

Is The Interdependent Self-Construal More Reliable for Cooperation Than the Independent Self-Construal?

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ABSTRACT

The concept of self is closely linked to the culture of belonging and significantly influences our interactions with others. A person's cultural background profoundly shapes their perception of self, which can be understood through two dimensions of self-construal: the independent self and the interdependent self. The independent self interacts with others on its own terms and maintains a sense of autonomy, while the interdependent self prioritizes the needs of others and fosters interconnected relationships. It is important to note that self-concept is not fixed; it is expansive and adaptable. As individuals' definitions of self evolve, so do their values and beliefs. Our understanding of human behavior in social contexts remains largely unexplored. This paper emphasizes that individuals derive a significant part of their identity and sense of self from the environments they belong to. It is crucial for individuals to have a frame of reference that relates to their perceptions of social distinctiveness and inclusiveness. Therefore, understanding how individuals' self-construals navigate and adapt their sense of self in interpersonal situations is essential.

Keywords: *Culture, Self-Construal, Cooperation, Social Dilemmas*

People have different perspectives on the concept of self. The predominant view is that of the independent self, which highlights being a self-contained and autonomous entity, separate from context (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In contrast, the interdependent self emphasizes fitting in with others and maintaining harmonious relationships. In an organizational setting, individuals from diverse backgrounds collaborate to achieve common goals. Each member brings unique perspectives and insights shaped by their upbringing and experiences. To enhance productivity, managers must exhibit flexibility and possess a deep understanding of the value systems and orientations across different cultures. For new members to adapt effectively to the organization, they need to learn its values, established norms, and the specific ways information is processed and customs are observed (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2014). Organizational culture significantly influences how members think, feel, and act, profoundly affecting individual behavior.

Our way of life is closely interconnected with work, leisure, family, and community. Individual social identity is shaped by the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In every society, work serves as a source of self-respect, personal growth, material reward, and

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fulfillment. A strong organizational culture fosters a positive ethical environment and promotes cooperation, competence, and innovation (Robbins, Judge, & Vohra, 2022). This culture encourages members to strengthen their commitment and consistency, directly benefiting the organization. Organizational culture is essential because it helps employees understand what matters and how things are done within the organization. Newcomers who want to fit in must learn the organization's core culture. Regardless of the thoroughness of the selection process or a candidate's qualifications, new employees often struggle to adjust to the prevailing culture. This adaptation requires support through socialization practices, such as establishing role models, measuring progress to meet role expectations, and aligning with the existing culture. Individuals who experience cultural continuity are more likely to realize their potential for success (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012).

Individual self-construal influences attentiveness to common ground (Haberstroh, Oyserman, Schwarz, Kuhnen, & Ji, 2001). Organizational culture shapes organizational identity. To adapt better and work effectively within the institution, members must cooperate, share information, and enhance teamwork. Furthermore, employees' experiences and identities are shaped by their connections with team members and the organization as a whole. An individual's self-concept is influenced by their understanding of their membership within the organization (Tajfel, 1978). Organizations and teams significantly shape individual behavior and a sense of belonging (Mesmer-Magnus, Asencio, Seely, & DeChurch, 2015). Additionally, organizational identification serves as a form of social identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) that contributes to enhancing self-esteem. Reference groups are crucial in determining individual achievements. These groups act as a frame of reference that greatly influences mindset formation. A positive reference group promotes accountability and helps individuals stay focused on their goals, providing support during setbacks. Interacting with knowledgeable individuals enriches understanding. Conversely, negative influences from a poor frame of reference can limit aspirations and hinder intellectual growth. Positive work relationships enable employees to thrive. Success within an organization is not solely based on individual abilities and efforts; alignment with the institutional culture is also vital. Moreover, organizations consist of individuals from diverse backgrounds and social groups working toward a common objective. Therefore, institutions operate within a complex network of intergroup relations. This paper examines the various self-construal responses within an interpersonal context.

Self-Construal

People from various cultures have different concepts of self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These views can be broadly divided into two types: the independent self and the interdependent self. Each of these perspectives has specific implications for thinking, feeling, and behaving. For example, Asian cultures primarily endorse an interdependent self, which emphasizes harmonious relationships and connections with others. In contrast, American culture often prioritizes an independent self, where individuals focus on their personal goals and autonomy. Western societies also value pluralistic diversity (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996), meaning that individuals can hold differing values and that there is mutual respect for these differences. People can coexist without needing to conform to the same beliefs, exercising their freedom to choose their own values.

Cultural background has a significant impact on personal traits, influencing how individuals think and feel. While the core aspect of self-identity may be universal, other facets are

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shaped by cultural contexts (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Different views of self lead to distinct social orientations: an independent self is often perceived as disconnected from others, whereas an interdependent self is rooted in relationships. The notion of an independent self can be problematic as it may become detached from the surrounding context; individual experiences are typically influenced by relationships with others. Moreover, a person's self-construal affects their ability to cooperate (Utz, 2004). Individual behaviors can directly or indirectly influence the level of interdependence in cooperative situations.

In general, self-construal affects how attentive individuals are to others (Haberstroh, et al., 2002). Those with an independent self tend to focus on their own outcomes, while individuals with an interdependent self are concerned with the broader impact on others. In social dilemmas, people with an independent self often demonstrate lower levels of cooperation. In contrast, individuals with an interdependent self-construal are more attentive and likely to engage in meaningful conversations. This person-embedded perspective shapes cognitive styles and social interactions.

Organizational Context

Humans naturally tend to socialize with one another. Today, various human groups communicate more than ever and are increasingly interdependent. Our social diversity aims to preserve the unique characteristics of each group. While each group strives to maintain and establish its social identity, intergroup cooperation can foster harmony in the workplace (Tajfel, 1978). However, rivalry between groups can lead to social and economic challenges, creating a sense of social distance among them. Key factors influencing intergroup perception include levels of competition and cooperation.

Culture serves as a shared meaning that can unite individuals toward a common goal. According to Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010), organizational culture is defined as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one organization from those of others” (p. 344). This mental programming originates from the surrounding social environments. Our culture establishes specific patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In the workplace, members from diverse cultures collaborate, making it essential for managers to understand the differing value systems and orientations.

Every organization aims to function effectively within its cultural context. Achieving this goal relies on recognizing and embracing cultural diversity in the workplace. Previous research has shown that communication, negotiation strategies, and decision-making processes are influenced by both cultural similarities and differing approaches (Kim & Sharkey, 1995). In an organization, team members come from various social and cultural backgrounds. Aligning with the prevailing culture of the institution offers significant benefits to individuals (Stephens et al., 2012).

Social Identity in Organizational Context

Research indicates that social identities, such as race and gender, can interact with various factors in ways that hinder achievement (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). The fear of confirming negative stereotypes associated with one's group can significantly impact performance, increasing stress and mental load (Cohen & Garcia, 2008). To work effectively with individuals from different cultures, it is essential to promote cultural diversity. Culture

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fosters organizational commitment and enhances employee behavior stability, which directly benefits the organization.

Many organizations operate within hierarchical structures, where the dynamics of status and power significantly influence interactions. For many individuals, their professional identity can be more impactful than their ascribed identities, such as gender and ethnicity (Hogg & Terry, 2000). A person's motivation to achieve is often linked to their sense of social identity and feelings of belonging. For instance, affiliations with family, community, or religious groups can serve as vital sources of social identity and belonging. People are often driven by the desire to be part of a group, and these institutional affiliations can play a crucial role in motivating personal achievement.

Furthermore, the organizational goals and values are shared among members, distinguishing one organization from another. A collective understanding of these values and beliefs characterizes the organization and helps guide its members in a unified direction. This shared meaning can shape employees' attitudes and behaviors, often creating a sense that an individual's social identity is tied to their affiliation with the organization, workgroup, department, or age cohort. Social identification refers to how individuals perceive themselves concerning social categories, while organizational identification is a specific type of social identification in which individuals adopt the organization's values as their own (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Those who are committed to their organization tend to be actively involved in its activities. To integrate into the organization, members must adhere to its values and practices. However, adjusting to a new environment and assimilating into a new culture can take time. Individuals will be held accountable for their assigned tasks, making it crucial to understand the organization's norms, values, information processing, and established procedures.

The Concept of Self and its Organizational Context

Self-concept is not a fixed attribute; it is adaptable and can evolve over time. As individuals' understanding of themselves changes, so do their interests and motivations (Brewer, 1991). People seek consistency and stability in their self-perception but often resist changes to it. Self-concept is both stable and malleable, influenced by environmental factors (Bandura, 2006). Individuals create meaningful social systems that affect their lives, demonstrating self-organization, proactivity, and reflection. Furthermore, a person's behavior can change depending on the time and context (Markus & Kunda, 1986). For instance, the way someone interacts with a superior may differ from how they communicate with a subordinate. Social interaction encompasses various aspects, including speech, behavior, and appearance (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

Members of a group tend to be more reliable when their group identities are emphasized. They derive part of their identity and sense of self from the institutions they belong to. Moreover, social interactions act as a means of self-verification (Banaji & Prentice, 1994). Understanding the self within an institutional context is best approached through the concept of adaptation (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). People who adapt well to their social context are generally more engaged in interpersonal settings. These interactions create opportunities for individuals to gain self-knowledge and pursue self-improvement (Banaji & Prentice, 1994).

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A crucial aspect of self-concept arises from an individual's membership in their social environment. In other words, how someone perceives themselves is closely linked to the world around them. Baumeister and Muraven (1996) emphasized that society plays a vital role in shaping identities. Specifically, an individual's self-view is influenced by their sociocultural context. The independent self-construal emphasizes a unique perception of oneself, while the interdependent self-construal highlights the importance of considering others and maintaining harmonious relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In organizational contexts, where the social environment is complex and interdependent, individuals must choose to better adapt to their surroundings to achieve more effective outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Individual self-concept is significantly shaped by the surrounding social context, and perceptions of self directly influence behavior. We live in a world where individuals seek both unity and diversity within human groups, and each person has their unique view of self in relation to social reality. This paper examines how personal self-construal affects interactions in interpersonal settings. Often, individual behaviors in social contexts are overlooked. A person's self-construal directly impacts behavior and guides how one relates to others. However, self-concepts are highly malleable; people often tend to enhance their self-views rather than simply maintain them. To better understand the social context, further studies are necessary, as humans are inherently social beings. This paper suggests that an individual's self-concept is intertwined with their sociocultural context. Individual behavior and relationships with others can be better understood through the lens of culture. In professional settings, unspoken expectations and norms often exist, requiring members to be interdependent and competent. While meeting these expectations can be challenging, it encourages individuals to adapt to the social context in order to thrive in their fields. In summary, on a personal level, each individual must cultivate a sense of belonging that aligns with their institution. At a broader level, administrators must recognize that cultural diversity in institutional settings is essential. Acknowledging various perspectives of self is important, as individuals' strengths can manifest in diverse ways. Neither an excessively independent nor an overly interdependent self is ideal in interpersonal domains.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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