PSIWORLD 2012

Police Organizational Image and Performance: the Citizens' View

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Abstract

This study investigated the organizational image and performance of a Romanian police force from the viewpoint of 50 citizens. First, the core and the peripheral traits of organizational image were identified through the 21-Statement Test and Q-sort type distribution. Second, the associations between three aspects of perceived policeman organizational identity and four dimensions of organizational performance were examined. The analysis of 1026 statements revealed "safety" as a central characteristic trait of police organizational image, while "uniform" was seen as the least characteristic trait. Overall, from the citizens' perspective, a strong organizational identification positively associated with high levels of organizational performance.

1. Introduction

Organizational identity is a flourishing domain among organizational theorists and researchers (Gioia, Prince, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010). Early conceptualizations defined this concept as the essentialist view that characterizes an organization as possessing a set of central, distinctive, and enduring features (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Later research emphasized its subjective, dynamic and malleable nature, considering it a mental construct or an image that reflects audience perceptions about the properties and attributes of an organization (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). Other authors suggest that this concept can be better examined in terms of six dimensions along which it can vary but are not parts of its defining characteristics: homogeneity, intensity, complexity, abstractness, content and context (Barney et al., 1998; cited in Boroş, 2009).

Most of the research on organizational identity has focused on its conceptualizations (Albert & Whetten, 1985), its impact on organization and organizational members (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991) and the effect of

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change (Corley & Gioia, 2004). But few studies articulated the factors that influence organizational identity construction (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006). In this sense, Gioia (1998) considered that organizational identity "develops over time in interaction with internal and external parties" (p. 45). These stakeholders perceive and interpret the actions of an organization and the information about it, and, based on these data, they construct a cognitive image of the organization (Scott & Lane, 2000) or mental associations of it (Brown et al., 2006). Understanding these mental associations is essential because they can influence stakeholders' reactions to the organization (Scott & Lane, 2000). According to these, it is expected that stakeholders' views about the organization will influence employees' interpretation of how others perceive their organization (construed external image). Subsequently, this image influences employees' organizational identification (Hatch & Schultz, 2000) considered as their perception of oneness with or belongingness to organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

Literature suggests that employees with high organizational identification have greater contribution to their organizations, such as increased in-role and extra-role job performance (Norman, Avey, Nimicht, & Pigeon, 2010). Furthermore, Carmely, Gilat and Waldman (2007), using employees' viewpoint, found that organizational performance is related to their organizational identification. However, there is a need to understand how such attitudes can be related to distinct aspects of organizational performance.

Understanding mental associations of an organization and the way the organizational identification relates to several aspects of organizational performance is more stringent in the case of the public organizations such as police organizations, which ensure citizens' security and safety. One of their main stakeholders is represented by the citizens (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1994). Thus, measuring and understanding how the public views the police, are important because police as a public service agency is ultimately accountable to the public (Wells, 2007). Furthermore, although there are a few studies on police organizational identity, mainly on organizational identity claims (Jacobs,Christe-Zeyse, Keegan, & Pólos, 2008), there are no empirically examinations of the perceived police organizational image in terms of its central and peripheral traits from the citizens' viewpoint as police stakeholders. Examining how various aspects of organizational identification relate to multiple dimensions of police organizational performance from the citizens' viewpoint, this study provide additional information about the relationship between employees' attitudes and multidimensional organizational performance from the stakeholders' viewpoint.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants were 50 individuals from the Romanian general population, with age ranging from 20 to 60 years. They voluntarily participated in this study.

2.2. Instruments

To collect data about the perceived police organizational image the 21-Statements Test was used. Participants were asked to answer the question: "What is [the name of the police organization]?", using 21 self-generated statements. Each statement was written on a Q-card and evaluated on a 9-point Likert scale based on its importance as a perceived police organizational image trait, ranging from -4 (the least important features) to +4 (the most important features). For each point on the Likert scale, a limited number of statements could be evaluated as such -4 and 4 (1 card), -3 and 3 (2 cards), -2 and 2 (2 cards), -1 and 1(3 cards), and 0 (5 cards) (Q sort type distribution).

Three aspects of police officers' organizational identity from the citizens' viewpoint were considered. Each aspect was measured with one item adapted from Avey, Avolio, Crossley, and Luthans (2008): *"Policemen feel this organization's success is their success"* (identification with organizational success), *"Policemen feel being*

members in this organization helps define who they are" (organizational membership) and *"Policemen feel the need to defend their organization when it is criticized"* (defending the police organization when it is criticized).

Data about perceived organizational performance dimensions were collected using four items: 1. *"This police force performs very well on the requirements set by the formal authority"*, (2). *"This police force performs very well according to its internal priorities"*, (3). *"The internal priorities of this police force are well aligned with the requirements set by the formal authority"*, and (4). *"The internal priorities of this police force are well aligned with the expectations of its external stakeholders"*. The measurement scale for organizational identification and performance dimensions was a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

3. Results and Discussion

The participants generated 1026 statements. From these statements, only those that were mentioned by over 20% of the participants were considered as reflecting the elements of the common image of the police organization. To establish which are the least and the most characteristic traits of the perceived police organizational image, the statements that had the mean below and above the interval [-1; 1] were considered. The results revealed that one of the least characteristic trait, as perceived by the citizens, is "uniform" (-2.48), followed by "rules" (-1.82) and "interest" (-1.30) (Table 1). One the other hand, "safety" was one of the most characteristic trait (2.33), followed by "protection" (2.00), "respect" (1.89), "responsibility" (1.50), "law enforcement" (1.43), "bribery" (1.32), "professionalism" (1.17) and "control" (1.15). Also, dual statements were identified, such as "responsibility" versus "lack of responsibility". This might reflect that citizens held different perceived images about this police force. As suggested by previous research, important determinants of citizens' views about police effectiveness, fairness, shooting, legitimacy or acceptability of specific police practice and procedures are represented by the citizens' individual and contextual factors such as age, race, socioeconomic status, neighborhood context (Wells, 2007), satisfaction and past experience with the police (Garcia & Cao, 2005).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the least and most characteristics traits of police organizational image

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency	Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency
1. Safety	2.33	1.72	18	11. Surveillance	.83	1.27	12
2. Protection	2.00	2.09	12	12. Attention	.63	2.00	16
3. Respect	1.89	1.32	18	13. Organization	.55	1.64	11
4. Responsibility	1.50	1.67	20	14. Corruption	.07	1.93	30
5. Law enforcement	1.43	2.59	14	15. Lack of responsibility	.00	1.48	12
6. Bribery	1.32	1.95	19	16. Seriousness	.00	1.74	26
7. Professionalism	1.17	2.79	12	17. Illegality	-1.00	1.18	11
8. Control	1.15	2.49	26	18. Interest	-1.30	1.46	20
9. Security	1.00	1.18	11	19. Rules	-1.82	2.04	11
10. Trust	.83	2.37	12	20. Uniform	-2.48	1.40	21

It is important to notice that we investigated the citizens' mental associations regarding the police image and not their significance or how this image was constructed. Also, this perceived image could be the result of citizens' personal sense-making or an effect of the way the police organization has fabricated and projected an image of itself. Another possible explanation for this perceived image formed by the citizens is the effect of other police stakeholders, such as mass media and its news on police work (Corley, Cochran, & Comstock, 2001).

Positive associations between the four dimensions of perceived police organizational performance were found (Table 2).

Table 2. Matrix of r-Pearson correlations matrix between organizational identification and performance dimensions

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Performance on the requirements set by the formal authority	1						
2. Performance according to internal priorities	.65**	1					
3. Alignment of internal priorities with the requirements set by the formal authority	.72**	.57**	1				
4. Alignment of internal priorities with external stakeholders' expectations	.41**	.37**	.53**	1			
5. Identification with organizational success	.53**	.44**	.40**	.44**	1		
6. Organizational membership	.13	-.10	.09	.39**	.42**	1	
7. Defending the police organization when it is criticized	.20	-.09	.08	.27	.63**	.55**	1

** $p < .01$.

Also, the three aspects of organizational identification positively correlated between them. Furthermore, it was found that a strong perceived identification of the policemen with organizational success was associated with a high perceived police organizational performance on the requirements set by the formal authority ($r = .53$, $p < .01$) and its internal priorities ($r = .44$, $p < .01$), from the citizens' viewpoint. Also, this aspect of the policemen organizational identification perceived by the citizens was positively associated with a good alignment of police internal priorities with the requirements set by the formal authority ($r = .40$, $p < .01$) and the external stakeholders' expectations ($r = .44$, $p < .01$). Regarding the other two aspects of organizational identification considered in this study, it was found that a strong organizational membership was associated with a good alignment of police internal priorities with external stakeholders' expectations ($r = .39$, $p < .01$). Citizens' perception on policemen's defending the police organization when it is criticized was not significantly associated with any perceived dimension of the police organizational performance. These results reflect that policemen's distinct perceptions of oneness with or belongingness to their organization are not always perceived as being associated with multiple dimensions of police organizational performance in the view of the citizens.

These results suggest that police organizations need to pay close attention to the images of their organization held by its stakeholders. The police forces need to attend to the discrepancies between their sense of identity resulted from organizational identification process and the images held by other perceivers such as citizens. It is considered that those organizations that can best monitor their image(s) are likely to have the greatest ability to assess the implications of those images for identity, and for taking action to manage those images (Price & Gioia, 2008). Thus, based on previous research (Frandsen, 2012), future studies should focus on coping strategies policemen use in case of discrepancies between their organizational identity and organizational image. Also, it is important to study the level of agreement between the views of police officers and citizens. Only a few studies used concurrent surveys to investigate the relative importance of crime problems in the jurisdiction, overall satisfaction with the police performance and the strategies designed to improve this performance (Liederbach, Fritsch, Carter, & Bannister, 2008).

4. Conclusions

This study investigated the content of the police image held by citizens. It provided additional information about the relation between the process of organizational identification and distinct dimensions of police organizational performance from the citizens' perspective. Beyond the contributions of this paper on the topic of police organizational image, organizational identification and performance from the perspective of the citizens, it

is important to mention that the research on this topic will increase considering that police organizations operate in a rapid changing context at the national and international level.

Acknowledgements

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