Group & Organization Management
38(1) 128–144

DOI: 10.1177/1059601112472368
http://gom.sagepub.com
SAGE

Working With Subgroup Identities to Build Organizational Identification and Support for Organizational Strategy: A Test of the ASPIRe Model

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Abstract

A growing body of evidence indicates that organizational identification underpins a range of important organizational outcomes. However, to date, the literature has provided little empirically grounded guidance for organizations that are trying to develop organizational identification among their employees. In this article, the authors aim to address this lacuna by testing the effectiveness of the ASPIRe (*A*ctualizing *S*ocial and *P*ersonal *I*dentity *R*esources) model—a model that specifies a sequence of structured activities designed to use subgroup identities as a platform for building organizational identification—in a bespoke workshop delivered to senior military health services personnel. As predicted by the ASPIRe model, participants reported increased levels of subgroup and organizational identification as a result of the workshop and were also more supportive of the organization's strategy.

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Keywords

organizational identification, ASPIRe, social identity, communication

A growing body of research suggests that organizational identification is the basis for a range of important organizational outcomes (e.g., Haslam, 2001; Van Dick, 2001). Nevertheless, a perennial question that this research raises is how exactly organizational identification can be increased with a view to delivering these positive outcomes. To date, a range of solutions has been offered to this problem. For example, researchers recommend that leaders promote a common in-group identity (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993) or that they structure organizational activities in ways that make shared identity meaningful and salient (van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher, & Christ, 2005) or that their communications define the organization as a positive, distinct, and enduring entity (Albert & Whetten, 1985). However, such approaches have tended to encounter at least three significant shortcomings.

First, they tend to pay minimal attention to the fact that the organization as a whole is not the only source of social identity available to employees (although see Gaertner, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996, for a discussion of dual identity). Moreover, alternative identities can often represent significant barriers to organizational identification (Jetten, O'Brien, & Trindall, 2002). In particular, organizational members often define themselves in terms of less abstract, lower-level identities (e.g., the workteam, the department) whose relationship to the organization as a whole may be either problematic or unclear (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000). Second, and related to this point, recommendations for building organizational identification are often politically naïve or problematic in the sense that they take a managerial perspective that neglects or does violence to the (diverse) perspectives and aspirations of employees themselves (Haslam, 2001; Tyler & Blader, 2000). Indeed, it seems reasonable to suppose that many strategies for building identification will backfire since they are likely to be met with cynicism, reactance, or resistance from employees because they are at odds with alternative valued identities (Brehm, 1966; Kelly & Kelly, 1991). This possibility makes clear the importance of establishing whether strategies for promoting identification actually work and what their consequences are. However, this raises a third shortcoming—that empirical evidence of this form is rarely provided by researchers and, as a result, their recommendations remain largely speculative.

Sensitive to the first two of these issues, social identity researchers have recently proposed a model that seeks to develop organizational identification

through a bottom-up process that is informed by respect for, and engagement with, lower-level organizational identities (e.g., as recommended by Hogg & Terry, 2000; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). Referred to as *the ASPIRe model* (*A*ctualizing *S*ocial and *P*ersonal *I*dentity *Re*sources; Haslam, Eggins, & Reynolds, 2003; see also Eggins, Haslam, & Reynolds, 2002; Eggins, O'Brien, Reynolds, Haslam, & Crocker, 2008), this model draws out the lower-level identities that are important for organizational members and then works with these with the goal of cultivating an *organic organizational identity* that can reconcile any conflict between identities and provide a platform for the development of an inclusive organizational strategy. Yet although this model incorporates principles that have been extensively tested in the literature (e.g., Eggins et al., 2002; Fiol, Pratt, & O'Connor, 2009; Huo, Molina, Sawahata, & Deang, 2005; Jans, Postmes, & Van der Zee, 2011), the model itself has not been subjected to an integrated formal test. This is the objective of the present article.

The ASPIRe Model

The ASPIRe model builds on principles articulated in social identity and self-categorization theories (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). In particular, it recognizes (a) that behavior in organizations (as in society as a whole) is dictated not only by people's personal identities (their sense of themselves as "I") but also by social identities associated with their membership in subjectively important groups (their sense of themselves as "us"), and (b) that these identities are arranged hierarchically, such that lower-level more concrete identities (e.g., member of a particular workteam) are nested within higher-level more abstract ones (e.g., member of the organization as a whole).

The model specifies a structured four-phase process that starts by identifying employees' valued subgroup identities and then uses those identities to guide successive subgroup and superordinate collective decision-making activities. These activities aim (a) to increase employees' awareness and positive perceptions of different subgroups within the organization, (b) to build organizational identification by respecting those subgroup differences, and (c) to increase support for the organization's strategic objectives (i.e., "buy-in") by ensuring that they are informed by the diverse aspirations of the important subgroups.

The ASPIRe model rests on an assumption that organizational outcomes are likely to be more positive to the extent that organizations work with (rather than against) the grain of social identities that are relevant to members of the organization (Haslam, 2001). Accordingly, the first phase of the ASPIRe

process involves *Ascertaining Identity Resources* (or AIRing; Eggins et al., 2008)—seeking to uncover existing valued organizational identities. This is usually done by distributing a questionnaire that asks employees to nominate the group of colleagues with whom they feel the most affinity and about whom they are most concerned when they engage in their work. This group need not be formally recognized within the organization's structure and could, for instance, reflect shared demographic status. This phase facilitates the construction of an *identity map* that serves to chart the contours of significant and meaningful subgroup identities within the organization. In its most basic form, this consists of a list of subgroups along with the frequency with which they were nominated. Where nominated groups overlap horizontally (i.e., at the same level of abstraction) or vertically (i.e., where one subsumes another) it could be informative to represent these relationships graphically.

This map then provides the basis for selecting the subgroups that will meet in the second phase of the process: *Subgroup Caucusing* (or Sub-Casing). In the event of a simple identity map, consisting of a small number of frequently selected groups, employees can simply be asked to attend the meeting for their nominated subgroup. In the event of a more complex map it will be necessary to select a subset of the nominated subgroups. The aim here is to ensure that where an employee's nominated group is not included, they are provided with another meaningful option (for instance, a higher-level, more inclusive group). In the subgroup caucusing meetings, members are asked to identify key subgroup goals and barriers to their achievement. By respecting and giving voice to valued subgroup identities, this phase is expected to increase the salience of subgroup identities, increase employees' identification with their subgroup, and their commitment to both the ASPIRe process and its eventual outcomes (Smith, Tyler, & Huo, 2003).

The third phase of *Superordinate Consensualizing* (or Super-Casing) aims to bring the goals of each subgroup into alignment through the specification of higher-order organizational goals that synthesize those that have emerged in the Sub-Casing phase. Here subgroups (or their representatives) come together in a forum where they engage in the task of presenting the outcomes of the previous phase and strive to collectively identify (a) the issues that matter for all groups, (b) any means by which distinct group goals can be reconciled with these, and (c) any obstacles that are preventing the reconciliation of goals. This phase aims to make salient an organic organizational identity (i.e., one whose content recognizes internal differentiation; Haslam, 2001) and increase organizational identification. In effect, then, Super-Casing replicates Sub-Casing but at a higher level of abstraction.

The fourth and final phase of the ASPIRe process is one of *Organic Goal Setting* (ORGanizing) in which the goals that emerged within the previous phases are formalized in a plan that provides a strategic framework for ongoing organizational activity. Here subgroups (or their representatives) specify and agree upon a series of collective goals corresponding to the different spheres of activity for which different identities are important and a strategy for achieving them. Here it is assumed that because these goals have been set in a participative manner (rather than imposed) there is a greater chance of employees working constructively toward them.

The Present Study

The opportunity to conduct the first full test of the ASPIRe model arose when the researchers were approached by the Director of a Military Health Services Organization in the United Kingdom (hereafter MHSO) to develop and deliver a 2-day workshop. The aims of the workshop were to help clarify and deliver a coherent strategic plan for the organization and build a sense of shared organizational identity among its senior managers. The MHSO is a functionally and geographical diverse organization that manages a wide range of operations in multiple sites around the world.

The workshop brought the leaders of the various operations together. The first two authors took responsibility for the form and content of the workshop and the construction of materials used to assess relevant constructs.

In light of the foregoing analysis, we hypothesized that

Hypothesis H1a: Participation in the ASPIRe process will lead to increased subgroup and organizational identification (relative to the baseline).

Hypothesis H1b: Participation in the AIRing and Sub-Casing phases of the ASPIRe process will lead to an increase in subgroup awareness and identification.

Hypothesis H1c: Participation in Super-Casing and ORGanizing phases of the ASPIRe process will lead to an increase in organizational awareness and identification.

Hypothesis H2: Participation in the ASPIRe process will lead to an increase in the perceived alignment of subgroup and organizational identities.

Hypothesis H3: Participation in the ASPIRe process will lead to increased support for the organization's strategic objectives.

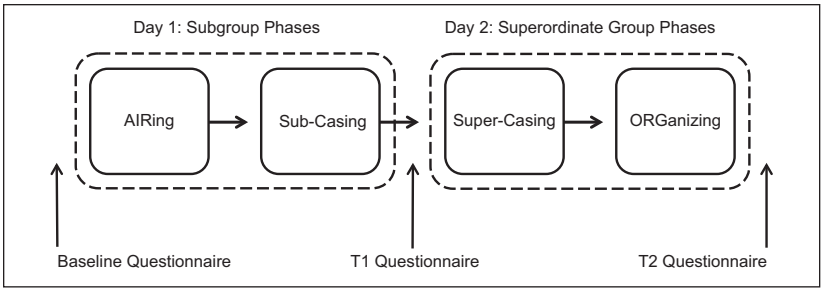

Figure 1. The ASPIRe (*A*ctualizing *S*ocial and *P*ersonal *I*dentity *R*esources; Haslam, Eggins, & Reynolds, 2003) model and measurement points

Method

Participants

Participants in the ASPIRe workshop were 20 senior officers (males, n = 19) from the aforementioned MHSO, including the director of the organization, his immediate subordinates, and senior consultant advisors. The MHSO in question consists of approximately 1,800 personnel stationed across the United Kingdom and around the world, the majority of whom are involved in the provision of (or support for) primary and secondary health care. Four participants were unable to attend the entire workshop, and so analysis is restricted to the 16 participants (males, n = 15) who took part in all phases of the ASPIRe process and who each completed the full set of questionnaires.

Procedure

The workshop took place over 2 days and was broken down into four phases reflecting the four stages of the ASPIRe model: (a) AIRing, (b) Sub-Casing, (c) Super-Casing, and (d) ORGanizing (see Figure 1). The subgroup phases—AIRing and Sub-Casing—took place on Day 1; the superordinate group phases—Super-Casing and ORGanizing—took place on Day 2. At the start of the workshop, participants were asked to complete an initial questionnaire (Qre1, Baseline), which provided baseline measures of subgroup and superordinate group perceptions relevant to our hypotheses. Participants were then provided with an overview of the stages of the ASPIRe process and the activities involved in each stage and informed that these activities were designed to ensure that key perspectives within the organization were represented when developing strategic objectives for the organization.

Once participants were satisfied that they had a clear understanding of the structure of the workshop, the authors took them through the AIRing phase. Nine subgroups were nominated: 15 participants nominated one of four shared subgroups (senior management, secondary health care, primary health care, and nursing), and the remainder nominating unshared subgroups. The authors presented the participants with the resulting identity map and asked them to make a collective decision about which of the groups generated in the AIRing phase represented the major identities of participants and organizational members as a whole. Participants settled on four subgroups, three of which had been nominated previously. All participants indicated that they were able to select one group that meaningfully captured their working experience.

These 4 subgroups provided the basis for the second, Sub-Casing, phase of the workshop. Here, participants who selected each subgroup (n = 3 to 5) then worked together to identify the key goals of their subgroup and any obstacles that they faced. Subgroup representatives presented the results of their discussion to the group as a whole. Following this, participants were asked to complete a second questionnaire (Qre2, Time 1), which asked about any perceived changes in their views of the organization as a consequence of having participated in the subgroup phases of the workshop.

Day 2 began with subgroup representatives reiterating their group's goals and obstacles. Participants then moved on to the Super-Casing phase, where they were asked to collectively identify shared goals and obstacles. This was followed by the ORGanizing, strategy formation phase. At the end of this process, participants were asked to complete a final questionnaire (Qre3, Time 2), which asked about any perceived changes in their views of the organization as a consequence of the workshop's superordinate group phases.

Questionnaire

In the baseline questionnaire (Qre1) participants responded to 10 questions on identical 7-point response scales (where 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Participants' perceptions of *subgroup clarity* were measured with a single item, "I am aware of the subgroups in my organization"; their *subgroup identification* was measured with three items, for example, "I identify with my subgroup"; perceptions of *subgroup alignment* were measured with a single item, "I think that the goals of the subgroups in my organization align"; perceptions of *organizational strategy clarity* were measured with two items, for example, "I have a clear sense of the organization's goals"; perceptions of *organizational strategy support* was measured with a single item, "Employees support the organization's strategic direction"; and their organizational identification was measured with two items, for example, "I identify with my organization."

Although Qre2 and Qre3 assessed the same constructs, there were two differences in the way in which they did so: (a) In these latter questionnaires, perceptions of organizational strategy support were assessed with two items: "I have confidence in the strategic direction of the organization," and "Others have confidence in the strategic direction of the organization," and (b) participants were asked to rate any *perceived changes* in their views about the organization (i.e., in their levels of agreement with each statement) that may have occurred as a result of taking part in the preceding workshop (AIRing and Sub-Casing in Qre2; Super-Casing and ORGanizing in Qre3). The anchor points were changed to reflect this instruction, such that –3 = *much less than before*, 0 = *no change*, and +3 = *much more than before*. We measured *perceived change* in each construct at these latter time points (rather than absolute levels; Wanous & Reichers, 2003) (a) to avoid the possibility of response-shift bias that may threaten the validity of traditional pre-post measures during an information sharing intervention of this type (e.g., Cook & Campbell, 1979), (b) to mitigate against possible floor or ceiling effects, and (c) to avoid alienating participants through repetitive questioning.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

We created scales for the constructs in which we were interested: subgroup identification ($\alpha_B = .94$, $\alpha_{Time\ 1} = .76$, $\alpha_{Time\ 2} = .89$), organizational strategy clarity ($r_B = .74$, $p < .001$; $r_{Time\ 1} = .47$, $p = .040$; $r_{Time\ 2} = .60$, $p = .013$), organizational strategy support ($r_{Time\ 1} = .71$, $p = .001$; $r_{Time\ 2} = .46$, $p = .077$), and organizational identification ($r_B = .56$, $p = .010$; $r_{Time\ 1} = .73$, $p < .001$; $r_{Time\ 2} = .77$, $p < .001$). Scale means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1. At baseline, one-sample *t* tests indicated that participants reported levels of (a) subgroup clarity, (b) subgroup identification, (c) subgroup alignment, (d) organizational strategy clarity, and (e) organizational identity that were significantly higher than the scale midpoint, all $t(15) > 2.78$. In contrast, they reported levels of organizational strategy support that did not differ significantly from the scale midpoint, $t(15) = 1.00$, *ns*.

Changes From Baseline in Perceptions of Subgroups and Superordinate Group

Table 1 contains the mean change scores reported by participants at Time 1 and Time 2. From these it is clear that, with one exception (Time 1 organizational

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Subgroup and Organizational Measures at Baseline and Change at Time 1 and Time 2

	Baseline	Time 1 change (AIRing + Sub-Casing)		Time 2 change (Super-Casing + ORGanizing)	
Measure	*M* (*SD*)	Expected	Actual *M* (*SD*)	Expected	Actual *M* (*SD*)
Subgroup clarity	5.69 (1.01)	↑	1.06 (0.77)**	—	1.25 (0.58)**
Subgroup identification	5.63 (1.33)	↑	0.54 (0.70)*	—	0.81 (0.84)*
Subgroup alignment	4.88 (1.26)	—	0.19 (1.05)	↑	0.88 (0.72)**
Organizational strategy clarity	5.25 (0.88)	—	0.16 (0.54)	↑	1.06 (0.73)**
Organizational strategy support	3.69 (1.25)	—	–0.13 (0.65)	↑	0.94 (0.48)**
Organizational identification	6.25 (0.75)	—	0.28 (0.68)	↑	0.78 (0.88)*

Note: *N* = 16; AIRing = Ascertaining Identity Resources; Sub-Casing = Subgroup Caucusing; Super-Casing = Superordinate Consensualizing; ORGanizing = Organic Goal Setting; one-sample *t* tests comparing Time 1 and Time 2 mean change to 0 (*no change*) with Bonferroni adjustment.
*$p < .01$. **$p < .001$.

strategy support), all means are positive—indicating that perceptions of subgroups and the superordinate group became more positive over the course of the workshop, in line with Hypothesis 1a. Importantly too, in line with Hypotheses 1b and 1c, changes in subgroup and superordinate group perceptions varied systematically over the course of the workshop. In particular, subgroup perceptions were more responsive than superordinate group perceptions to the AIRing and Sub-Casing phases (assessed at Time 1), but superordinate group perceptions were responsive to the Super-Casing and ORGanizing phases (assessed at Time 2).

To examine more formally whether participants reported the patterns of change in subgroup and organizational measures at Time 1 and Time 2 predicted by Hypotheses 1b and 1c, we conducted a 6 (measure: subgroup clarity, subgroup identity, subgroup alignment, organization strategy clarity, organization strategy support, organizational identity) X 2 (time point: Time 1, Time 2) repeated-measures ANOVA on participants' change scores (see Table 1 for means). There were significant differences in participants' change scores as a function of the measure examined, $F(5, 75) = 5.87$, $p < .001$, and the time point at which they were assessed, $F(1, 15) = 60.97$, $p < .001$, although both these effects were qualified by a two-way interaction, $F(5, 75) = 4.28$,

$p = .002$. We tested whether subgroup perceptions showed a greater improvement than superordinate group perceptions at Time 1 but not at Time 2, by means of the following contrast: 2, 2, –1, –1, –1, –1 (subgroup perceptions were each assigned a value of 2 and superordinate perceptions a value of –1). The contrast comparing subgroup and superordinate group perceptions was significant, $F(1, 15) = 12.47$, $p = .003$, but qualified by an interaction with assessment point, $F(1, 15) = 13.85$, $p = .002$, such that the difference between subgroup and superordinate group perceptions existed at Time 1 but not at Time 2.

The Relationship Between Subgroup and Organizational Identification

Next, we aimed to test Hypothesis 2, which suggests that the ASPIRe process helps to align subgroup and organizational identities. Table 1 summarizes the results of one-sample *t* tests comparing Time 1 and Time 2 mean perceived change to 0 = *no change*, with the Bonferroni adjustment. Consistent with the analysis presented above, although perceptions of subgroup goal alignment had not increased significantly by Time 1, they had done so by Time 2.

Table 3 presents the bivariate correlations between perceived changes in subgoup and superordinate group perceptions at Time 1 and Time 2. Inspection of these correlations reveals a strong positive association between these measures at Time 1 and Time 2, such that increases in subgroup identification are associated with increase in organizational identification. In light of the lack of relationship between absolute levels of these variables at baseline, $r = .13$, $p = .62$ (see Table 2), this suggests that participation in the ASPIRe process strengthens the association between subgroup and organizational identification.

The Relationship Between Perceptions of Subgroup and Organizational Groups and Organizational Strategy

Finally, we aimed to test Hypothesis 3, which suggests that the changes in subgroup perceptions (i.e., clarity, subgroup identification, and subgroup alignment) and organizational identification at Time 1 and Time 2 that result from participation in the ASPIRe process will predict the observed changes in organizational strategy clarity and organizational strategy support. Inspection of Table 3, which contains the Time 1 and Time 2 bivariate correlations, suggests that changes in subgroup identification, perceptions of subgroup alignment, and organizational identification are positively associated with changes in organizational strategy clarity at Time 1 and Time 2. In

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations Between Baseline Measures and Time 1 Change Measures

	Time 1 (AIRing + Sub-Casing) change measures					
Baseline measures	1	2	3	4	5	6
Subgroup clarity	.20	.10	–.44*	–.03	–.22	–.11
Subgroup identification	–.19	.07	–.15	–.02	–.42	–.02
Subgroup alignment	–.06	.16	–.44*	–.17	.19	–.11
Organizational strategy clarity	.03	–.02	.13	–.02	.30	–.15
Organizational strategy support	–.12	.16	.30	.23	.40	.03
Organizational identification	–.09	–.21	.36	.23	–.10	.24

Note: *N* = 16; AIRing = Ascertaining Identity Resources; Sub-Casing = Subgroup Caucusing

Table 3. Bivariate Correlations Between Subgroup and Organizational Change Measures at Time 1 (Above Diagonal) and Time 2 (Below Diagonal)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
Subgroup clarity	—	–.26	.15	.22	.15	.09
Subgroup identification	.42	—	.07	.50*	.36	.78**
Subgroup alignment	.56*	.77**	—	.59*	.53*	.30
Organizational strategy clarity	.28	.56*	.59*	—	.59*	.69**
Organizational strategy support	.30	.35	.27	.68**	—	.54*
Organizational identification	.45	.75**	.59*	.78**	.76**	—

Note: *N* = 16.

addition, changes in perceptions of subgroup alignment (Time 1 only) and organizational identification (Time 1 and Time 2) are positively associated with changes in organizational strategy support.

In order to formally test Hypothesis 3 we regressed organizational strategy clarity and then support for organizational strategy on subgroup perceptions and organizational identification using ordinary least squares (OLS) estimation. To control for the effect of time we defined a dummy variable that contrasted Time 2 with Time 1 and calculated the interaction between the dummy variable and each of the predictors. As this is a within-participants analysis, one must control for the fact that each individual indicates their subgroup and

organizational perceptions at two time points. To control for the lack of independence within participants, we followed Wooldridge's (2003) recommendations and clustered the standard errors of the OLS estimation at the level of the individual participant. Neither subgroup clarity, subgroup identification, nor their respective interaction terms were significant predictors of organizational strategy clarity or organizational strategy support. To maximize power, our final analysis only included perceptions of subgroup alignment, organizational identification, the Time 2 dummy, and the interaction between these variables and the Time 2 dummy as predictors.[1]

Together, these predictors were able to account for 62.3% of the variance in perceptions of organizational strategy clarity, $F(5, 15) = 12.56$, $p < .001$. Organizational identification was a significant positive predictor of organizational strategy clarity, $\beta = .42$, $t(15) = 4.37$, $p = .001$, as was subgroup alignment (marginally), $\beta = .22$, $t(15) = 2.08$, $p = .055$. The Time 2 dummy was not significant, $\beta = .00$, $t(15) < 1$, and neither of the relationships was qualified by an interaction with the Time 2 dummy variable: $\beta = .13$, $t(15) < 1$, and $\beta = –.02$, $t(15) = –0.11$, respectively. This analysis therefore indicates that perceived changes in organizational identification and perceptions of subgroup alignment are positively associated with perceived changes in organizational strategy clarity to the same extent at Time 1 and Time 2.

These predictors also accounted for 47.4% of the variance in support for organizational strategy, $F(5, 15) = 13.02$, $p < .001$. Here, though, only organizational identification was a significant positive predictor of strategy support, $\beta = .36$, $t(14) = 3.45$, $p < .001$, and this association remained consistent over time, $\beta = .15$, $t(14) = 1.06$, $p = .31$. This analysis therefore suggests that changes in organizational identification were positively associated with perceived changes in support for organizational strategy to the same extent at Time 1 and Time 2.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to provide the first integrated test of the ASPIRe model—a model that specifies a sequence of structured activities that are designed to identify and work with subgroup identities in order to build organizational identification and commitment to organizational strategy. The study's findings are consistent with this model. In the first instance, there was evidence that although subgroup and organizational identification was already high, participation in the ASPIRe process was associated with participants' reports of an increased awareness of, and identification with, both their subgroup and the organization as a whole (as predicted by Hypothesis 1a).

Moreover, it was clear that perceptions at these two levels of abstraction were differentially sensitive to particular phases of the ASPIRe process (as predicted by Hypotheses 1b and 1c). Thus, participants reported increases in subgroup clarity and identification following the phases of the process that served to identify different subgroups (AIRing) and make subgroup membership salient (Sub-Casing). Similarly, participants reported increases in superordinate organizational clarity and identification following the phases of the process that served to bring different subgroups together to reconcile their differences (Super-Casing) and articulate a collective organizational strategy (ORGanizing).

Importantly too, there was evidence that as the ASPIRe workshop progressed subgroup and superordinate identities became increasingly aligned (Hypothesis 2). Although there was little correspondence between these constructs (as indicated by low correlations) in the early phases of the process, reported increases in the meaningfulness of subgroup and superordinate identities were positively associated over the course of the workshop, and by the end of it, participants reported a significant increase in subgroup alignment. Furthermore, there was evidence that support for the strategy that was agreed upon in the study's final ORGanizing phase was predicted by the sense of increased superordinate identification that previous phases of the ASPIRe process had helped to develop (Hypothesis 3).

Limitations and Future Research

Although the findings of this study were consistent with our hypotheses, our capacity to draw definitive conclusions on the basis of its findings is limited by a number of factors. Most particularly, the sample was only very small and its members were homogeneous in terms of their seniority and demographic characteristics (e.g., gender and race). Although the size and seniority of the sample is representative of workshops of this form (Hodgkinson, Whittington, Johnson, & Schwarz, 2006), it is nevertheless very important for future research to seek to replicate the present findings—ideally with data from diverse workshops conducted with diverse organizations. Notwithstanding the practical challenges of larger participant (and hence, subgroup) numbers, it should be possible to implement this process with much larger, and more inclusive, groups of employees. Here, subgroups are likely to be meaningfully differentiated in terms of status and may have a history of negative or positive interactions. Accordingly, it will be important to examine whether these factors moderate outcomes.

A second limitation relates to the absence of control conditions against which to assay the particular efficacy of the present intervention. Thus, although we took baseline measures against which to establish the impact of

various phases of the ASPIRe process, it is impossible to establish whether the effects we obtained were specific to the procedures followed in this workshop or might be expected from any activity that proves enjoyable to participants and engages with their creative energies (e.g., so as to produce either a placebo or a Hawthorne effect; Cook & Campbell, 1979; Haslam & McGarty, 2003). Indeed, it is worth considering that our findings did deviate from our expectations in that reports of subgroup identification continued to increase in the later, superordinate, phases of the workshop and that reported changes in subgroup and superordinate group identification were as strongly associated in the early phases of the workshop as they were in the latter phases. If replicated, this would suggest that both the subgroup and superordinate ASPIRe phases have some capacity to affect subgroup and superordinate perceptions.

Furthermore, in future work it is important to utilize longitudinal, multisource methods for measuring any impact of the ASPIRe process in order to demonstrate that positive outcomes are not exclusively short-term or driven by social desirability or experimenter effects. There could also be some value in using pre-post measures of change across distinct phases of the process. This may be particularly important in light of evidence that affective and cognitive resistance may pose significant challenges to identity change initiatives of this kind (e.g., Hodgkinson & Healey, 2011; Huy, 2011).

Concluding Remarks

The importance of the present study is that it provides the first integrated test of the ASPIRe model and the first evidence of its viability as a practical strategy for addressing complex issues of identity construction and mobilization in organizational contexts. Much more work clearly remains to be done in order to consolidate the case for the model's deployment (including the identification of contexts in which its use is inappropriate), but in an area where there is a pressing need to cross the "Valley of Death" (Barr, Baker, Markham, & Kingon, 2009) in order to translate theoretical understandings into practical interventions, this would appear to be a very important and promising first step.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Note

1. The functional of form of the regression is y = b1x1 + b2x2 + b3 dummy_t2*x1 + b4 dummy_t2*x2 + b5 dummy_t2 + u, where y = organizational strategy clarity *or* strategy support; X1 = subgroup alignment; X2 = organizational identification. Note that this equation does not include a constant term.

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