The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational identification as well as the impact that these two constructs have on turnover intention and job satisfaction (focal outcomes). Participants were 5,195 employees from 730 teams in 6 Italian local health organizations. Two competing conceptual models were tested for goodness of fit using multilevel path analysis. In the first model, psychological empowerment predicts organizational identification, which, in turn, predicts focal outcomes. In the second model, organizational identification predicts psychological empowerment, which, in turn, predicts focal outcomes. Fit indices of the path analysis indicated that the second model obtained the best fit to the data as compared with other models. Moreover, mediation analysis showed that psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between organizational identification and focal outcomes.

Different authors such as Keys and Frank (1987) and Boyd and Angelique (2002, 2007) had examined the research on organizations within community psychology. In their content analysis of all organizational studies published in the American Journal of Community Psychology and Journal of Community Psychology from 1977 through the end of 2000, Boyd and Angelique (2002) found that the focus of community psychologists who explored organizational issues was on community psychology tenets such as...
empowerment. Indeed, the concept of empowerment at work has been extensively applied to the study of organizations (Klein, Ralls, Smith-Major, & Douglas, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000). However, the authors also found that organization constructs are not widely utilized by community psychologists. Over the past 20 years, the concept of organizational identification (Haslam & Ellemers, 2011; Hogg & Terry, 2001; Riketta, 2005) has received little attention as a unique research topic. A theory comparable to that of social identity does not seem to exist in community psychology. Linked to this approach is Putnam’s (1993) study demonstrating that people who belonged to more groups (a concept linked to group identification) were more inclined to be politically engaged (a concept linked to empowerment) across different regions of Italy.

In this article, we first briefly introduce the concepts of empowerment and organizational identification. Then we discuss two theories about the relationship between organizational identification and psychological empowerment.

**Empowerment and Organizational Identification**

Applying the social identity approach (Tajfel, 1982) to the organizational domain, organizational identification may be defined as “a specific form of social identification where the individual defines him or herself in terms of their membership in a particular organization” (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 105). Processes pertaining to organizational identification are, on the one hand, context-determined consequences of organizational life; on the other hand, they are determinants of organizational goals and behaviors (Haslam & Ellemers, 2011).

Empowerment may be defined as a participatory process by which individuals, groups, organizations, and communities gain greater control over their lives (Rappaport, 1987). Aspects of empowerment theories have been examined across a broad variety of disciplines, such as political science, social work and social welfare, education, management, health studies, and community psychology (see Hur, 2006). Recently, there has been a growing body of evidence regarding the positive consequences of psychological empowerment in the workplace (see Spreitzer, 2007). According to Zimmerman’s (2000) theoretical framework, empowerment can be conceptualized at the individual, organizational, and community levels of analysis. At the organizational level, organizational empowerment refers to organizational efforts that provide opportunities for members to develop personal empowerment. Peterson and Zimmerman (2004) described a nomological network of empowerment at the organizational level of analysis that includes three components: intraorganizational, interorganizational, and extraorganizational.

Furthermore, Maton and Salem (1995) identified three characteristics of empowering community settings: (a) a belief system that inspires growth is strengths-based and is based beyond the self; (b) an opportunity role structure that is pervasive, highly accessible, and multifunctional; (c) a support system that is encompassing, peer-based, and provides a psychological sense of community; and (d) leadership that is inspirational, talented, shared, and committed to both setting and members.

**The Relationship between Organizational Identification and Empowerment**

Both organizational identification and psychological empowerment have been shown to be very good predictors of a range of important organizational outcomes, including turnover intention and job satisfaction (see Haslam & Ellemers, 2011; Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011; Riketta, 2005; Spreitzer, 2007). However, little attention was paid to the

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Empowerment and Organizational Identification

A relationship between organizational identification and psychological empowerment in the workplace. On the one hand, it was theorized that feelings of empowerment can enhance one’s identification with his or her organization (Ertürk, 2010; Kahaleh & Gaither, 2007). According to this perspective, psychological empowerment may influence organizational identification through a process of reciprocation: the more employees feel empowered, the more satisfied they are with their jobs and the more they are likely to reciprocate by being more identified with the organization.

Moreover, when employees are provided with greater responsibility, participation in the decision-making processes in the organization, opportunities for decision latitude, they tend to accept organizational goals and to perceive them as their own goals. This commonality of goals increases the degree to which an employee defines him/herself by the same characteristics attributed to the organization and, therefore, favors his or her organizational identification.

On the other hand, it has been argued that organizational identification may lead to psychological empowerment (Haslam, 2004; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). The rationale behind this perspective is that people identify themselves with groups or organization partly because such identification enhances their sense of efficacy and self-esteem (e.g., Hogg & Abrams, 1990). According to the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982), identifica-tion with the group is often associated with the attribution of more positive characteristics to the group, and, ultimately, result in an increase in self-esteem of its members.

Moreover, when the self-concept is based on the belonging to an organization, the participation in the activities of the collectivity is likely to increase, because such participation affirms the personal self-concept (Shamir, 1990). According to Kark et al. (2003), one consequence of this affirmation of self-concept is an increase in feelings of empower-ment. Therefore, the more an employee identifies with an organization, the more he or she is likely to experience specific psychological rewards, such as enhanced feelings of empowerment. More specifically, the more employees connect themselves to a bigger and stronger entity (identification with the organization), the more they will experience higher levels of self-esteem and perceptions of self-efficacy and collective efficacy, and the more they can feel empowered.

Haslam (2004) offers another point supporting the view that organizational identifi-cation provides the basis for empowerment. Following the Reynolds and Platow’s (2003) notion that the salience of an organizational identification shared with group members can serve as a basis for using power on behalf of those others, Haslam (2004) stated that the categorization of self in terms of specific social group constitutes a precondition for sharing of power. Sharing of power is considered a useful way for employees to increase their power because sharing power is different from giving or throwing it away and de-le-gation does not mean abdication (Kanter, 1979; Reynolds & Platow, 2003). For example, according to Kanter (1979, p. 155) “by empowering others, a leader does not decrease his power; instead he may increase it—especially if the whole organization performs better.” Yet without a shared salient organizational identification, the sharing of power is likely to fail.

The Current Study

In sum, two perspectives on the relationship between organizational identification and psychological empowerment exist. To our knowledge, no study to date has contrasted statistically these competing conceptual models. A previous study conducted in community settings by Christens, Peterson, and Speer (2011) tested the reciprocal and unidirectional
causal relations between community participation and psychological empowerment using structural equation modeling. However, this study was conducted in a different setting and did not test any relationship between organizational identity and psychological empowerment. Because participation and organizational empowerment are different constructs, we cannot make predictions about the relationship between organizational identification and psychological empowerment. Contrasting the different models represented by the two perspectives avoids the potential threat of relying on only one model, when there may be another model that better explains variation in turnover intention and job satisfaction as focal outcomes. Job satisfaction refers to the extent of individuals’ satisfaction with their jobs, while turnover intentions occur when the employee plans to voluntarily retire from a position. Here, we focused on the relationship between empowerment and organizational identification, as well as the impact that these two constructs have on focal outcomes.

In the current analysis, we explicitly contrasted two models:

Model 1. Psychological empowerment predicts organizational identification, which, in turn, predicts focal outcomes.

Model 2. Organizational identification predicts psychological empowerment, which, in turn, predicts focal outcomes.

We focused on health care public services because it is one of the largest employers in Italy (Istat, 2011). Furthermore, previous investigations highlighted the importance of both empowerment and organizational identification among employees of health care public services (e.g., Koberg, Boss, Senjem, & Goodman, 1999; Sparrowe, 1994; Terry & Callan, 1998). Finally, empowerment and organizational identification play a critical role in health care public services. On the one hand, empowerment is one of the core elements of organizational transformation changes in health community services (Evans, Hanlin, & Prilleltensky, 2007). On the other hand, the organizational success of health care public services is partially determined by organizational members’ cooperative behavior, which, in turn, depends on organizational identification (Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002).

In Italian health care system, three main categories of personnel are employed: health professionals (e.g., nurses, physicians), technical staff, and administrative staff. Technical staff and administrative staff may be likely to be different in terms of their organizational identification than professionals such as nurses and physicians. Therefore, a multigroup analysis will be carried out to explore differences across these three main categories of personnel.

Following a major reform of the Italian National Health Service in the early nineties (Legislative Decree no. 502/1992 and no. 517/1993), Italian Regions were granted greater responsibility and autonomy regarding health matters and the Local Health Units and Hospitals were transformed into Agencies. Furthermore, a second major reform of the Italian National Health Service in the late nineties (Legislative Decree no. 112/1998 and no. 229/1999) decentralized health governance from the Central Government to the Regions. As such, we might expect different results across different macroregions (Northern, Central, and Southern Italy). Thus, a second multigroup analysis will be carried out to explore differences across these three macroregions.

Finally, within the local health organization different teams are responsible for key organizational outputs such as hospital accommodation, delivering care to patients in different settings ranging from primary care to critical acute care, chronic care, laboratory services, ambulance services, and home care health services. Teams within the administrative staff are responsible for managing finances, making policy, and human resource
Empowerment and Organizational Identification

management. Teams within the technical staff are responsible for coordinating the use, administration, and maintenance of equipment, devices, and other technical resources. Teams may vary in numbers of members and usually are multidisciplinary in nature.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 5,195 employees from 730 teams in six Italian local health organizations (Azienda Unità Sanitaria Locale). Of the 5,195 respondents (mean \(M\) age = 46.94 years; standard deviation \(SD\) = 8.50; range = 22 to 71; organizational tenure \(M\) = 15.64 years, \(SD\) = 10.28; range = 1 to 42), 69% were female employees; 69% were nurses, physicians, dietitians, therapists, and other health care professionals, 12% were employed in the technical staff, and 19% were part of the administrative staff. Finally, 25% of the respondents were managers.

Measures

Organizational identification. We used the six items organizational identification scale proposed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). The Italian version was derived from the study of Bergami and Bagozzi (2000). A sample item is “When I talk about [organization], I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they.’” Subjects indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each of the six statements, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha was .79.

Psychological empowerment. Among the different measures commonly used in community psychology (e.g., Speer & Peterson, 2000), we used the Spreitzer’s empowerment scale (Spreitzer, 1995) because it was validated on a large sample of Italian workers (Prati & Pietrantoni, 2008). The total scale comprises 12 items. A sample item is “I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.” The response scale was a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha was .82. Psychological empowerment can be treated as a unitary construct because relationships with outcome variables do not differ by subdimensions and there are strong intercorrelations among the subdimensions (see Seibert et al., 2011).

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured by a single-item overall measure assessing respondents’ satisfaction with their current job on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied; Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997). According to Wanous et al. (1997), the observed corrected mean correlation between single items and scale measures of overall job satisfaction is .67. This finding indicates convergent validity and bolsters the argument that a single-item measure of overall job satisfaction is acceptable.

Turnover intentions. A two-item measure of turnover intentions was derived from a previous study (Toderi & Sarchielli, 2011). The items were “I intend to leave this job/position in the next 12 months” and “It is very possible that I will change job/position in the next 12 months.” Participants responded to these items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This measure exhibited satisfactory reliability.
(r = .74), and so we averaged responses to these items to create a composite measure of “turnover intentions.”

Procedure

We collected data using an online anonymous questionnaire. The employees were told that the aim of the study was to identify issues and concerns related to organizational well-being. They were invited by the management to participate in the study, assured of confidentiality, and allowed to use work time to complete the questionnaire. They were told that they could decline participation in the study at any time. Data collection took place between May 2011 and August 2011. All participants were informed by e-mail when the questionnaire was available online and were reminded several weeks later if they had not yet responded. Access to the online questionnaire was restricted to the intended participants. Besides being employed in the organization, there were not any exclusionary criteria regarding eligible participants.

A total of 5,195 usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 46.95%. We screened the data to determine the presence of random/inconsistent/fixed responding. We did not find any evidence of the presence of random/inconsistent/fixed responding. There were no significant differences in the sociodemographic variables between the group of employees who did participate in this study and the group of employees who did not participate.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

There were no missing data since the survey tool was designed in a way that did not allow respondents to submit without filling out all the questions. Table 1 shows correlations and descriptive statistics for the variables including intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC). All the relationships are statistically significant.

Because data were clustered at two levels (individual level and team level), we employed multilevel analysis, as it produces correct standard errors for clustered data and, therefore, more accurate Type I error rates. Because members from the same team are likely to share characteristics, they are more likely to respond in the same way compared with individuals in other teams. Therefore, to avoid the violation of the assumption of

Table 1. Summary of Means, Standard Deviations, Intraclass Correlation Coefficients (ICC), and Intercorrelations (Pearson) for Scores on Organizational Identification, Empowerment, Turnover Intentions, and Job Satisfaction (N = 5195)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>ICC</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Organizational identification</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.45*</td>
<td>− .26*</td>
<td>.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Empowerment</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.70*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>− .43*</td>
<td>.55*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Turnover intentions</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>− .32*</td>
<td>− .65*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>− .55*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Job satisfaction</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>.81*</td>
<td>− .58*</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Upper diagonal contains indicator correlations; lower diagonal contains latent variable correlations.
*p < .001 (two-tailed).
Empowerment and Organizational Identification

independent observations, a multilevel analysis is needed to incorporate the dependency among employees in the same team (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

Multilevel structural equation modeling was, therefore, employed to test two path models. To account for the complex survey nature of the data, we used a robust maximum likelihood complex sample estimation in Mplus 6 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2010). In this approach, weights for parameter estimation are incorporated and a sandwich estimator is used to compute appropriate standard errors for clustered data. Following recommendations for model goodness of fit, a combination approach to evaluating model fit was used (Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004). Specifically, the goodness of fit for each model was examined using two incremental close-fit indices: comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), one baseline close-fit index, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Incremental fit indexes (CFI and TLI) of .90 or higher reflected acceptable levels of fit, while RMSEA less than 0.05 represent a close fit, and values as high as 0.08 indicate reasonable errors of approximation.

Confirmatory Factors Analyses and Concerns Regarding Common Method Biases

It should be noted that common method bias might be a threat to the validity of our findings, because all the measures were obtained in the same situation and from the same source (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). To this end, we applied the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) marker variable technique outlined by Williams, Hartman, and Cavazotte (2010), as recommended by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012). This technique requires the use of a marker variable that is theoretically unrelated to the focal study constructs. We selected the Seeking Social Support subscale of the Coping Strategy Indicator (Amirkhan, 1990) as a marker latent factor. Following this procedure, we estimated and compared the relative fit of five nested latent variable models. The first model (the CFA model) allows for a complete set of correlations among the latent variables to obtain the factor loading and measurement error variance estimates for use in subsequent models.

In Model 2 (the Baseline model), we fixed the marker variables’ factor loadings and error variances to the values obtained from the initial CFA model and set to zero the correlations between the marker variable and all other variables. The third model (Method-C model) has additional factor loadings from the marker latent factor to each of the indicators in the model. These added factor loadings are constrained to be equal in size in the third model and are freely estimated in the fourth model (Method-U model). The final model (Method-R model) differs from the fourth or third model (depending on which of them provided a better fit to the data) in that the correlations between the variables are constrained to their values from the baseline model. If Method-R model does not fit the data better than Method-C or Method-U model, common method variance do not significantly bias the correlations between the variables.

The results showed that the Method-R model was not superior to the Method-U model ($\Delta \chi^2 = 2.23, \Delta \text{ degree of freedom } [df] = 3, p = .524$). Therefore, the relationships between the variables of our study were not significantly biased by common method variance (Williams et al., 2010). Although this method has its limitations, the results suggest that common method variance is not an important issue with these data.

A Test of Two Competing Models

The first model (psychological empowerment predicts organizational identification, which, in turn, predicts focal outcomes) exhibited a poor fit to the data, $\chi^2 (57) =$

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Figure 1. Standardized coefficients for path Model 2.

Note. *p < .001.

2536.71, p < 0.001; NFI = 0.78; CFI = 0.84; RMSEA = 0.092. The second model (organizational identification predicts psychological empowerment, which, in turn, predicts focal outcomes) showed a good fit to the data, $\chi^2 (57) = 681.99$, p < 0.001; NFI = 0.95; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.046. Figure 1 presents a simplified depiction of the second model that showed the best fit to the data. The variance of job satisfaction and turnover intentions explained by psychological empowerment was 45% and 62%, respectively. Organizational identification explained 33% of the variance associated with psychological empowerment.

In the next step of analysis, we examined whether psychological empowerment mediated the relationships between organizational identification and the focal outcomes. To test the multilevel mediational paths, we employed the multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) approach for 1-1-1 designs (Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010). A mediation effect may be considered as a special case of an indirect effect that occurs when both the total effect (in this analysis the relationships between organizational identification and the focal outcomes) and the indirect effect are significant (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The significance of the indirect effects at the .05 level is supported if the confidence intervals for the estimates exclude zero. In other words, because it was found a significant total effect, there is evidence of mediation if the confidence interval for indirect effect does not contain zero. The indirect effects of organizational identification to job satisfaction (estimate = 0.19, BCa 95% confidence interval [CI] = 0.06 to 0.32) and to turnover intentions (estimate = −0.84, BCa 95% CI = −0.93 to −0.75) were significant. Therefore, we found evidence of mediation effects of psychological empowerment in the relationships between organizational identification and the focal outcomes.

Testing Multigroup Invariance

As a final step in this study, we tested for the equivalence of structural regression paths across different macroregions (Northern, Central, and Southern Italy), and across different categories of personnel (health care professionals, technical staff, and administrative staff). The initial step in testing for invariance requires that the same parameters across groups to be estimated in a multigroup model (configural model). In the second step in testing for invariance, the fit of this configural model provides the baseline value against which the fit of the invariant structural regression paths model (with structural regression paths equality constraints imposed) is compared.

The results are presented in Table 2. Concerning the equivalence across regions, as indicated by the significantly higher S-B$\chi^2$ value, despite the very slightly lower CFI value, compared with the configural model, results suggest that the model does not fit the data quite as well as it did with no structural regression paths constraints imposed.
Table 2. Tests for Invariance Equivalence of Structural Regression Paths Across Different Regions (Northern, Central, and Southern Italy), and Across Different Categories of Personnel (Health Care Professionals, Technical Staff, and Administrative Staff): Summary of Model Fit and $S-B\chi^2$-Difference-Test Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$S-B\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$\Delta S-B\chi^2$</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>$\Delta$RMSEA</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>$\Delta$CFI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Configural model</td>
<td>863.17</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.957</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Invariant structural regression paths</td>
<td>885.71</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>22.54*</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.956</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Categories of personnel</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Configural model</td>
<td>841.13</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.962</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Invariant structural regression paths</td>
<td>850.95</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>9.82</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.961</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* df = degree of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index.

* $p < .05.$

Therefore, we can expect to find some evidence of noninvariance related to the structural regression paths. More specifically, the regression coefficient of the relationship between organizational identification and psychological empowerment was higher in the Southern Italy compared with the Northern and Central Italy (see Figure 2). Concerning the equivalence across categories of personnel, the corrected $S-B\chi^2$ square difference test was statistically nonsignificant.

Figure 2. Standardized coefficients for path Model 2 across different regions (Northern, Central, and Southern Italy).

*Note.* $^*p < .001.$

Therefore, we can expect to find some evidence of noninvariance related to the structural regression paths. More specifically, the regression coefficient of the relationship between organizational identification and psychological empowerment was higher in the Southern Italy compared with the Northern and Central Italy (see Figure 2). Concerning the equivalence across categories of personnel, the corrected $S-B\chi^2$ square difference test was statistically nonsignificant.
DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational identification. To this end, we contrasted the fit of two different models. In the first model, psychological empowerment was conceptualized as a determinant of organizational identification, which, in turn, predicted the focal outcomes (job satisfaction and turnover intentions). In the second model, organizational identification was hypothesized as a predictor of psychological empowerment, which, in turn, predicted the focal outcomes.

Identification as the Predictor of Empowerment

Our findings offer strong support for the view that organizational identification leads to psychological empowerment, which, in turn, predicts job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Haslam, 2004; Kark et al., 2003). Consistent with this perspective, our results suggest that when employees identify with an organization, there is an increase in feelings of empowerment. In line with the social identity theory (Hogg & Abrams, 1990; Shamir, 1990; Tajfel, 1982), following identification with a group or organization, people tend to attribute more positive qualities to the superordinate entity and this may enhance their self-concept, sense of efficacy, and self-esteem. This change in the way people see themselves may explain why people feel more empowered (Kark et al., 2003).

Put in this way, the psychological sense of empowerment at work is, at least in part, a function of how employees identify themselves with the organization—the extent to which the organization is valued and self-involving and contributes to the definition of self—rather than of work conditions or job characteristics. When an employee identifies with his or her organization, he or she tends to internalize the organization's goals, values, ideology, and culture (Haslam, 2004; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). This sense of the individual as part of the organizational entity, characterized by a sense of we that join individuals into one group with a common identity, may lead to the perception of more power in the workplace.

Furthermore, when an individual's organizational identification is salient and there is a sense of shared group membership, he or she will be motivated less by self-interest and more by the prospect of contributing to group goals (for example, through extra-role, pro-organizational behavior), thereby accomplishing collective self-actualization (Haslam, 2004). Therefore, employees who are strongly identified with the organization may feel more competent, influential, self-determined, and more likely to find a meaning in their work. These four psychological states correspond to the four dimensions of empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995).

Our findings also showed that psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between organizational identification and job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Therefore, organizational identification may lead to lower turnover intentions and higher job satisfaction when, at least in part, it contributes to a psychological sense of empowerment. The study extends prior research on the predictors of psychological empowerment such as organizational membership (e.g., Wilke & Speer, 2011) by providing evidence of the role of organizational identification.

Furthermore, the degree of empowerment employees may perceive was directly related to job satisfaction and turnover intentions. This is in line with a large number of studies that showed that empowered employees report high job satisfaction and have less propensity to turnover (e.g., Aryee & Chen, 2006; Carless, 2004; Koberg et al., 1999;
Empowerment and Organizational Identification

Liden, Wayne, & Sparrow, 2000; Seibert, Silver, & Randolph, 2004; Seibert et al., 2011; Sparrowe, 1994; Spreitzer, Kizilos, & Nason, 1997; Wang & Lee, 2009). Therefore, the present study adds to the growing body of literature that relates the psychological experience of empowerment at work to positive individual outcomes (Spreitzer, 2007).

Although the first model did not exhibit a good fit, it should be noted that we cannot exclude the possibility that feelings of empowerment can improve, to some extent, organizational identification (Ertürk, 2010; Kahaleh & Gaither, 2007). The effect size of the correlation between psychological empowerment and organizational identification was large and the third model in which these variables were unrelated displayed a very poor fit. Therefore, this substantial degree of intercorrelation among psychological empowerment and organizational identification may be interpreted in the way that the first influences the second. This hypothesis concerns the process of reciprocation: When the employees feel more empowered they may reciprocate by elevating the salience of the organizational identification and by accepting organizational goals as their own goals.

Differences Across Personnel and Macroregions

It is interesting to note that the relationships implied in the second model did not differ across different categories of personnel. These findings suggest that the characteristics associated with health care work (an ethic of caring for others) are not unique and might not differ from other jobs that do not involve directly health care. Therefore, we should expect that other organizational social identities predict empowerment as well. In addition, other social identities not necessarily associated with organizations (mother, artist, athlete, etc.) may predict empowerment because, according to the social identity theory (Hogg & Abrams, 1990; Shamir, 1990; Tajfel, 1982), identification with a group may lead to an enhanced sense of efficacy and self-esteem.

We found small, although significant differences across macroregions. Regional differences in per capita income and quality of life indices are exceptionally large in Italy. The economy and quality of life of the North are similar to those of Central and Northern Europe, while the South is much poorer. According to Putnam (1993), sociocultural factors, such as the low civic trust in the south, are an important part of the explanation of the North-South gap. However, it should be noted that the number of Italian local health organizations was too small to be considered a representative sample of these three different contexts. Therefore, it is not clear whether these differences may be attributable to the social, economic, and cultural differences across the three macroregions in Italy or simply to differences across local health organizations (or both). Future studies are needed to investigate the nature of these differences.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Taken together these findings add to the theoretical conceptualization of organizational identification and empowerment in a number of unique and novel ways. First, the mediation analysis provided evidence of how organizational identification determines work outcomes. Previous studies showed that organizational identification is associated with a wide range of work-related attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Riketta, 2004), but the investigation of the mediators has received little attention. Second, the study also helps advance empowerment theory regarding its relationship with organizational identification. Third, our findings show that theorists need to account for the influence of organizational identification when considering the predictors of empowerment.
Our findings also have several implications for promoting psychological empowerment through organizational identification. The promotion of organizational identification is linked to intervention aimed at maximizing and emphasizing internal similarities and external differences with other organizations (Pratt, 2001) and at maintaining in-group/out-group comparisons that favor the organization (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Furthermore, organizations can use sensebreaking and sensegiving processes to manage organizational identification (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Sensebreaking “involves a fundamental questioning of who one is when one’s sense of self is challenged . . . [creating] a meaning void that must be filled” (Pratt, 2000, p. 464), while sensegiving refers to the process of “meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). One example is Pratt’s (2000) study of Amway showing how sensebreaking and sensegiving can be used by organizations to strip away employees’ old identities and establish new ones.

Other recommendations on how to increase organizational identification may be found in the literature on the sense of community in community organizations which suggests to “foster intraorganization relationships that accomplish meaningful outcomes beyond the organization” (Hughey, Peterson, & Speer, 1999, p. 108). Furthermore, strategies for promoting organizational identification may be derived from the literature on organizational empowerment, more specifically, in reference to the concept of opportunity role structures and group-based belief systems (Maton & Salem, 1995; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Rappaport, 1993; Spreitzer, 1995). On the one hand, groups’ community narratives (belief systems) may act as mechanisms for members’ identity formation and change (Rappaport, 1993). On the other hand, a pervasive, accessible, and multifunctional opportunity role structure can contribute to identity formation and change by providing numerous opportunities and occasions for members to become involved and by helping members achieve primary personal goals in participatory activities (Maton & Salem, 1995; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Rappaport, 1993; Spreitzer, 1995).

Limitations

The interpretations that can be drawn from the present research are limited for several reasons. First, although the models tested in this study are based on established theoretical frameworks, because of the cross-sectional study design, causality is not possible to ascertain. Experimental studies are needed to test for a causal link between organizational identification and psychological empowerment. Related to cross-sectional data, another limitation concerns common method biases. To address this problem, we showed that the one factor model does not fit these data. However, it is not possible to exclude method effects, since this procedure has its limits. Second, the generalizability of the current findings to employees in other organizations or in other countries is unknown. Future studies should determine whether these results are replicable. For example, unlike the U.S.’s strong centralized government, in Italy the decentralization of health governance may lead to unique results.

Conclusions

The findings of the present study supported the conceptualization of organizational identification as a determinant of psychological empowerment. Moreover, we found that psychological empowerment should be considered a mediator in the relationship between...
organizational identification and focal outcomes, namely, job satisfaction and turnover intentions. It should be noted that we found small but significant differences across macroregions. It is likely that both or either the differences across the three macroregions in Italy and the differences across local health organizations may have played a role. In conclusions, our findings accentuate the importance of taking into consideration the role of organizational identification in the development of a model of empowerment in the workplace.

REFERENCES


Empowerment and Organizational Identification


