

The mediating roles of psychological safety and employee voice on the relationship between conflict management styles and organizational identification

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationships between conflict management styles (CMS) used by leaders and organizational identification of their followers as well as to test the mediating effects of psychological safety and employee voice on that relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected on site from 1,023 employees in 13 multinational companies in Turkey. The mediating roles of psychological safety and employee voice on the CMS and organizational identification relationship were tested using ordinary least squares regression analyses.

Findings – The results show that cooperative CMS is positively and significantly correlated with organizational identification. In addition, the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses support the mediating effects of psychological safety and employee voice with regard to the relationship between CMS and organizational identification.

Practical implications – Given that cooperative CMS are associated with valued organizational outcomes such as higher employees' commitment, trust and satisfaction in leaders and citizenship behaviors, organizational efforts to foster cooperative CMS should prove fruitful. Moreover, focussing on efforts to improve leader-follower relationship and to create a trust-based work environment could increase the likelihood that CMS will increase level of employees' identification with their organizations.

Originality/value – The value of this study is its original contribution to the research literature, as no previous studies, which incorporated CMS, organizational identification, and psychological safety and voice behavior as mediating variables were found during the exhaustive literature review.

Keywords Voice behaviour, Psychological safety, Conflict management styles, Organizational identification

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

Conflict is part of organizational life. Managers spend up to 20 percent of their time in the workplace dealing with conflict or its aftermath (Chan *et al.*, 2008; Schermerhorn *et al.*, 1998). Conflict is considered to be a “natural process between people and, as such, is an inevitable aspect of a manager’s job” (Markowich and Farber, 1987, p. 140). Researchers claim that conflict between managers and employees is particularly important, because, if managed poorly, it can undermine an organization’s labor

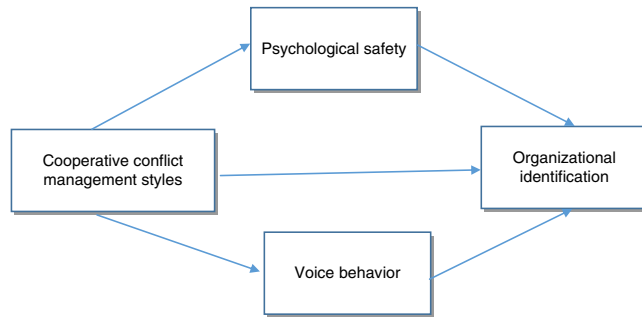
relations and productivity (Tjosvold and Chia, 1988). In fact, conflict management styles (CMS) have been the focus of considerable research for decades. Studies have found that cooperative styles of conflict handling (integrating, obliging and compromising styles), in which more concern is shown for others, generally yield beneficial outcomes in the workplace, whereas uncooperative or competitive styles (avoiding and dominating styles) generally produce negative outcomes (e.g. Meyer, 2004; Ohbuchi and Kitanaka, 1991; Rahim and Buntzman, 1989; Weider-Hatfield and Hatfield, 1996). Other studies show that CMS of managers is related to various outcomes of subordinates, such as job satisfaction, supervision satisfaction, supervisor-subordinate relationships, long-term cooperation and attitudinal and behavioral compliance (Alexander, 1995; Blake and Mouton, 1964; Follett, 1940; Rahim, 1986; Thomas and Kilmann, 1974; Weider-Hatfield and Hatfield, 1996). While the importance of managers' CMS has been demonstrated repeatedly, little is known about the mechanism through which the CMS of superiors influence the work attitudes of subordinates.

At the conceptual level, leader behaviors that are seen as more trusting should promote and raise identification with the workgroup or organization, because such interpersonal treatment conveys to individuals that they are valued and respected (Tyler, 1997). Specifically, because leaders using cooperative CMS enhance social exchange process and earn trust from subordinates, we expect such leaders to increase cooperation (De Cremer and van Knippenberg, 2002, 2003; Dukerich *et al.*, 2002) which, in turn, should promote their followers' organizational identification. Mael and Ashforth (1992) found that identification is more likely to occur in the absence of superior vs employee competition within the organization. Furthermore, scholars (e.g. De Cremer and van Knippenberg, 2002; Tyler and Blader, 2000; van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2004) suggest that people identify more with social institutions (i.e. organizations) when trust is present, satisfying individuals' need for psychological safety. Empirical research provides support for this notion. For example, several studies, including experimental work, have shown that characteristics of the leaders using cooperative CMS such as openness and trustworthiness, among others, are positively related to organizational identification (see De Cremer *et al.*, 2008; McAllister, 1995; Smith *et al.*, 2006). Drawing on this literature, we expect a positive, cooperative CMS and organizational identification relationship.

Our work is aimed at expanding not just the current understanding of conflict management, but also the current understanding of organizational identification. Whereas the existing literature on social identity theory (SIT) provides valuable frameworks for understanding organizational identification (e.g. Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Ashforth *et al.*, 2008), researchers have not investigated how various CMS may predict organizational identification, nor how CMS can promote and raise identification through important mediating variables. Indeed, DeConnick (2011) urges researchers to devote more attention to the specific variables that may emerge as antecedents of organizational identification.

In light of the above, the purpose of this study is to examine not just the connection between CMS and organizational identification, but also two of the key mechanisms we believe help account for this connection. Our central argument is that cooperative CMS promote trust and satisfaction in leaders within organizations. This, in turn, enables employees to develop high levels of organizational identification. Specifically, we argue that cooperative CMS affect organizational identification by perceiving higher psychological safety and by encouraging employees to be actively involved in the improvement of work practices through voice behavior. Figure 1 displays the hypothesized model.

Figure 1.
Conceptual model



In arguing that psychological safety and employee voice are key mechanisms explaining the effect of CMS on organizational identification and by providing empirical support for these arguments, we hope to make several important theoretical and empirical contributions. First, we hope to add to the growing body of research showing that CMS affect individual-level outcomes such as satisfaction, creative problem solving and lead to improved efficiency, creativity and organizational identification (Chen *et al.*, 2005). Second, our study sheds light on how it is that CMS help shape organizational identification. Wiesenfeld *et al.* (2001, p. 223) noted that “relatively neglected is what leaders should actually be doing to enhance organizational identification.” By examining the mediating role of two potential intervening variables, we extend previous research by showing underlying mechanisms that are responsible for the effects of leader’s CMS. Third, our study contributes to the literature on employee voice behavior (e.g. LePine and Van Dyne, 1998). A key assumption in voice literature is that voice helps groups and organizations perform more effectively, yet this assumption has received little empirical attention (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2012). In addition, we contribute to recent research on organizational identification (e.g. Wiesenfeld *et al.*, 2001; Fuller *et al.*, 2006), providing additional evidence that this is a robust individual-level construct with meaningful outcomes.

Literature review and hypotheses

CMS and organizational identification

Previous research has widely supported the view that cooperative styles of conflict handling generally yield beneficial outcomes in the workplace (Meyer, 2004; Weider-Hatfield and Hatfield, 1996), whereas uncooperative styles generally produce negative outcomes (Pruitt and Carnevale, 1993; Weider-Hatfield and Hatfield, 1996). For example, there is substantial conjecture that CMS of a leader are directly related to the level of job satisfaction of his or her subordinates (Blake and Mouton, 1964; Thomas and Kilmann, 1978). Alexander (1995) found that there are significant positive relationships between principals’ use of the collaborating style and teachers’ satisfaction with their work, their supervision and their jobs in general. A positive relationship was also found between principals’ use of the compromising style and teachers’ satisfaction with their supervisors. Further, Rahim and Buntzman (1989) reported that subordinates’ perception of their superiors’ integrating style is positively correlated with attitudinal and behavioral compliance and satisfaction with their supervisor. Yang (2012) argued that cooperative CMS lead to trust in leaders. It has also been posited that when organizational parties are interdependent, such as in superior-subordinate relationship, the use of the collaborating CMS will lead to longer-term cooperation (Weider-Hatfield and Hatfield, 1996). Moreover,

cooperative conflict management leads to distributive, procedural and interactive justice; organizational innovation and team effectiveness (Chen *et al.*, 2005; Chen and Tjosvold, 2002).

As previous literature has found that cooperative CMS generally produce positive job outcomes such as satisfaction in leader (Alexander, 1995), trust in leader (Yang, 2012) and organizational justice (Chen *et al.*, 2005), we believe that cooperative CMS (integrating, obliging and compromising), which focus on satisfying the concerns of others, will lead to higher levels of organizational identification.

Organizational identification concerns the perception of belongingness to or oneness with an organization, of which the person is a member (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) and is rooted within the framework of SIT (Abrams and Hogg, 2001; Hogg, 2003; Tajfel and Turner, 1985). SIT posits that people classify themselves according to social categories such as gender or religious affiliation (Tajfel and Turner, 1985). People identify with other group members based on similar characteristics they possess with each other and are defined based on that membership (Olkkonen and Lipponen, 2006). According to Ellemers *et al.* (1999), peoples' degree of identification with a particular social group determines their willingness to behave similarly to other group members. They view themselves as representatives of a particular group, causing them to adopt unique group norms that guide their behavior (Ellemers *et al.*, 2004).

Ashforth *et al.* (2008, p. 334) state that understanding organizational identification is important to organizations. The concept of identity helps capture the essence of who people are and, why they do what they do. It is at the core of why people join organizations and why they voluntarily leave, why they approach their work the way they do and why they interact with others the way they do during that work. Identification matters because it is the process by which people define themselves, communicate that definition to others and use that definition to navigate their lives, work-wise or other.

Although many studies have examined the consequences of employees' identification with their organization (Riketta, 2005; Haslam, 2004; van Dick, 2004), less research has been devoted to analyzing the antecedents of organizational identification (van Dick, 2004). Research exists that indicates certain variables are antecedents to organizational identification. For example, leader behavior (Kark *et al.*, 2003; Tangirala *et al.*, 2007), organizational prestige, support and perceived external image of the firm by outsiders (Dutton *et al.*, 1994; Mael and Ashforth, 1992), organizational justice (Lipponen *et al.*, 2004; Olkkonen and Lipponen, 2006), perceived organizational support (Edwards, 2009; Sluss *et al.*, 2008), trust (Edwards and Cable, 2009) and trust in leader (Rousseau, 1998; DeConinck, 2011) were found to influence employees' organizational identification.

Managerial behavior that shows care and respect for subordinates, as well as open communication, are important factors in fostering trust in the relationship. These characteristics match perfectly well with another important leaders' behavior – cooperative CMS (Chan *et al.*, 2008). Managers who use cooperative CMS show a high level of concern, respect for others and use open communication. Therefore, it seems that cooperative CMS shares the characteristics with supportive leadership, organizational justice and participative decision making, which are major antecedents of trust.

Based on a manager's relationship, collaboration and communication with employees, we argue that employees may observe how they are treated by a manager in conflict situations in the workplace to make inferences about their degree of trust toward the manager as part of the social exchange process, which, in turn, influences their work

attitudes and behavior. Many studies of trust are based on social exchange theory, which refers to “voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and, typically, do in fact bring from others” (Blau, 1964, p. 277). Social exchange is based on the norm of reciprocity, which specifies that one should help and not hurt those who have helped oneself (Gouldner, 1960). Based on social exchange theory, when employees perceive that the cooperative CMS of a manager (integrating, obliging and compromising) shows that they are being valued and cared for, their trusting relationship will be enhanced. With this trusting relationship, employees will reciprocate by displaying positive work attitudes, including higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Employees are more likely to form bonds that foster identification when they have trust in the organization and their leaders and perceive an organizational justice and satisfaction. As a result, a positive relationship between cooperative CMS and organizational identification is expected. Therefore, we propose that:

- H1. The cooperative CMS of managers (integrating, obliging and compromising) are positively related to organizational identification.

The mediating roles of psychological safety and employee voice

Psychological safety refers to individuals’ perceptions of the consequences of taking interpersonal risks in their work environment (Edmondson, 1999, 2004; Kahn, 1990). As such, it describes a perception that “people are comfortable being themselves” (Edmondson, 1999, p. 354) and “feel able to show and employ one’s self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career” (Kahn, 1990, p. 708).

Research suggests that leader behaviors contribute to the feelings of psychological safety (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006). Specifically, Edmondson (2004) suggested that when leaders exhibit openness, availability and accessibility, they are likely to facilitate the development of psychological safety among employees at work. Leaders can encourage followers to bring up new ideas and take risks by communicating the importance of such behaviors and assuring followers that negative consequences will not result from such behavior. Being open, available and accessible allows leaders to communicate such expectations. When the leader is open, listens to employees, is willing to discuss new ways for achieving the work goals and pays attention to new opportunities, employees are likely to feel that it is safe to bring up new ideas without fear of negative consequences. In a similar vein, when leaders are available and accessible to employees, they send a clear signal that it is safe to approach them and that they will be available and accessible to employees attempting to address issues creatively. Edmondson’s (2004) theory about such aspects of leadership as openness, availability and accessibility is also consistent with other studies that pointed, for example, to behaviors that signal leader benevolence (e.g. genuine caring and concern about the follower) and leader support, increase trust (Burke *et al.*, 2007). Further, high-quality interpersonal relationships have been shown to facilitate the development of psychological safety (Carmeli *et al.*, 2009; Carmeli and Gittell, 2009; Puccinelli and Tickle-Degnen, 2005). Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) found that when members felt that their leaders invited and appreciated their input, they developed a sense of psychological safety, in that their voice is appreciated and they are comfortable with speaking up and expressing themselves.

Edmondson (2004) proposes that the existence of trusting relationships between organizational members can play a pivotal role in engendering feelings of psychological safety. Specifically, she suggests that when employees have trust in their leaders, they are

more likely to openly express their thoughts and opinions. On the contrary, if employees have little trust in their leaders, they are likely to feel “judged” or “monitored” and refrain from expressing their opinions because of fear that it may bring harm to their reputation (Edmondson, 2004). Other scholars have also expressed similar views. For instance, May *et al.* (2004) assert that high levels of trust – a component of trust that reflects a special relationship, in which individuals express care and concern for their partners (McAllister, 1995), can play a key role in promoting feelings of psychological safety. Furthermore, Kahn (1990, p. 708) found that “interpersonal relationships promoted psychological safety when they were supportive and trusting.” The results of this study showed that the employees were more willing to share ideas and concepts about designs when they trusted their leaders. Finally, Madjar and Ortiz-Walters (2009) empirically established that a climate of trust, an outcome of cooperative CMS, could prove to be an important predictor of psychological safety.

Leader’s cooperative CMS is likely to promote employees’ sense of psychological safety. It employs cooperative behaviors intended to pursue mutually favorable solutions, focusses on shared points and goals rather than personal interests and involves working through the conflict with flexibility, open communication and information exchange in order to achieve the best solution for all concerned parties (West and Hirst, 2005). A psychologically safe environment, in turn, is likely to promote organizational identification. For instance, when employees feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to take risks that express their true selves. Employees in these organizations should actively engage their interest in their tasks and try novel ways of doing role-related tasks (Amabile, 1983; May *et al.*, 2004). Such open and safe organizational environments are likely to lead the employees to believe that their opinions are valued by their leaders and this sense of being valued is expected to bolster their feelings of self-worth and eventually increase identification with the organization (Smidts *et al.*, 2001). However, employees in unsafe environments characterized by ambiguous, unpredictable and threatening conditions are likely to disengage from their work and be wary of trying new things. This should increase employees’ initiative and strengthen their sense of self-determination and as a consequence might raise their work engagement. Conversely, when employees are working under uncertain and unsafe conditions, they will be hesitant to experiment and express themselves, which, in turn, may cause their identification levels to decline (May *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, we claim that:

H2. Employee perception of psychological safety mediates the relationship between cooperative CMS and employee’s organizational identification.

The notion of employee voice stems from Hirschman’s (1970) assertion that when employees are faced with dissatisfying conditions at work, they tend to either exit the organization or stay and voice their concerns. Employee voice behavior refers to the discretionary verbal expression of ideas, suggestions, concerns and opinions that intends to improve operational and managerial effectiveness (Van Dyne and LePine, 1998). Examples of voice behaviors include bringing potential problems to a supervisor’s attention and making cost-saving suggestions to managers (Withey and Cooper, 1989). This type of voice behavior can lead to higher employee commitment (Hirschman, 1970), employee retention (Spencer, 1986) and collective learning (Detert and Burris, 2007; Morrison and Milliken, 2000). Furthermore, actively making constructive suggestions is an important step to innovation (Van Dyne and LePine, 1998) and organizational adaptation processes (Van Dyne and LePine, 1998). Ultimately, voice behaviors make it possible for an organization to channel employee concerns and complaints into formulating

solutions to organizational problems (Zhou and George, 2001). When this does not happen, employees' lack of voice can have serious consequences when, for example, employee safety is jeopardized (McCall, 2001) or accounting irregularities are suppressed (Thomas *et al.*, 2004). Yet, many employees do not speak up because they fear potential personal costs may outweigh the benefits (Detert and Edmondson, 2007; Milliken *et al.*, 2003).

Leader behavior that shows care and respect for subordinates, as well as opens channels of communication fosters trust in the relationship by showing a high level of concern and respect for others. Given the risks associated with employees' voice and due to the power that leaders hold over employees' resources and outcomes, trust in leader may play an important role in employees' decisions to voice their opinions (Premeaux and Bedeian, 2003). In the literature, the arguments for a direct and positive effect of trust on risk-taking behavior are straightforward (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001, 2002). Specifically, the more employees trust in their leader, the more likely they will feel safe and comfortable about the ways in which their leader will respond toward their voice behavior. In turn, this should increase their willingness to actually engage in expressing their concerns and opinions. In contrast, having low levels of leader trust is likely to inhibit the willingness of employees to accept vulnerability toward their leader, which, in turn, decreases the likelihood that one will take the risk of engaging in voice behaviors. Thus, employees' perceptions of the trustworthiness of their leader should promote their voice behavior. Accordingly, we predict that cooperative CMS are positively related to employee voice.

When employees perceive that their leaders treat them with respect and dignity in daily encounters, employees are more likely to speak up (voice behaviors) because their perception of psychological safety conveys cues to them that their leaders consider their needs (Colquitt *et al.*, 2001) and are willing to establish and maintain a long-term relationship with them rather than treating each event as a one-shot encounter (Tyler and Lind, 1992). This perception may diminish the employees' feelings of uncertainty (i.e. the apprehension of being exploited) and enhance their trust in leader (Brockner *et al.*, 1997). Furthermore, a lower level of felt uncertainty may enhance an employee's organizational identification (Olkkonen and Lipponen, 2006) and their motivation to display a cooperative attitude at work (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2012).

According to LePine and Van Dyne (2001), individuals who exhibit voice behavior typically support organizational goals, and devote effort to developing and expressing ways to overcome impediments to the achievement of those goals (LePine and Van Dyne, 2001). Voice also increases the social well-being of the organization because it helps to align the structure of roles within the organization, thereby lessening conflict over individual role responsibilities (LePine and Van Dyne, 2001). Thus, voice is likely to enhance cooperation and cohesion within the organization, which would lead to higher employee organizational identification (Dutton *et al.*, 1994; Kramer, 1993). Therefore, based on the SIT of leadership, we expect voice behavior to serve as a mediator through which cooperative CMS influence organizational identification:

H3. Employee voice behavior mediates the relationship between cooperative CMS and organizational identification.

Methodology

Samples

This study was conducted in 13 multinational companies in Turkey. We used a web-based survey tool to collect the data. The entire survey was translated from English

into Turkish and then back into English by two independent bilingual individuals to ensure equivalency of meaning (Brislin, 1980). Using contact information obtained from the companies' human resources (HR) departments, we sent an e-mail, along with a URL survey link, to 1,300 professional employees who also received an e-mail from their related vice presidents supporting the study and encouraging participation. The 1,023 usable employee survey responses (psychological safety, voice behavior and CMS scales) constituted a 78.7 percent response rate. Upon receipt of employee responses, we contacted the 233 relevant direct supervisors and received back useful responses (the organizational identification scale) from 193 of them (82.8 percent response rate). Finally, we were able to match 1,023 usable responses from both direct supervisors and employees. Since employees had to attach their direct supervisor's names to the surveys to match them with their supervisors, the surveys were not anonymous. The number of employees evaluated by each supervisor varied from one to nine, with most supervisors rating three to six employees.

Participants comprising the final sample worked in one of three types of jobs: R&D (18 percent), marketing (53 percent) and functional professions (29 percent). The average age of the participants was 30.4 years and the average organizational tenure was 6.62 years. Among the 1,023 respondents, 66.3 percent were male; 88 percent held bachelor's degrees, and 12 percent had graduate degrees.

Measures

CMS. The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI-II) Form B (Rahim, 1983) was used in this study. The ROCI-II, which measures the five styles of managing interpersonal conflict, consists of 28 items ($\alpha = 0.86$). Three of the five styles, integrating (seven items), obliging (six items) and compromising CMS (four items), which are considered as "cooperative CMS," were chosen for this study. Cooperative CMS were chosen because they were the main focus of our research. The items were modified to measure subordinates' perception of their immediate supervisors' styles in handling disagreements with them. Employees were instructed to indicate the extent to which they agreed that each item described the way in which their immediate supervisor handled interpersonal conflicts with them on a five-point Likert type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The α reliability coefficients for integrating, obliging and compromising CMS were 0.86, 0.89 and 0.92, respectively.

Organizational identification. We measured organizational identification using a five-item scale ($\alpha = 0.84$) from Smidts *et al.* (2001). This scale is based on SIT, includes both cognitive and affective elements, is reliable, and has been used in past research (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2009). Sample items include, "You (the employee) are glad to be a member of this organization" and "You feel strong ties with this organization."

Psychological safety. This measure assesses the extent to which a member in an organization feels psychologically safe to take risks, speak up and discuss issues openly. Following the results of a confirmatory factor analysis, which included deletion of two items due to low standardized loadings, we adopted five items from Edmondson's (1999) psychological safety scale (seven-item originally). Sample items are: "It is difficult to ask other members of this organization for help" (reversed), and "Members of this organization are able to bring up problems and tough issues." Items were all anchored on a seven-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The Cronbach's α for this measure was 0.86.

Employee voice. A six-item employee voice questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.83$) developed and validated by Van Dyne and LePine (1998) was used. Employees indicated how frequently each statement fitted their own behavior. Response scale ranged from “almost never” (1) to “almost always” (7). Sample items are “I develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect this workgroup” and “I communicate my opinions about work issues to others in this group even if my opinion is different and others in the group disagree with me.”

Control variables. Participants’ age and organizational tenure (in years) were controlled since prior research has found them to be significant predictors of organizational identification (e.g. Bhattacharya *et al.*, 1995; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Epitropaki and Martin, 2005).

Results

We performed a confirmatory factor analysis to assess the convergent and discriminant validity of our constructs: three cooperative CMS of leaders, psychological safety, voice behavior and organizational identification, using the item parceling method that is recommended by Bagozzi and Edwards (1998). The constructs were randomly modeled by one and three parcels, respectively. A confirmatory analysis was performed by using AMOS 20.0 to test whether the six-dimensional model fits our data. The results show good support for the hypothesized model. Each item loaded significantly with its intended factor. With the specified items loading on their respective dimension, the six-factor structure yielded a good fit (CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.93, GFI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.06) when compared to single-factor model or an alternative five-factor model. In fact, single-factor model, in which all factors merged into one, resulted in CFI = 0.69, TLI = 0.43, GFI = 0.46 and RMSEA = 0.13. On the other hand, alternative five-factor model, in which the items of the two mediating factors (psychological safety and employee voice) were set to load on a single construct, generated CFI = 0.46, TLI = 0.53, GFI = 0.50 and RMSEA = 0.19. To sum up, the results obtained indicate that the scales of cooperative CMS, organizational identification, psychological safety and employee voice possessed adequate discriminant validity for use in our tests of the hypotheses.

Table I shows the means, standard deviations and correlations of the study variables. Ordinary least squares regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses in this study. The mediating roles of psychological safety and voice behavior

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	30.36	2.18								
2. Gender	0.66	0.34	0.06							
3. Organizational tenure (years)	6.62	1.09	0.23*	0.03						
4. Psychological safety	3.19	0.86	0.07	0.01	0.09					
5. Voice behavior	3.89	0.93	0.11	0.09	0.12	0.19*				
6. Obliging CMS	3.69	0.73	0.13	0.11	0.06	0.23*	0.26**			
7. Compromising CMS	3.42	0.94	0.11	0.12	0.03	0.26**	0.28**	0.40***		
8. Integrating CMS	3.66	0.88	0.16	0.13	0.04	0.31***	0.29**	0.37***	0.39***	
9. Organizational identification	3.92	0.69	0.09	0.13	0.18*	0.34***	0.31***	0.36***	0.34***	0.38***

Notes: $n = 1,023$. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table I.
Descriptive statistics
and correlations

were analyzed by using procedures for testing multiple mediation outlined by MacKinnon (2000); a straightforward extension of Baron and Kenny's (1986) causal step approach. This procedure involves estimating three separate regression equations. Since mediation requires the existence of a direct effect to be mediated, the first step in the analysis here involved regressing organizational identification on CMS and the control variables. The results presented in Table II (model 2) show that cooperative CMS are significantly and positively related to organizational identification ($\beta = 0.34, p < 0.001$; $\beta = -0.32, p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.36, p < 0.001$ for obliging, compromising and integrating conflicts management styles, respectively), thus providing support for the direct effect of cooperative CMS on identification (H1).

As the mediation hypotheses in this study imply that cooperative CMS are related to both psychological safety and voice behavior, the first part of the second step in the mediation analysis involved regressing psychological safety, voice behavior and the control variables on cooperative CMS. The results in Table II indicate that cooperative CMS have significant, positive relationships with both psychological safety ($\beta = 0.21, p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.23, p < 0.05$; and $\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$) and voice behavior ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.26, p < 0.01$; and $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.01$) for obliging, compromising and integrating conflicts management styles, respectively. Thus, the results offer support for the main effects of cooperative CMS on psychological safety and voice behavior.

In addition, in forwarding the mediation hypotheses, positive relations between psychological safety and voice behavior and organizational identification was presumed. The second part of the second step of the mediation analysis, therefore, involved regressing organizational identification on psychological safety and voice behavior. Rather than performing a separate regression analysis for each affect-related variable, psychological safety and voice behavior, all variables were simultaneously entered in a single regression analysis to correct for any multicollinearity problems. Results reported in Table II (model 3) confirm the two presumed relationships. They indicate that psychological safety is significantly, positively related to organizational identification ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001$) and show that voice behavior is significantly related to organizational identification ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$).

In the final step of the mediation analysis, organizational identification was regressed on cooperative CMS, psychological safety, voice behavior and the control variables. As predicted, results (model 4) indicate that the significant relationships

Variables	Psychological safety	Voice behavior	Organizational identification			
			Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	0.06	0.10	0.09	0.06	0.06	0.04
Organizational tenure (in years)	0.08	0.10	0.16*	0.15*	0.15*	0.12
Obliging CMS	0.21*	0.24**		0.34***		0.10
Compromising CMS	0.23*	0.26**		0.32***		0.07
Integrating CMS	0.29**	0.28**		0.36***		0.09
Psychological safety					0.32***	0.28**
Voice behavior					0.29**	0.23*
R^2	0.49	0.36	0.07	0.14	0.20	0.19
Adjusted R^2	0.46	0.32	0.06	0.13	0.18	0.18
ΔR^2			0.09**	0.09**	0.09*	0.00
F	12.12**	8.26**	2.69*	3.66**	9.16***	8.69***

Notes: $n = 1,023$. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table II.
Results of the standardized regression analysis for the mediated effects of cooperative conflict management styles via behavioral integrity and voice behavior

between cooperative CMS and organizational identification become non-significant when psychological safety and voice behavior are entered into the equation ($\beta = 0.10$, ns; $\beta = 0.07$, ns; and $\beta = 0.09$, ns for obliging, compromising and integrating conflicts management styles, respectively). At the same time, the effect of psychological safety ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) and voice behavior ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$) on organizational identification remained significant. Complementing the causal step approach, a Sobel test was conducted to determine the significance of the mediated effect of cooperative CMS on organizational identification via psychological safety and voice behavior. The results confirm the mediating effects of psychological safety ($z = 2.66$, $p < 0.01$) and of voice behavior ($z = 2.99$, $p < 0.01$). Together, these results suggest that psychological safety and voice behavior mediate the relationship between cooperative CMS and organizational identification, a pattern of results that supports *H2* and *H3*.

Discussion

Although recent work has stressed the importance of leadership in follower motivation, the leadership literature, in general, has paid relatively limited attention to the underlying psychological mechanisms through which leaders motivate followers to achieve desired outcomes (Kark and Dijk, 2007). This is even more apparent at the organizational level of analysis. Although researchers have suggested that cooperative CMS may produce important desired individual and organizational outcomes (e.g. Rahim, 2010; Lee, 2008; Chen *et al.*, 2012), the processes underlying the relationship between CMS and organizational identification have not yet been tested (Reuver and Woerkom, 2010). In this study, we analyzed the effect of cooperative CMS on a desired outcome (organizational identification) that is mediated by the employees' perceptions of psychological safety and voice behavior.

This study found that cooperative CMS were positively related to organizational identification and both psychological safety and employee voice behavior mediated the positive relationship between cooperative CMS and organizational identification. Specifically, findings are consistent with prior research that has found cooperative CMS to be positively related to organizational identification, psychological safety and voice behavior (Alexander, 1995; Yang, 2012; Chen *et al.*, 2005; Madjar and Ortiz-Walters, 2009; May *et al.*, 2004; Van Dyne and LePine, 1998; LePine and Van Dyne, 2001; Dutton *et al.*, 1994; Kramer, 1993). The mediating roles of psychological safety and employee voice on the relationship between CMS and organizational identification.

The results of this study revealed that more cooperative CMS such as integrating, compromising or obliging styles of handling conflicts are likely to increase employees' identification with their organizations. As leaders use more cooperative CMS, trust and satisfaction between the leader and employees rises. Such trust and satisfaction in leaders has proven to be an important component in predicting various attitudinal, behavioral and performance outcomes such as organizational commitment, involvement and justice (Alexander, 1995; Yang, 2012; Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). As employees trust and are satisfied with their leaders, they become more willing to openly communicate with him/her, feel that it is safe to bring up original and new ideas (higher psychological safety perception) and proactively challenge the status quo and make constructive suggestions (higher voice behavior) which, in turn, leads to an increase in employees identification with their organizations. Mayer and Gavin (2005) suggest that employees who do not trust or are not satisfied with their leaders will divert energy toward "covering their backs," thus adding support to the argument that

many organizational level behavioral failures can be directly tied to a lack of support, trust and satisfaction between leaders and employees.

The results in this study suggest that researchers should continue to investigate other situational and personal factors such as leader-member exchange relationship (Lian *et al.*, 2012), organizational politics (Basik, 2010), organizational culture (Chan *et al.*, 2008), locus of control (Ilies and Reiter-Palmon, 2008) and self-monitoring (Tepper, 2007) in explaining CMS and organizational identification. For example, organizations where organizational members perceive high organizational politics may require to use competitive CMS instead of cooperative conflicts handling styles. Furthermore, a supportive or innovative organizational cultures may demand cooperative CMS. The findings in this study may be sample specific. In different settings, other situational factors, such as the type of industry in which an organization operates, or organizational climate, might become relevant. In developing theoretical explanations for the role of situational and personal factors, researchers are encouraged to consider aspects of the situation that are most important and relevant to the population under investigation.

Implications for practice

The results of this study revealed that cooperative CMS, especially an integrating CMS, are desirable to ensure positive attitudinal outcomes for employees in the workplace such as higher levels of identification with the organization, psychological safety and employee voice behaviors.

The implication of this study is that organizations can encourage their members to adopt cooperative CMS (win-win styles) rather than competitive conflict handling styles (win-lose styles) through education and training. Training can be provided to develop key conflict skills and to socialize members to adopt a cooperative approach, especially for organizational members rated low on cooperative conflict management (Tjosvold *et al.*, 2003). Previous research provides guidance for developing cooperative conflict management skills (Tjosvold *et al.*, 2003). Organizational members are trained to express their ideas, positions and feelings directly and without animus. They cease defending their own views long enough to ask each other for more information and arguments. They work to resolve the conflict so that everyone benefits, not just themselves, and they combine the best ideas to create new solutions (Somech *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, organizations should provide more training opportunities for managers to promote trustworthy behavior in the areas of leadership, HR, communication and conflict management. The challenge for a contemporary organization is to enhance the cooperative conflict-management skills of their members through appropriate training that will involve survey feedback, lecture, case studies and exercises (Rahim, 2010). Training should be made available to both management and non-management employees.

Organization members should also be encouraged to promote cooperative CMS through continuous self-learning. Organizations should provide appropriate reinforcements for learning and improving employees' conflict-management so that they can handle various situations effectively. Recent literature shows that learning organizations are providing ample opportunities to managers for continuous learning that should help to improve their conflict management skills. To attain this goal, appropriate changes in organization design and culture would be needed.

Another practical implication is that organizational design could be tailored with the goal of emphasizing cooperation and de-emphasizing competition among organizational members. For example, making the organization's mission clear to all

members, generating an organizational identity and designing tasks in order to enhance perceptions of positive interdependence are recommendations for highlighting the organizational members' shared objectives (O'Neill *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, organizational members and their leaders might be trained to recognize when interactions are becoming negative, to openly acknowledge the issue, and perhaps restructure the situation in order to move toward cooperation and the emphasis of shared, mutual goals.

Strengths and potential limitations

The main strength of this study was its multilevel research design. Most research on organizational identification and conflict management has been conducted within single organizations, precluding an assessment of the way in which contextual variables influence employees' identification or leaders' conflict management. The multilevel design was capable of capturing the complexity of individual behaviors by considering different contexts. A second strength was the use of an independent sample to measure organizational identification. Measuring culture from a secondary source allowed us to minimize same-source bias. The best way to avoid or minimize any potential same-source bias is to collect measures for different constructs from different sources (Chang *et al.*, 2010). Third, the use of a Turkish sample added to the growing literature examining organizational identification and conflict management in non-Western settings.

This study has potential limitations as well. First, this study only focussed on the individual level to investigate the relationship between cooperative CMS and individual outcome; future studies should focus on different levels, such as team level, to investigate the relationships among CMS, situational and/or personal mediators and team outcomes. Future research also needs to examine the influence of national or organizational culture on the proposed relationships. Second, since we utilized a cross-sectional design in our study, conclusions about the direction of causality in our model cannot be drawn. Longitudinal research is needed, therefore, to firmly establish the direction of causality for the model presented here. A third limitation is that our data were collected from multinational companies operating in Turkey. Conflict management preferences have been proposed to differ across cultures (Holt and DeVore, 2005). People from collectivistic cultures have been found to prefer less direct forms of conflict management, such as third-party mediation and avoidance, whereas people from individualistic cultures have tended to prefer more direct and confrontational (e.g. dominating, forcing) strategies (Kozan, 1989; Ting-Toomey *et al.*, 1991). Results of studies with Turkish samples (e.g. Kozan, 1989) are in line with this collectivistic trend (i.e. relying on avoidance and third-party involvement rather than direct negotiation). More globally, a meta-analysis of 36 cross-cultural studies on conflict styles suggests that overall, individualistic cultures prescribe forcing (i.e. dominating) strategies, whereas collectivistic cultures prescribe withdrawing, compromising and problem-solving strategies (Holt and DeVore, 2005). Therefore, the extent to which our findings are generalizable to other companies or settings (e.g. in Western countries such as USA, UK, Canada, Germany, etc.) should be tested in future studies.

Despite these potential limitations, this study contributes to the research on CMS and organizational identification by showing that psychological safety and voice behavior are relevant mediating variables. The results in the study support the argument that conflict as an "interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities" (Rahim, 1992, p. 16) is socially constructed

and therefore studies of conflict handling styles in relation to outcomes should recognize the situational and individual difference variables. It is expected that the results of this study would encourage future research that considers other variables in models of CMS and organizational identification.

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