NOTE

AND THE AWARD FOR BEST ACTOR GOES TO . . . : FACADES OF CONFORMITY IN ORGANIZATIONAL SETTINGS

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Facades of conformity are false representations created by employees to appear as if they embrace organizational values. I present a conceptualization of the facades of conformity construct and propose that organizational reward systems, minority status, and self-monitoring are examples of variables likely to serve as antecedents to creating facades of conformity. I also propose that psychological and emotional distress are potential outcomes to facade creation. I conclude with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications for continued research on facade creation.

Navigating in organizational life often requires members to employ tactics beyond simply performing an honest day's work. In an article in the *Los Angeles Times,* Oldham (1998: 20) advises organizational newcomers to "get ready to rumble" and emphasizes the importance of developing tactics for survival and success within the political warfare of work organizations. Oldham's article, as well as similar writings, suggests that survival and success primarily depend on how well employees conform to the prevailing norms and values of their organizations (DuBrin, 1990; Jackall, 1988). Organizational research indicates that when new employees enter an organization, they begin to conform to the organization's values. During the socialization process, newcomers observe cues regarding what is acceptable behavior, and they adapt accordingly. Employees who plan to remain with the company usually conform and demonstrate acceptance of how things are done (Louis, 1980; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Conformity at work may include modeling others in similar roles (Ibarra, 1999), expressing appropriate emotions (Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987), wearing proper attire (Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, & Mackie-Lewis, 1997), expressing agreement with the opinions of one's manager (Ralston, 1985), and, at an extreme, acquiescing to bad decisions made in one's workgroup (Flippen, 1999; Janis, 1972) or even discriminating against minorities (Brief, Dietz, Cohen, Pugh, & Vaslow, 2000). Although scholars have addressed conformity in other research, there has been no systematic investigation of whether employees' outward expressions of conformity are consistent with their inward values. Furthermore, researchers have paid relatively little attention to the tensions employees may experience when they feel they must conceal values that differ from and perhaps conflict with those of the organization (notable exceptions are Bell, 1990; Meyerson, 2001; and Meyerson & Scully, 1995).

When conflicts arise between personal and organizational values, some employees may perceive the need to suppress their own values and pretend to embrace organizational values. I describe this behavior as "creating facades of conformity." The decision of whether to create a facade of conformity, rather than to openly express personal values, may reflect a range of fears and concerns: Will I be passed over for a promotion if I show how important my role as a parent is to me? Will I be viewed as a radical or deviant if I wear clothing that reflects my religion or my cultural values? Will I be considered too straitlaced or not savvy enough to handle

clients if I don't use profanity or drink alcoholic beverages during after-work engagements?

In light of these and other dilemmas arising from personal and organizational value conflicts, the facades of conformity construct represents a worthy research topic. From a theoretical perspective, this construct extends research on person-organization fit and organizational socialization (Chatman, 1989, 1991; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Consistent with arguments set forth in these streams of literature, the assumption here is that people join organizations as a result of some fit between personal and organizational values. However, as suggested by socialization theorists (e.g., Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), *not all* values held by all members are going to be aligned with those of the organization. Research on facades of conformity contributes to our understanding of what members may do in response to personal and organizational value misalignment.

The facades of conformity construct also contributes to scholarly thought on the multiple response modes employees may choose when personal and organizational values differ or conflict (Meyerson, 2001; Withey & Cooper, 1989). One response mode that some employees might choose is simply to exit the organization (Withey & Cooper, 1989). For others, this option may not be viable because of the potential costs associated with exiting. Such costs may include the inability to transfer skills to another job or the financial investments (i.e., pension and stock options) that would be lost if an individual resigned (Withey & Cooper, 1989). Exit costs also may relate to dual career and family constraints, valued relationships with peers, and the simple fact that employees may like many aspects of their job. After weighing the various costs of leaving, some employees may conclude that it is less costly to stay and create facades than to incur the costs of exiting.

Understanding when and why employees create facades of conformity is also important from a managerial perspective. Research on facade creation can provide insight on how organizational systems and structures intended to facilitate organizational performance can potentially alienate employees whose personal values differ from organizational values. I propose that creating facades may be a survival mechanism for such employees. The prevalence of such behavior within an organization, how-

ever, has the potential to result in a level of homogeneity of thought and action among employees that may lead to dysfunctional outcomes. A failure among organizational members to express diverse values and ideas, for example, may have a negative impact on innovation as well as organizational learning (see Morrison and Milliken's [2000] work on organizational silence).

This paper is organized into four parts. In the first part I formally define facades of conformity. I describe how facade creation is a response to personal and organizational value incongruence. In the second part I explain how the notion of facades of conformity differs from other constructs in the literature, such as impression management, emotional labor, and compliance. I continue with a description of organizational reward systems, minority status, and self-monitoring as examples of variables that are likely to serve as antecedents to creating facades of conformity. I also examine psychological and emotional distress as potential outcomes to facade creation. Collectivism and the extent to which individuals are able to segment personal and work identities are likely to moderate the intensity of such outcomes. In the final section of the paper, I discuss theoretical and practical implications for continued research on facade creation.

FACADES OF CONFORMITY DEFINED

Facades of conformity are *false representations created by employees to appear as if they embrace organizational values*. Creating a facade of conformity is a form of masking one's true self. Facades may include verbal expressions of conformity or nonverbal gestures, such as choices of attire and nods of agreement. They can be products of overlearned habits or scripts (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985), or they can consciously be chosen and performed (Rosenfeld, Giacolone, & Riordan, 1995). The focus here is on the conscious creation of facades that occurs in daily work interactions and settings when there is a discrepancy between personal and organizational values. It should be noted that "personal values" refer to core, stable values such as those linked to one's identity and rooted in one's upbringing, socioeconomic status, and cultural background (Lachman, 1988; Rokeach, 1973). They consist of those values most important and

dear to a person. Such values are likely to persist, even in the face of strong socialization processes.

A thorough discussion of the specific values that may differ between employees and organizations and that may trigger employees to create facades is beyond the scope of this paper. However, for illustrative purposes, it is important to note a few of the types of value conflicts that potentially can arise at work. For example, employees who value honesty and integrity may experience value conflicts working in organizations that promote profitability by any means as an overriding priority (Flaherty, Dahlstrom, & Skinner, 1999). Additionally, organizational values and demands often change according to the demands of the environment. When such changes occur, employees who fit in a former value system may feel like misfits if the new value system or culture conflicts with their personal values. For example, imagine an individual who joins an organization because of the environmentally friendly practices of that organization. This same individual may suddenly be at odds with the organization when a change in leadership results in a change of agenda.

FACADES OF CONFORMITY DIFFERENTIATED

The facades of conformity construct is related to forms of impression management in organizations, yet there are two important distinctions that warrant the introduction of a new construct. The first distinction relates to scope. Impression management generally is studied in the context of dyadic relationships, such as subordinate and manager or interviewee and interviewer (Liden & Mitchell, 1988). These studies focus on how impression management positively influences career outcomes, such as performance ratings and obtaining employment by influencing the impressions of a specific target person (Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne, Liden, Graf, & Ferris, 1997). The facades of conformity construct is broader in scope, because it is concerned with the pretense of individuals embracing *organizational values* in daily work interactions with all organizational members. Consequently, the emphasis here is not on employees conforming to the opinions or likes or dislikes of direct managers or interviewers.

The second distinction between facades of conformity and impression management relates

to assumptions about internal consistency. Impression management theorists acknowledge that personal values may indeed be in conflict with public expressions (Baumeister, 1982; Jones, 1964). Ferris, King, Judge, and Kacmar (1991), for example, discuss how some members may opportunistically express organizational value statements to obtain desired personal outcomes. The authors suggest that the expressed values may not necessarily be aligned with those held by the organizational member. Impression management researchers, however, have not systematically explored this conflict between internal and expressed values. Rather, a primary focus has been on the dynamics of looking acceptable in the eyes of an audience, rather than on whether the actor's behavior is consistent with his or her internal values (Turner, 1991).

The facades of conformity construct also can be differentiated from the notion of emotional labor. Emotional labor refers to the expression of organizationally desired emotions during customer service interactions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). For example, flight attendants are expected to be cheerful (Hochschild, 1983), whereas bill collectors are expected to display emotions that exude intimidation (Sutton, 1991). Hochschild (1983) argues that employees working in customer-intensive environments often simulate the emotions they are expected to express at work. This is called *surface acting*.

Surface acting is similar to facades of conformity with respect to the pretense that is involved, yet it differs from facades of conformity in two primary ways. First, surface acting is limited to the expression of emotions. Facades of conformity, however, include not just emotional displays but also behaviors, gestures, and verbal statements—all of the different ways in which an employee may signal acceptance of organizational values. Indeed, in many cases emotional displays may play little part in this. The facades construct applies to any manner in which employees pretend to embrace organizational values. The second distinction is that the context for surface acting has been typically limited to customer service interactions. The facades of conformity construct, however, applies to any context in which employees pretend to embrace organizational values.

The compliance construct also shares similarities with the facades of conformity construct. Compliance is publicly changing one's beliefs and opinions in response to external pressures, without an accompanying change in one's internal beliefs or values (Festinger, 1953; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Individuals exercising compliance maintain their personal beliefs while publicly submitting to group norms, values, and decisions (Kelman, 1958; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1969). Studies on organizational compliance provide evidence that subordinates may set aside their personal values and commit illegal or immoral acts for the sake of fulfilling organizational roles or following orders from superiors (Brief, Buttram, Elliott, Reizenstein, & McCline, 1995; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). Whereas compliance research provides insight on following orders and on factors that influence people to comply with authority and directives, it virtually ignores the impression management activities and the internal tensions that may be associated with the act of compliance. In contrast, the facades construct focuses on the false expressions and behaviors individuals may display during the act of compliance, as well as on the inconsistency between outward behavior and internal values.

It is also worth noting that many researchers have focused on ways in which employees are proactive at work (Morrison, 1993; Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Scholars within this paradigm challenge the notion that employees passively conform to organizational systems. Upward and intraorganizational influence tactics (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkenson, 1980), information and feedback seeking (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Morrison, 1993), and job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) are examples of an array of proactive strategies such scholars explore. In research on how employees actively control and influence their own careers, however, scholars have paid little attention to the extent to which employees suppress their personal values to achieve their career goals. The notion that people create facades of conformity raises the question of whether employees, even when highly proactive, are actually expressing their own true values. That is, even when employees are proactive, they may still be confined to the organizational value system—a system that not all employees necessarily embrace as their own.

TOWARD A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF FACADE CREATION

I base the conceptualization of facades of conformity on two premises. The first is that facades emerge from forces at a variety of levels: (1) the organizational context, (2) one's position or status within the organization, and (3) individual characteristics. In the discussion below, I provide an example of a variable at each of these levels. Specifically, I discuss the impact of organizational reward systems, minority status, and self-monitoring on facade creation.

My second premise is that people experience negative tensions when they feel they must pretend at work. Therefore, I examine psychological and emotional distress as outcomes of creating facades, and I also discuss how individual characteristics moderate the intensity of this distress. My goal is not to be exhaustive but, rather, merely illustrative. Collectively, the variables that I discuss in this section begin to tell the story of when and why people pretend to embrace organizational values at the expense of their own, along with the consequences associated with that choice.

Factors Influencing the Creation of Facades of Conformity

Facade creation is likely to be driven by several facets of the organizational context. One such facet, for example, is the reward system. Reward systems are primary mechanisms for organizations to enforce behaviors and attitudes that are consistent with organizational beliefs and values (Kerr & Slocum, 1987; Pfeffer, 1997). Rewards include salary increases, stock options, promotions, bonuses, and perquisites. They also may include social acceptance (Kanter, 1977), special recognition, and awards (Biggart, 1989). Traditional, bureaucratic organizations tend to rely on quantifiable performance outcomes to determine rewards, whereas less bureaucratic and more flexible organizations tend to rely more on subjective evaluations as criteria for rewards (Kerr & Slocum, 1987; Ouchi, 1980). Subjective criteria may include solidarity and congruence between the person and the organization, which often must be inferred from subtle cues (Ouchi, 1980).

Research suggests that when employees perceive subjectivity with respect to reward deci-

sions, they are likely to use impression management techniques to demonstrate that they are competent, part of the team, and worthy to receive such rewards (Ferris et al., 1991; Gardner & Matinko, 1998; Ralston, 1985). Furthermore, Nemeth and Staw (1989) argue that rewards that stem from subjective appraisals of conformity to organizational norms, and from the tastes and preferences of management, will lead employees to behave in a manner that is consistent with the beliefs and values of their managers.

Based on these arguments, I propose that the degree to which organizations base rewards on subjective appraisals of performance will influence the degree to which employees experience dilemmas of choosing how or how not to behave when their values differ from those of the organization. As subjectivity increases, employees will more likely feel pressured to create facades of conformity, concealing any personal values that differ from organizational values.

With respect to organizational position or status, the creation of facades of conformity is likely to be a function of whether one is a minority within the organization. Minorities are individuals who possess salient social characteristics such as demographic features that are different from those of more than 50 percent of the group to which they belong (Moscovici & Faucheux, 1972; Westphal & Milton, 2000). The term *minority* also can be used to refer to an individual who holds values, attitudes, and beliefs that differ from those of most others in the organization (Ferris, Frink, & Galang, 1993; Triandis, Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994). Given their status, minorities may perceive that they must display outward expressions of conformity in order to fit in and receive the benefits of majority members. Research provides evidence that women, for example, make stronger efforts to maintain and protect a positive image at work than men (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998; Schoderbek & Deshpande, 1996). Dryburgh (1999) found that female engineering students perceive they must actively manage impressions to earn the trust and confidence of their male counterparts. Such impressions include presenting themselves as competent and nonthreatening members of the profession.

Minorities, in general, also must deal with widespread publicity of their activities. The success or failure of minority members tends to become public at a faster rate than that of non-minority members (Kanter, 1977; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Consequently, minorities are likely to feel pressured to display facades of conformity so as to avoid any negative publicity that may be associated with expressing unacceptable values. This argument is consistent with research on groups, which suggests that members holding divergent views may minimize resistance by expressing values and objectives that are shared by other group members (Ragins, 1997; Westphal & Milton, 2000).

In addition to the organizational context and one's position or status within the organization, individual traits, such as the propensity to adapt one's behavior to social cues, are likely to influence facade creation. Self-monitors, for example, are individuals who are sensitive to the desires and expectations of others, thereby using others' behavior as a guide for expressing themselves (Snyder, 1974). Research indicates that high self-monitors are more likely to manage impressions than low self-monitors (Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1982). High self-monitors tend to seek out more information, are more accurate in diagnosing social situations, take social cues more into consideration in their behavior, and are more highly skilled at presenting impressions (Snyder, 1974). Low self-monitors rely less on social cues to direct their behavior and more on introspection. Given that creating facades of conformity is a form of appearing socially acceptable, I propose that high self-monitors are likely to create facades of conformity to a greater extent than low self-monitors.

Consequences of Creating Facades of Conformity

Meyerson's qualitative work on tempered radicals (Meyerson, 2001; Meyerson & Scully, 1985) describes the experience of individuals whose values conflict with those of the majority in an organizational setting. Tempered radicals are employees who "temper" the expression of their own beliefs that are inherently in conflict with the beliefs of the organization, in order to effect future organizational change. Meyerson argues that the experience of tempered radicals includes pressures to assimilate, as well as feelings of isolation, hypocrisy, and dissonance.

Bell's (1990) empirical work on the bicultural life of African American women in corporate settings also speaks to the tensions employees

experience when their personal values are different from the prevailing values of their work organizations. Bell's results, for example, provide evidence that African American women perceive themselves as living in two distinct cultural contexts: one black and the other white (Bell, 1990; Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Managing these two complex worlds can lead to feelings of ambivalence and stress. Similarly, research on emotional labor suggests that the emotive dissonance (Hochschild, 1983; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988) resulting from conflicts between expressed and felt emotions is likely to lead to emotional exhaustion (Morris & Feldman, 1996).

The conclusions from the above organizational studies are compatible with psychological research suggesting that people experience psychological and emotional distress when their public behaviors are inconsistent with their attitudes or views of self (Tunnell, 1984). Higgins (1989) also argues that when people experience a discrepancy between who they are and who they perceive they ought to be, they experience heated emotions, such as fear, anxiety, and threat. Taking the organizational and psychological research together, I propose that when employees create facades of conformity, they are likely to experience psychological and emotional distress resulting from suppressing their personal values and pretending to agree with organizational values.

All employees, however, may not experience the same degree of emotional and psychological distress when there is a conflict between their expressed and felt values. For example, I propose that individualists and collectivists are likely to experience different outcomes resulting from the creation of facades.

Scholars have researched individualist and collectivist orientations from an array of approaches (see Erez & Earley, 1993, for a review). Earley and Gibson (1998) note that this wide range of approaches has created a challenge for researchers to come to an agreement on the definition and domain of individualism and collectivism. In this article I am drawing from research in which it is assumed that individualist and collectivist orientations differ not only across cultures but also within cultures (Triandis, Bontempo, Vilareal, Masaaki, & Luca, 1988). Building on Wagner and Moch's (1986) work, I define collectivists as employees who are likely to view themselves as inseparable from others.

They are likely to pursue and embrace interests that are shared by the collective, "even if these pursuits sometimes conflict with members' personal desires" (Wagner & Moch, 1986: 282). Employees holding individualistic values, however, are likely to view themselves as autonomous and self-contained. Satisfaction for individualists, therefore, resides in the pursuit and development of individual potential and distinctiveness (Wagner & Moch, 1986).

Given that collectivists define themselves in the context of the group and readily suppress internal beliefs to maintain group harmony (Triandis, 1989), I propose that collectivists may not experience the same level of psychological and emotional distress when they create facades of conformity as would individualists. Individualists would more likely experience psychological and emotional distress, because the conflict between their expressed and felt attitudes would be more salient to them.

Finally, the extent to which people are able to segment their personal and work identities may impact the level of negative outcomes associated with facades of conformity. According to identity theory, people have an array of role identities (manager, subordinate, parent, etc.), each varying in salience or importance according to the situation. Within each role exist normative guidelines and values that give meaning and shape behavior (Stryker, 1968, 1980). Stryker and Serpe (1982), for example, argue that, in situations where multiple identities are salient, individuals will choose the identity that is highest within a hierarchy of role identities. Other scholars, however, suggest that as the multiplicity of identities increases, individuals are likely to experience role conflicts and overload that are not as neatly resolved as Stryker and colleagues would suggest (Goode, 1960; Merton, 1957; Wiesenfeld & Hewlin, 2003). One way individuals resolve this tension is by segmenting role identities (Ashforth, 2001; Bell, 1990; Nippert-Eng, 1996). When at work, for example, individuals may choose to separate their personal identities from their organizational or work identities (Jackall, 1988; Perlow, 1998).

Building on these concepts, I propose that individuals who are better able to segment their personal and work identities will be less likely to experience negative outcomes when they create facades of conformity. When at work, one's organizational identity will be most salient,

such that the employee will play the organizational role, which may involve creating a facade of conformity. Alternatively, employees who integrate their personal and work identities may experience conflict, because they perceive the two identities as inseparable (Ashforth, 2001). Creating facades of conformity for these employees is likely to lead to more intense negative emotional outcomes, because the conflict between personal and organizational identities will be highly salient for them.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

In this article I have introduced the notion of facades of conformity and have identified but a few potential predictors and outcomes. Therefore, rich opportunity exists for future research examining additional antecedents and consequences that may offer more insight on this phenomenon. Several streams of research may provide direction here. As an example, Morrison and Milliken (2000) argue that organizational factors such as top management team characteristics and upward feedback mechanisms are likely to influence the extent to which employees are collectively silent about organizational issues and concerns. Such contextual variables may be relevant to this research, since facades of conformity can be viewed as a means by which individuals are silent about value conflicts. Another research opportunity is an analysis of performance-related outcomes associated with facades of conformity. Does creating a facade of conformity exercise cognitive resources to a degree that may be detrimental to employee performance? In future research scholars can address this question by exploring the extent to which individuals are likely to expend more effort on managing their self-image than on performing tasks.

Another logical and important step for this research is to empirically examine facade creation. Empirical research in this area, however, poses three key challenges. The first relates to the sustainability of the construct. Will organizational members begin to internalize the values they are pretending to embrace over time? This question of whether an individual is able to sustain an enacted role has intrigued researchers studying role identity (Ashforth, 2001), as well as those studying impression management

(Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). It would be valuable in future research to involve a longitudinal study of facade creation to address this question.

The second challenge relates to the conceptualization of the construct. The construct refers to the suppression of personal values in conjunction with the pretense of embracing organizational values. Facades of conformity will therefore be difficult, if not impossible, to observe, limiting empirical analysis to self-reports. This limitation requires researchers to take careful steps toward developing a valid and reliable measure that accurately captures the essence of creating facades of conformity. Such efforts may require researchers to interview respondents so as to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of creating facades of conformity prior to developing a measure. The resulting measure could include statements that reflect the choice of creating facades, such as "I publicly support organizational values although they may be inconsistent with my personal values," and "At work, I promote the values of my organization even though I disagree with them."

The third challenge is that the concerns about being true to oneself and others (Higgins, 1989) may discourage some individuals from revealing that they are creating facades at work. Questionnaires can therefore serve as a complementary method to interviews, allowing respondents to anonymously share the extent to which they create facades of conformity at work.

If the facades of conformity construct is sustained empirically, this research can inform managerial practice by enabling organizations to create environments where employees feel more comfortable expressing their true values and selves. Creating such environments can have several benefits for organizations. I have argued that the psychological and emotional distress associated with facades of conformity has many negative implications for organizations. Extensive research suggests that negative psychological or emotional states can reduce job satisfaction and organizational commitment and can increase the likelihood of turnover (Cordes, 1993). Hence, there may be benefits to reducing the pressures for facade creation.

Another implication for managerial practice relates to the issue of how best to manage organizational change. Selection and socialization practices are important means for reducing value incongruence between organizations and

members (Chatman, 1991). Yet when organizations experience large-scale change (e.g., a merger or takeover), employees who once "fit" with the values of the organization may suddenly feel out of alignment and may feel the need to create a facade. By understanding these dynamics, organizations may be able to design "resocialization" processes to better manage the transition to new organizational values, norms, and practices. In the end, this may result in less ambivalence and tension on the part of employees, and it can have positive effects on their job attitudes and performance.

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