Managing Organizational Change

Process, Social Construction and Dialogue

Second Edition

Lecture Notes Chapter 12

12

MAKING SENSE OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY

Learning objectives

By the time you have completed your study of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define the notion of organizational identity.
- Explore the notion of organizational identity as a stable and enduring phenomenon.
- Explore the notion of organizational identity as a shifting and fluid phenomenon.
- Elaborate on the centripetal and centrifugal forces impacting on identity and organizational identification.
- Explore ways for managing the lack of accord between individual and organizational identities.
- Distinguish between empowerment and participation.
- Elaborate on empowerment based on Emery's notion of participative design.

Part 1 of this chapter explores the notion of organizational identity under conditions of change as a continuous process.

There might well be more than one organizational identity at any one time.

Part 2 explores the notion of organizational identity as it relates to empowerment and participation.
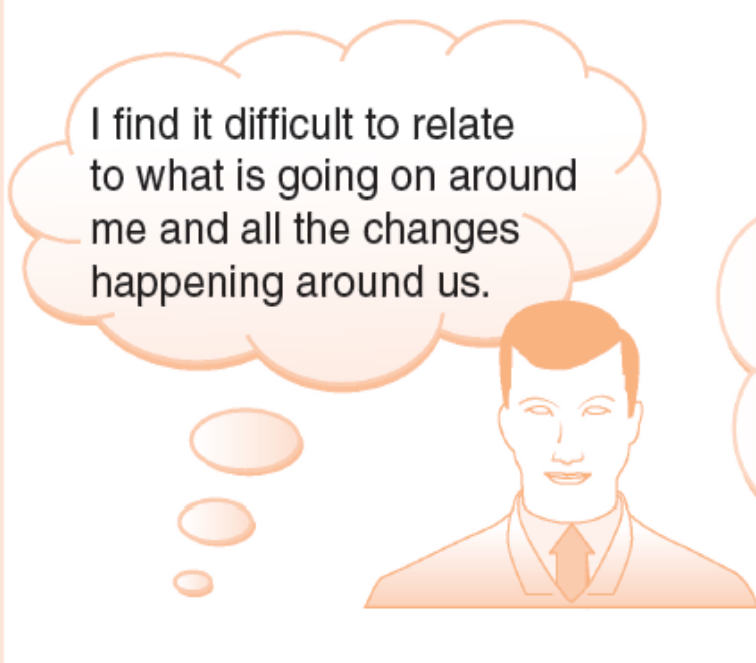
Let's start by defining the notion of identity:

We generally use the term 'organizational identity' to refer to **'who we are'** as an organization and what it stands for in terms of attributes that differentiate one organization from another.
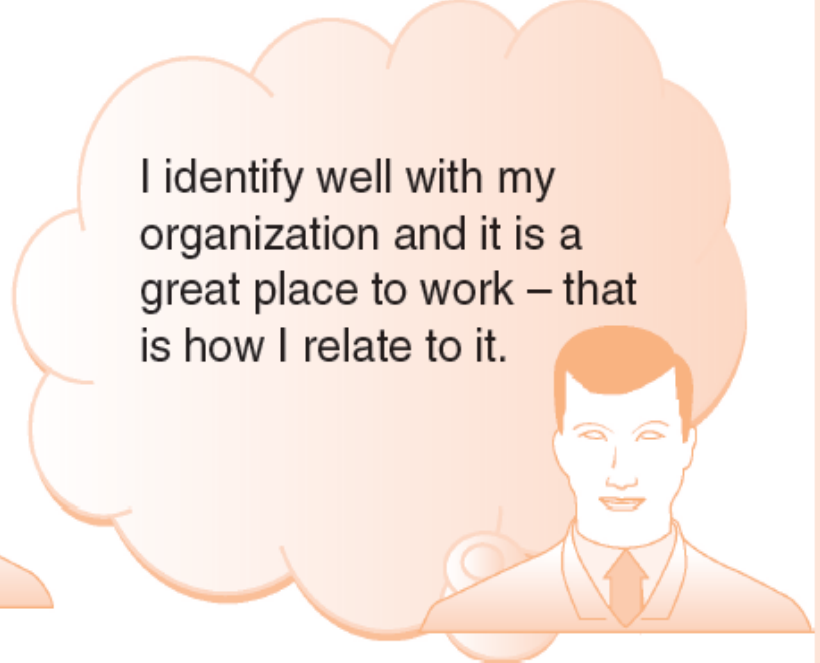
We also use individual identity, **'who I am'**, to explore how organization members make sense of their own identity in view of identity of the organization they work for.

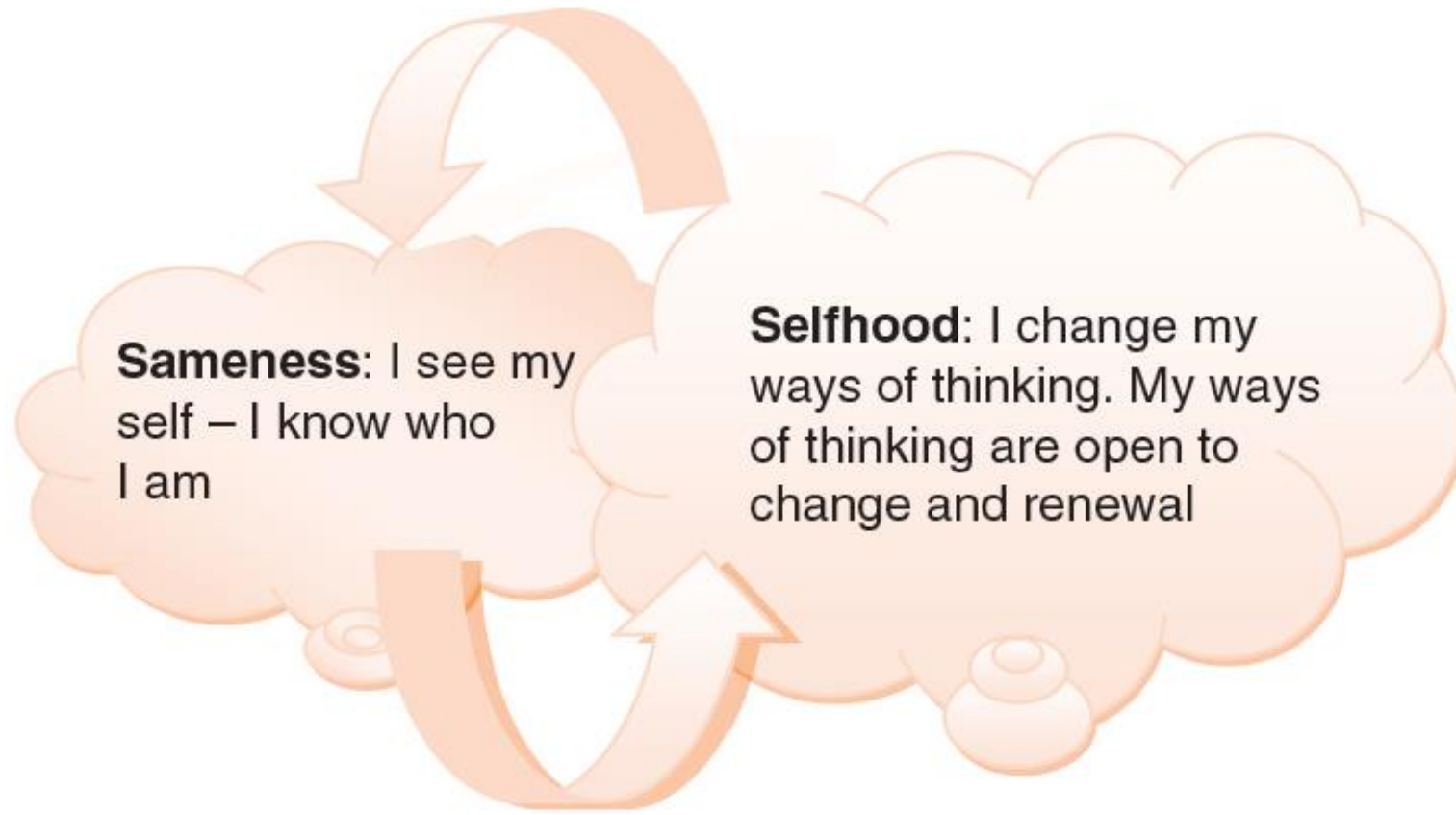Consider the way people inhabit their job description, job design and various challenges, including new technologies, mergers and other organizational changes that affect their perceived roles, job demands and job relationships. Such an inhabitation is crucial in defining representation and subjectivity.

I find it difficult to relate to what is going on around me and all the changes happening around us.

I identify well with my organization and it is a great place to work – that is how I relate to it.

Sameness: I see my self – I know who I am

Selfhood: I change my ways of thinking. My ways of thinking are open to change and renewal

Figure 12.3 Identity composition, according to Ricoeur (1984)

Why 'Organizational Identity', in particular?

We need some knowledge of organizational identity to help us answer questions such as:

- How does our organization present itself?
- What key attributes do we want to monitor?
- How should we celebrate our successes?
- How should we reward the achievements of our people?

Let's start by exploring 'organizational identity'

First: the 'conventional approach', which sees organizational identity as stable and monologic based on set of attributes describing 'who we are'; and

Second: the 'ever-changing approach', which is more about a dynamic conception of identity shaped by an ever-changing process.

# The conventional approach sees organizational identity as stable and enduring

Centrality
(C)

Endurance
(E)

Distinctiveness
(D)

The multiplicative effect of C × E × D is likely to result in a state of permanence

The other approach sees organizations as consisting of several identities that may or may not cohere with each other, hence shifting all the time

R&D

Marketing
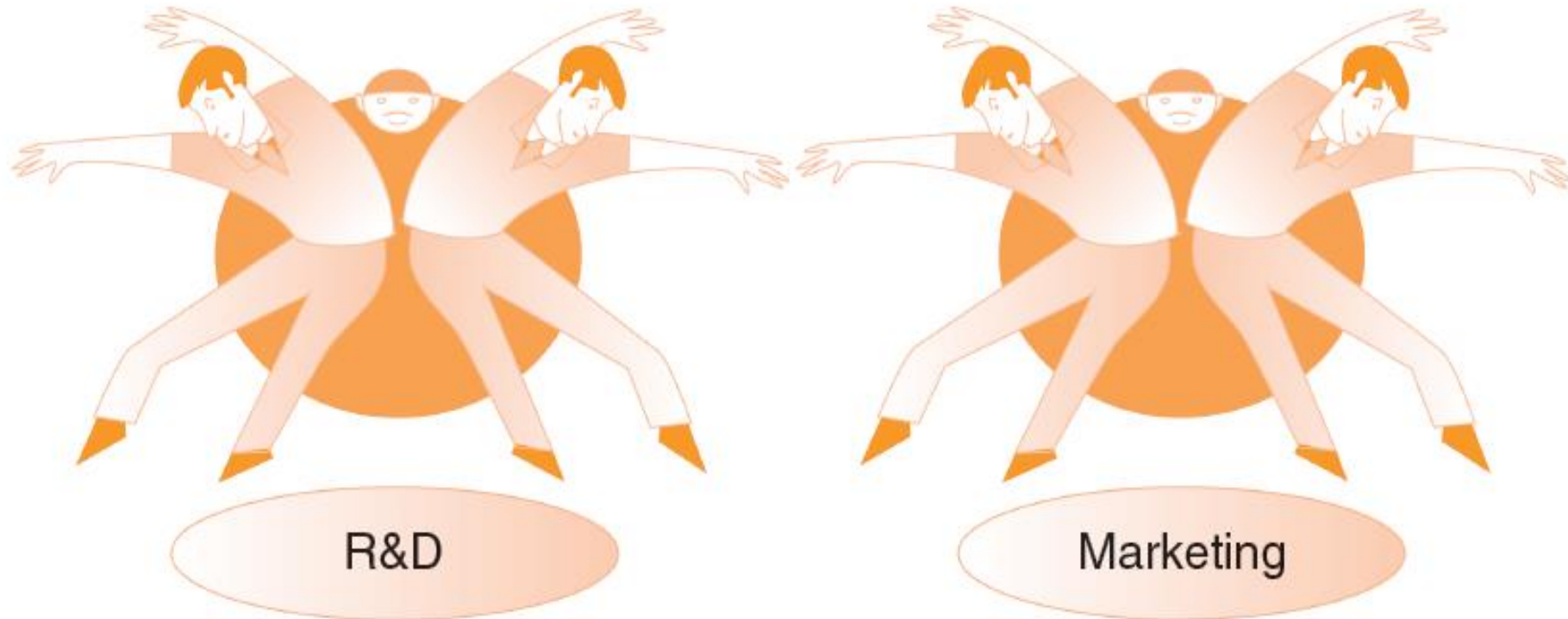
Movement of identities as in a dance . . .

A more dynamic (*ever-changing*) conception of identity is one that is more responsive to the outside. This leads us to think that an organization can and should have more than one identity and yet with such identities complementing each other.

Let's discuss: Should an organization have more than one identity? If so, should they cohere with each other?

However, there are other important ways of thinking about identity in terms of narrative

For example: Mair (1988: 127) shows the role of narrative in the formation of identity by noting that we live 'by the stories of our race and place . . . locations where the stories of our place and time become partially tellable'.

More on the role of utterances in changing identities

Changes in organizational identity are, therefore, dependent on utterances intersecting each other in various ways, thus co-constructing each other and forming new ways of thinking and identification.

Are there any connections between organizational identity and feelings of empowerment?
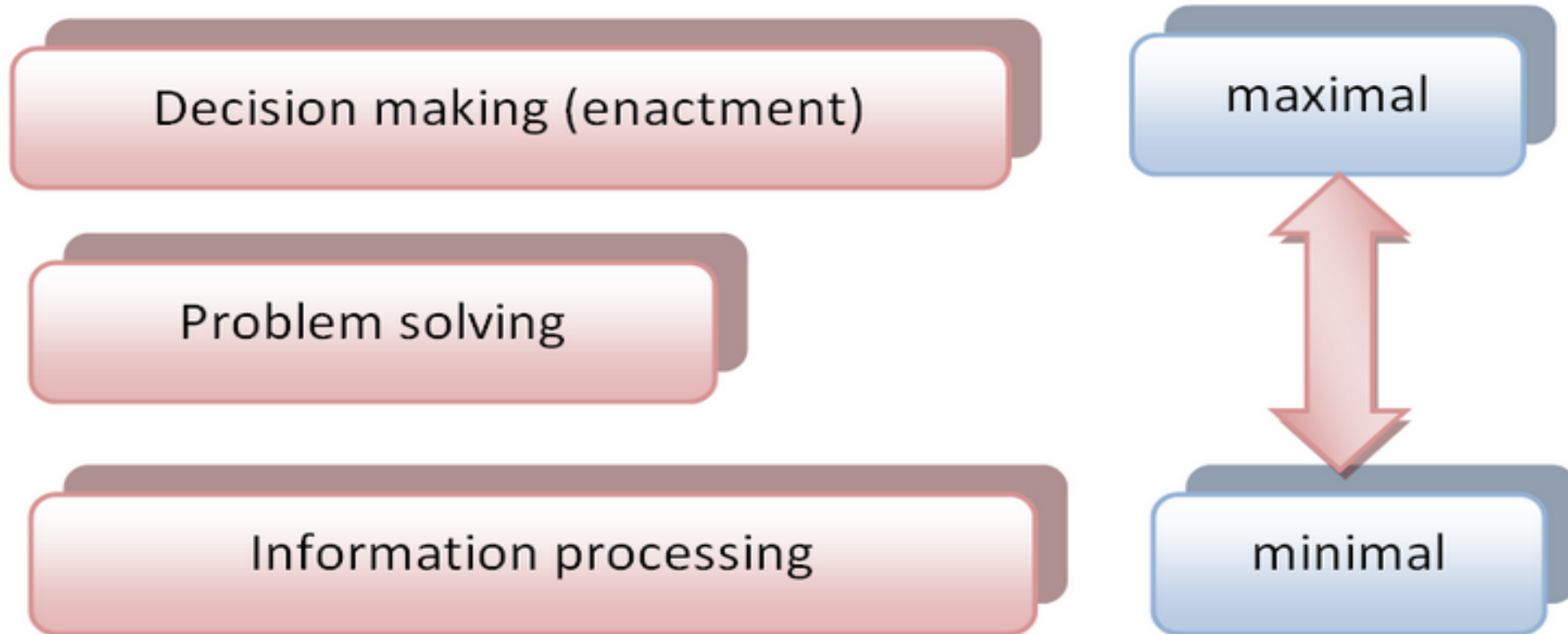
Change in organizational identity has an important consequence, in that it impacts on how people feel in relationship to their organization and their potential roles as empowered agents willing to support or deny the changes being initiated.

There is a fine distinction between participation and empowerment

- Empowerment is a **motivational** process aimed at enhancing feelings of self-efficacy.

- Participation, on the other hand, is a **relational** construct and it is used to describe perceived power.

Participation lies in at least three areas. Note how the three areas are being ordered from 'minimal' to 'maximal' and with participation in 'decision making' being at the top.

Decision making (enactment)

Problem solving

Information processing

maximal

Thank you