individuals actively create compatibility between identities? Although individuals may create compatibility between any identities that are likely to be coactivated, chronically activated identities in particular may pose a compelling reason for creating compatibility. As we note above, chronically activated identities are those identities that remain activated across situations. By definition, they are frequently activated and are not easily discarded. Thus, repeated coactivations of chronically activated identities with other chronically or situationally activated identities are likely to occur. This means the potential for both identity conflict and identity compatibility may be high with chronically activated identities. To avoid conflict between one's chronically activated identities and other identities, individuals may resort to creating compatibility as a coping strategy.

One way in which individuals may create compatibility is by cognitively *reframing* one's identities to emphasize features that are congruent or reframe the identity dimensions in ways that are valued (Derks, van Laar, & Ellemers, 2006, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For example, consider a boundary crossover when a female leader has both her female and leader identities coactivated while at work. When confronted with the stereotype

of leaders having masculine characteristics such as being directive and task oriented, female leaders may choose to emphasize features of leadership that are more stereotypically feminine, such as being participative and relational (see Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Thus, a female leader could cognitively reframe her nonwork identity (in this case being a woman) to be compatible with her leader identity as a way to avoid negative affect and stimuli every time her female identity is activated at work. As an example, Roberts (2007) describes the case of Jeannette Clough, CEO of Mount Auburn Hospital, who authentically drew on multiple identities such as her nursing background to lead a dramatic turnaround at the hospital. In this case, Clough may have cognitively reframed her low-status gendered nursing identity to be more compatible with her identity as CEO. Specifically, she may have reframed for herself how her nursing identity was compatible and even enriching to her leadership identity because it gave her insight into marshaling resources in a hospital environment and provided a deep understanding of decisions about patient care.

A second way in which individuals may create compatibility between a chronically activated identity and other identities is by *choosing* to enact only those identities that are complementary or synergistic to the chronically activated identity they cannot discard. Recent work on the low number of women in the computer science profession suggests that women actively choose not to take on "computer scientist" as a professional identity because the prototype of the computer scientist as a "geek" does not fit their self-image as a woman (Cheryan, Plaut, Davies, & Steele, 2007). Consider the career choice facing an Asian student. On the one hand, this student could choose to be a doctor or an engineer, to the extent that Asian families tend to value these professions and Asian children tend to choose these professions (Fouad et al., 2008; Tang, 2002; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999). On the other hand, the student could choose to be an artist or an actor. The professional identities presented by the latter career choices (artist, actor) may have much greater potential to raise identity conflicts, whereas the former career choices (doctor, engineer) may have much greater potential to raise identity compatibility when the person's Asian and professional identities are coactivated. Over time, given their basic tendency to seek positive affect and stimuli, individuals may be more likely to choose professional identities that are more likely to lead to identity compatibility when work and nonwork identities are coactivated. That is, the boundary crossover of professional and ethnic identities is carefully

chosen. Thus, identity compatibility and the subsequent routinized coactivation can also occur through an agentic process of reframing or choosing identities.

In sum, both passive and active adaptation rely on basic psychological processes such as the selection and reinforcement of positive stimuli and affect that result in routinization of identity coactivations that are experienced as compatible. Thus, over time, a strong relationship between compatibility and routinized coactivation is likely to develop.

DISCUSSION

We proposed a model of the conditions under which and how compatibility between coactivated work and nonwork identities is likely to occur by reviewing particular examples of factors that may enable people to experience coactivated identities in a compatible way. Specifically, we discussed two mechanisms, control and routinization, that may account for how individuals experience compatibility when their work and nonwork identities are coactivated.

Our model has implications for several fields of research. For scholarship on multiple identities, we add to the discussion on positive relationships *between* identities that are implicit in constructs such as enrichment, enhancement, and compatibility and broaden our understanding of the conditions under which compatibility can occur. By positing that role integration can entail either conflict or compatibility between the identities that are simultaneously activated, we also add to research on boundary theory. Specifically, we introduce the term boundary crossover, rather than boundary violation. We believe that such an affectively neutral term will allow scholars more facility in examining the potential for both positive and negative experiences when studying identities and the spillover across such boundaries. Last, our two mechanisms of control and routinization provide explanations about what factors can influence compatibility between work and nonwork identities. To fully illustrate how these mechanisms foster compatibility, we integrate research from numerous areas of organizational behavior, including status, respect, time, and the development of cognitive routines.

Our theoretical approach to multiple identities considers that positive relationships between multiple identities are important to investigate and understand in and of themselves. However, given the scope of this book, a relevant question to consider for future research is to what extent are the *outcomes* of compatibility between identities also likely to be positive? Research in related areas suggests the potential for future work to address this question in the following ways. First, there is the outcome of positive emotion. Research on role enrichment suggests that positive emotion is a critical factor in enrichment processes (Rothbard, 2001). Similarly, to the extent that coactivated sets of knowledge about the self are compatible, that is, are seen as complementary or synergistic, individuals may feel positively about themselves and generally experience positive emotion as they approach and embrace their multiple identities.

A second important outcome of compatible identities is increased productivity. Ashforth et al. (2000) suggest that identity integration may often lead to confusion and anxiety over enacting different identities, and this may then translate into a loss of productivity. However, it is possible that anxiety and confusion are byproducts of identity conflict. Conversely, identity compatibility may not have a negative effect on productivity. Future research should investigate to what degree productivity gains or losses may occur when identities are compatible versus conflicting. Addressing this question may also have managerial implications. For example, whereas managers may consider employees' preoccupation with family matters while at work a distraction and try to assert their own control over the temporal boundary between work and home (Perlow, 1998), it is also possible that leaving temporal control in the hands of workers enhances their ability to do their job. That is, the boundary crossover can operate in favor of the organization, too, that is, employees who ponder work while at home.

Another outcome of compatible identities is improved interpersonal problem solving. Recent research examining the effects of compatibility between identities finds that compatibility between identities leads individuals to be more cooperatively oriented toward one another. Moreover, they are more likely to resolve problems with others through integrative problem solving and using greater integrative complexity (Ramarajan, 2008).

In contrast to current research, common wisdom, and managerial practice that suggest individuals should check their nonwork identities at the

door when entering the workplace, both for their own good and the good of the organization, this chapter seeks to explain how coactivated work and nonwork identities may be experienced as compatible. Factors such as control over and routinization of coactivation of identities can influence the extent to which employees feel their work and nonwork identities are compatible. For individuals and organizations that struggle with managing multiple identities that cross the organizational boundary, this chapter highlights mechanisms that create compatibility and the potential for positive outcomes that can arise from embracing rather than rejecting the whole person while at work.

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