

Kwon, In Su; Lee, Seong Ho; Seo, Moon Kyo

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The Role of Psychological Ownership in Internal Marketing

In Su Kwon^a, Seong Ho Lee^b, Moon Kyo Seo^c

^aAssociate Professor, Department of Business Administration, Sejong University, Seoul, Republic of Korea

^bAssistant Professor, Department of Business Administration and Accounting, Hanbat National University, Daejeon, Republic of Korea

^cAssociate Professor, Department of Accounting Information, Woongji Accounting & Tax College, Paju, Republic of Korea

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on examining the role of psychological ownership in internal marketing. Specifically, this study explores the relationships between psychological ownership, organizational identification, and turnover intention. Two hundred forty-six employees participated in this study. The results of structural equation modeling revealed that the two components of psychological ownership were associated with increased organizational identification and reduced turnover intention. These findings indicate that psychological ownership might be a positive precedent factor for employees' organizational identification. Furthermore, organizational identification felt by employees plays an important role in decreasing overall turnover intention. The study contributes to our understanding of employees' psychology and behavior in their workplace and suggests ways to successfully conduct internal marketing and manage human resources.

Keywords: Psychological ownership, Organizational identification, Turnover intention, Internal marketing

1. Introduction

In the field of service marketing, psychological ownership and empowerment are regarded as essential for improving customer satisfaction and employees' marketing orientation. This is exemplified by a famous story concerning the clothing giant, Nordstrom. One day, a customer came to buy a pair of pants he had seen during a sale at Nordstrom. Unfortunately, the pants were sold out. Sales clerks in that store contacted

five nodes of Nordstrom in the same area, but none had the pants in stock. Thus, a salesman went to a rival department store across the street and bought the pants that the customer wanted at their regular price, and sold the pants to the customer at the sale price. Nordstrom's management gives employees all rights and responsibilities concerning customer service, and often welcomes the decisions made by employees in that regard. For example, store managers are permitted to hire as many salesman as necessary and have the authority to purchase goods that suit local characteristics. Furthermore, employees in that store are given the authority to accept returns from customers, regardless of the quantity. As a result, employees can effectively conduct their own business and decide almost everything by themselves, much

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† Seong Ho Lee

Assistant Professor of Marketing, Department of Business Administration and Accounting, Hanbat National University, Daejeon, Republic of Korea

Tel. +82-42-821-1376 E-mail: lsh33@hanbat.ac.kr

like self-employed businessmen and owners (Spector & McCarthy, 1996).

Many studies have emphasized the importance of internal marketing to enhance psychological ownership and empowerment. In marketing, employees are regarded as internal customers. According to many researchers, the definition of internal marketing is presenting the benefits of a service to employees and persuading them first before presenting the services and persuading the customer (George, 1990). Internal marketing regards employees as the first customers, and satisfying and motivating employees can produce better results by engaging them in a service-oriented or customer-oriented mindset (Kotler, 1997). As internal customers, employees play an important role in delivering customer satisfaction when providing goods or services to the end users (Mohr-Jackson, 1991).

In an effort to improve internal marketing, we focused on the potential benefits of employees' psychological ownership. Psychological ownership is found in almost all situations and societies, and is often used to describe a person's identity (Avey, Avolio, Crossley, & Luthans, 2009). People might define themselves as a sports car driver, a yacht owner, or an antique collector. It also applies in the context of organizations: For example, an individual might describe him/herself as a company employee and feel that this is a part of his/her identity due to a feeling of ownership about the company. Staff members can increase their attachment to an organization through attaining psychological ownership of it, which makes them exert their best effort. Pierce et al. (2001) argued that psychological ownership has three basic dimensions: self-efficacy, self-identity, and belonging. In attaining psychological ownership, particularly its elements of belonging and self-identity, employees may begin to identify themselves with the company and even feel responsible for other departments' work. Individuals who identify with an organization tend to feel responsible for the fate of that organization and equate its success, failure, and reputation with their own (Tolman, 1943).

Likewise, because organizational identification is

an important goal of internal marketing (Wieseke et al., 2009), this study examines psychological ownership as part of internal marketing, and particularly whether it is possible for employees to identify themselves with an organization. In addition, we consider the effects of psychological ownership on turnover intention to see if promoting it can help maintain a good quality workforce and increase loyalty to the organization.

Therefore, this study seeks to determine whether psychological ownership will have a positive influence on organizational members in the context of internal marketing as well as how psychological ownership influences individual outcomes such as work attitudes and performance (Pierce et al., 2003). The purposes of this study are to (1) examine the impact of psychological ownership on organizational identification, which has not been verified in previous studies; (2) establish whether organizational identification is related to employee turnover intention; and (3) provide academic and managerial implications suggesting that interest and investment in internal marketing can contribute to maintenance and positive performance.

II. Literature Review

A. Psychophysical ownership as a determinant of organizational identification

Psychophysical ownership refers to a mental state where a person feels like he/she owns a property without actually legally possessing it (Pierce & Furo, 1990). Mayhew et al. (2007) similarly defined psychological ownership as a feeling of possession without any formal or legal assertion of ownership. Van Dyne and Pierce (2004) defined psychophysical ownership as the psychological phenomenon of developing employee-specific feelings about both tangible and intangible objects (e.g., a group, job, work tools, organization).

Psychophysical ownership can be generally divided into "organization-based psychological ownership"

and “job-based psychological ownership” (Pierce et al., 1991; Mayhew et al., 2007). Organization-based psychological ownership refers to an employee’s feeling of psychological ownership of the organization itself, while “job-based psychological ownership” refers to psychological ownership of the specific duties or tasks that employees are responsible for (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001). Mayhew et al. (2007) investigated psychological ownership in organizational settings, and found that organization-based and job-based psychological ownership are independent from the work attitudes of job satisfaction and commitment. Job-based psychological ownership had a positive relationship with job satisfaction, while organization-based psychological ownership had a positive relation with affective organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Psychological ownership of the organization is related to the psychological connection between organization members and the organization as a whole. It has many antecedents, such as organizational culture and climate, attitudes toward superiors, the visions and goals of organization, reputation of the organization, and organizational policies and procedures (Mayhew et al., 2007). Furthermore, psychological ownership has important emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral effects on employees that experience ownership (Pierce et al. 2001). Many scholars are interested in what constitutes employees’ ownership and its outcomes (Avey et al., 2009). Van Dyne and Pierce (2004) found that psychological ownership was associated with increased organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organization-based self-esteem, and organizational citizenship. As noted above, Mayhew et al. (2007) revealed that organization-based psychological ownership has a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Avey et al. (2009) showed that psychological ownership was positively related to transformational leadership, organizational citizenship, affective commitment, job satisfaction, and intention to stay, and negatively related to workplace deviance.

To extend our understanding of the impact of psychological ownership on organizations, we focused

on organization identification, which seems to be highly relevant to psychological ownership. Interest in organizational identification has grown considerably, and research has revealed many antecedents that need to be studied. Mael and Ashforth (1992) reported that several organizational factors, such as organizational distinctiveness, organizational prestige, and absence of intra-organizational competition, have positive relationships with organizational identification. They also found several individual factors with positive relationships, such as tenure, satisfaction with the organization, and sentimentality. Other potential antecedents include person-organization fit (O’Reilly & Chartman, 1986), job satisfaction (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001), employee communication (Smidts et al., 2001), need to identify, and positive affectivity (Kreiner & Ashford, 2004).

Organizational identification refers to an employee’s perception of their “oneness” with and level of belongingness to an employing organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). It can be explained through social identity theory. People tend to classify other people via their demographic characteristics, such as affiliated organization, religion, occupation, gender, and age. If a person is perceived to belong to a particular society or group, and recognizes him/herself as a member of that group, they tend to feel that the success or failure of that group is his/hers (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Thus, organizational members who have a strong organizational identity are more likely to do more for the organization than others, and perceive that their actions or efforts will benefit individuals as well as the organization (Edwards & Cable, 2009). Furthermore, organizational identification can motivate employees to behave in pursuit of their organization’s interests.

Organizational identification can explain much of employees’ behavior, and is closely related to psychophysical ownership. Based on social identity theory, organization members often recognize themselves as part of a collective (i.e., “us”) when they work on certain tasks together (Albert et al., 2000), and people who experience psychological ownership about their organizations often seek opportunities to express their

self-identification with their organizations (Avey et al., 2009). This means that it reflects the relationship between individual and organization as objects, and individuals with psychological ownership experience greater intimacy with the organization (Furby, 1978; Litwinski, 1942; Wilpert, 1991). Given that psychological ownership implies that individuals feel that the objects of their perceived ownership are part of themselves (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001), we might therefore infer a positive causal relationship between psychological ownership of the organization and organizational identification. Therefore, the following hypotheses are presented.

Hypothesis 1: Psychological ownership of the organization will have a positive influence on organizational identification.

Psychological ownership of the job refers to an organizational member's perceived ownership of a specific job. Owning a job might help individuals understand themselves within an organization and assign themselves to the organization (Pierce & Jussila, 2011). Mayhew et al. (2007) defined job-based psychological ownership as concerned with an individual's feelings of possession towards his/her job.

The more people control a particular subject, the greater their need to own it, and the more attached to it they become—in other words, they become more likely to consider it a part of themselves (Furby, 1978). Familiarity and investment in a particular subject can also enhance psychological ownership. Furthermore, research suggests that when people invest considerable psychological energy, effort, and time in a subject, they more strongly identify with it (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). In this way, psychological ownership of job might help forge an individual's organizational identity. More specifically, the psychological ownership attained through greater control over, familiarity with, and investment of time and effort in a target will strengthen self-identity as a member of the organization (i.e., organizational identification). Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed.

Hypothesis 2: Psychological ownership of a job will have a positive influence on organizational identification.

B. Organizational identification as a determinant of turnover intention

Organizational identification is an important variable for making criteria for behaviors and predicting that behavior, because it refers to an aspect of individuals' identity or ego (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). If organization members accept and internalize their organization's goals and values, they tend to behave in ways that further the success and goals of the organization. In other words, organizational identification leads to greater motivation to make efforts that benefit the entire organization (Van Dyne et al., 1994).

If employees develop strong organizational identification, they achieve greater unity with their organizations because the individuals consider the organization to be a part of themselves. Members also begin to voluntarily identify themselves as the organizations, and define themselves as members of the organization and make their future decisions by organization (Van Dick et al., 2004).

Therefore, organizational identification has important emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral effects on employees. Particularly, O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) argued that members who are attached to an organization through organizational identification are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior than are members who are attached to an organization through prudential motives. Lee et al. (2016) insisted that organizational identification has a positive effect on job performance. Bell and Menguc (2002) also pointed out that organizational identification has a significantly positive effect on all five sub-factors of organizational citizenship behavior. Ultimately, organizational identification is likely to influence turnover intention because the organizational identification makes it more likely for the organizational members to act to benefit their organization, and helps strengthen the sense of community between members and organizations.

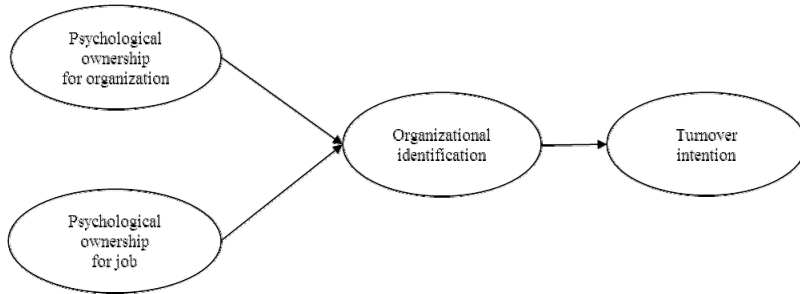


Figure 1. Research Model

Several studies have demonstrated a relation between organizational identification and turnover intention. Members who had weak organizational identification often tried to avoid their role in the organization, whereas turnover intention was lower among members who had strong organizational identification (Edwards & Cable, 2009). Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) argued that the organizational identification has a positive effect on organizational performance and organizational citizenship behavior, and negatively affects turnover. Riketta (2005) insisted that people with strong organizational identification tend to have a high degree of organizational commitment and job satisfaction, a more positive job attitude, and a lower willingness to quit. Ngo et al. (2013) found that organizational identification has a positive effect on organizational commitment and job satisfaction and negatively affects turnover intention. Thus, based on the theory and these prior studies, we formulated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Organizational identification will have a negative influence on turnover intention.

III. Method

A. Research setting and data collection

To verify the hypotheses and study model, we conducted a randomly sampled questionnaire survey targeting salespeople in South Korea working for retailers,

insurance companies, and banks. The sample was randomly chosen from the panels of a research company. Face-to-face survey and mail survey methodology was employed to collect the data in the final field survey. Each informant was requested to complete it with respect to a particular organization and job of him/her. The respondents were requested their participation and questionnaires which included cover letters explaining the purpose of the research and promising confidentiality. A total of 260 questionnaires were distributed directly or by mail to these salespeople. After three weeks, 250 responses were received. After excluding insincere responses, a total of 246 questionnaires were used in the final analysis. Regarding the demographic characteristics of the sample, 154 participants were men (62.6%) and 92 were women (37.4%). Twenty-five people were in their 20s (10.2%), 119 in their 30s (48.4%), 84 in their 40s (34.1%), and 18 in their 50s or older (7.3%). 150 participants worked in retailers (60.9%), 56 in insurance companies (22.8%), and 40 in bank (16.3%).

B. Measures

To measure the main variables, we set operational definitions and extracted measurement items for each variable using existing literature (see Table 1).

We defined psychological ownership as a state in which an individual feels ownership of an object, and measured it on 2 dimensions: psychological ownership of organization and psychological ownership of job. These were measured with a total of 8 items,

Table 1. Measurement items

construct	Items	Reference
Psychological ownership of organization	This is my company. I feel a very high degree of personal ownership for this company. I feel like I own this company. It is hard for me to think about this company as mine. (reversed)	Van Dyne & Pierce (2004) Shu & Peck (2011)
Psychological ownership of job	This is my job. I feel a very high degree of personal ownership for this job. I feel like I own this job. It is hard for me to think about this job as mine. (reversed)	Van Dyne & Pierce (2004) Shu & Peck (2011)
Organizational identification	I feel strong ties to this company. This company is important to me. I feel proud to be a member of my company.	De Moura, et al. (2009).
Turnover intention	In the next few years, I intend to leave this company. I think about leaving this company. I'd like to work in this company until I reach retirement age. (reversed)	De Moura, et al. (2009).

which were taken from the studies of Van Dyne and Pierce (2004) and Shu and Peck (2011) and modified for this study. Organizational identification was defined as the sense of connection between the self and the organization. To measure it, we used modified items by De Moura et al. (2009). Finally, we defined turnover intention as the tendency to consider how to leave their current organization, and measured it using items that we extracted and modified from De Moura et al.'s study (2009) and Lee and Jung (2015). All items of each construct were measured by using a 5-point Likert scale.

For the survey results, descriptive statistics and the reliability and validity analyses were carried out using PASW Statistics 18.0 (i.e., SPSS). Structural equation modeling was conducted by using SPSS AMOS 18.0.

IV. Results

A. Construct reliability and validity

We first verified the reliability of the measurement items by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The values ranged from 0.76 to 0.90, thus indicating that the internal consistency of the measurement tool was good. A principal component analysis was then carried

out to validate the constructs by extracting factors; the orthogonal rotation method was adopted to simplify the factor loading values.

A total of 4 factors explaining 70.90% of the variance were extracted. The factor loading values of the items in each factor were all more than the minimum value of 0.63, showing an appropriate level. The construct reliability coefficient (CR) refers to the shared variation between the measured variables of one latent factor; if it is greater than 0.7, the convergent validity of the factor is considered appropriate (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). As shown in Table 2, the minimum value of CR was .808, which exceeds the standard. The minimum value of the average variance extracted (AVE) was .51, which also exceeds the base value. This indicates that there is good convergent validity for the measured variables.

The discriminant validity of the tool was also acceptable: the maximum value of the correlation coefficients among the constructs was .60 (ranging from -.36-.60), which was smaller than the minimum value of .71 for the squared AVE (ranging from .71 to .80; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Additionally, a confirmatory factor analysis was carried out in order to measure if the items represent each factor well. The fit indices were as follows: $\chi^2 = 202.06$ ($p = .000$), goodness of fit index (GFI) = .88, comparative fit index (CFI) = .92, normed fit index (NFI) = .89, incremental fit index (IFI) = .92, Tucker-Lewis index

Table 2. Results for Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	1	2	3	4	α	AVE	CR
Organizational identification	1		.743		.780	.586	.808
	2		.856				
	3		.689				
Psychological ownership of organization	1	.886			.902	.653	.882
	2	.865					
	3	.777					
	4	.691					
Psychological ownership of job	1		.753		.772	.518	.810
	2		.792				
	3		.692				
	4		.632				
Turnover intention	1			.763	.762	.618	.829
	2			.797			
	3			.799			
Eigenvalue	3.139	2.450	2.207	2.130			
Variance (%)	22.422	17.503	15.761	15.217			

Table 3. Results for Discriminant Validity

	1	2	3	4
Organizational identification				
Psychological ownership of organization	.765**			
Psychological ownership of job	.600*	.808**		
Turnover intention	-.367*	-.428*	-.368*	.786*

Note. * Correlations, ** \sqrt{AVE}

(TLI) = .90, root mean square residual (RMR) = .05. All of these satisfied the acceptable standards of suitability, except for the χ^2 .

B. Structural equation modeling

The fit indices for the study model were as follows: $\chi^2 = 213.96$ ($p = .000$), CFI = .91, GFI = .87, NFI = .88, IFI = .92, TLI = .89, RMR = .06. These values are, in general, acceptable. Therefore, the proposed model can be said to describe the data relatively well, suggesting that all hypotheses were accepted with statistical significance, as shown in Table 4. The path coefficients of psychological ownership of

organization and organizational identification was 0.55 and t value was 6.01 ($p = .000$). In other words, the hypothesis 1 was supported. Furthermore, the path coefficient of psychological ownership of job and organizational identification was 0.28 and t value was 3.44 ($p = .000$). In other words, hypothesis 2 was also supported. When comparing the coefficient of the two paths, psychological ownership of organization had a greater effect on organizational identification. It is known that the psychological ownership of organization may have more influence on the sales people’s perception of their “oneness” with and level of belongingness to an employing organization. The path coefficient between organizational identification and turnover intention was -0.56 and t value was

Table 4. Results of Structural Equation Modeling

	Hypothesis	Estimate	t-value	Result
H1	Psychological ownership of organization → organizational identification	0.555	6.018(p = 0.000)	Support
H2	Psychological ownership of job → organizational identification	0.287	3.442(p = 0.000)	Support
H3	Organizational identification → turnover intention	-0.567	-6.385(p = 0.000)	Support

-6.38 (p = .000). In other words, the hypothesis 3 was supported. Thus, it is known that the organizational identification of sales people can lead to decreasing turnover intention. These results show that obtaining greater psychological ownership of the organization and job led participants to experience stronger identification with their companies, which in turn reduced their turnover intention. Therefore, psychological ownership seems to be an important factor for human resource management.

V. Conclusion

This study began with the question of the role that psychological ownership plays in internal marketing. To find the answer, we examined the structural relations between psychological ownership of the organization, psychological ownership of the job, organizational identification, and turnover intention. This study has a number of academic and practical implications, chiefly owing to its illumination of how salespeople develop a feeling of belonging to their companies.

We investigated psychological ownership by dividing it into psychological ownership of the organization and psychological ownership of the job. The results showed that both can affect salespeople. Furthermore, this study revealed direct relationships between psychological ownership and organizational identification, which has not been verified in previous studies. In fact, there is no study investigating organizational identification as a consequence of psychological ownership. Therefore, this study highlights this as a new consequence of psychological ownership. In this sense, we view organizational identification in

this study as an important variable in the context of internal marketing for explaining the relationship between psychological ownership and turnover intention. Finally, the turnover rate for salespeople is high. It is important to note that both psychological ownership and organizational identification have roles in reducing the turnover intention of salespeople. This can help companies more effectively manage their human resources and conduct internal marketing by helping them to understand their employees' psychology and behavior.

This study on the effects of psychological ownership on organizational identification and turnover intention revealed the following. First, psychological ownership might be a positive precedent factor that increases salespeople's organizational identification. This has practical implications, suggesting that the promotion of employees' psychological ownership can reinforce their organizational identification. Today, companies are exerting considerable effort to develop management skills that can strengthen organizational identification (Knippenberg & Schie, 2000). Thus, companies might manage differentiated human resources by targeting psychophysical ownership, which might help employees improve their organizational identity. In other words, managers should encourage employees to develop psychophysical ownership through continuous and efficient internal marketing. Such internal marketing activities could include education and social support, or organizational activities such as employee stock ownership plans. We expect that psychological ownership can be utilized to manage the task-related variables of an organization.

Second, the results of this study, coupled with those of provided by Abrams et al. (2005), indicate that increasing organizational identification can help reduce overall turnover intention. Employee turnover is an

extremely costly problem for many organizations today. Thus, identifying causal factors of turnover intention is important to better manage organization members and minimize turnover. Good management of organizational identification, according to our study, can reduce employees' turnover intention, which is very significant such as an economic compensation or incentive to reduce the degree of turnover and business performance. An academic implication of this study is supporting the direct relationship between organization identification and employees' turnover intention. Furthermore, in business management, turnover of salespeople leads to a loss of human resources, which has a negative effect on the loss of internal customers.

VI. Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations, which suggest some directions for further research. First, this study focused mainly on psychological ownership as a part of internal marketing. However, in future studies, it is necessary to validate the benefits of other activities involved in internal marketing covered by past research. This would help identify the role of internal marketing if it deals with psychological ownership including various internal marketing activities such as training, management support, internal communication, employee compensation system, and employee involvement.

Second, despite the presence of salespeople in various industries, the study has only limited the number of industries concerned. It will be difficult to generalize the results of the study. Thus, future research should consider various industries and estimate in various work environment.

Third, this study focused on psychological ownership as a unidimensional construct. However, Pierce et al. (2001) suggested that psychological ownership is in fact a multi-dimensional construct consisting of the dimensions of belonging, self-efficacy, and self-identify. Thus, future research should consider and estimate each dimension's impacts on work

attitude and behaviors.

Finally, future research should examine a wider variety of outcome variables. This research did not use an integrated approach to deal with all related variables, focusing only on turnover intention as an outcome of psychological ownership and organizational identification. For example, organizational commitment is affecting the service quality provided by a customer oriented organization (Sihombing et al. 2017). Thus, we recommend that future research should continue to examine how psychological ownership and organizational identification are related to various constructs, such as job attitude, employee commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior.

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