Current Situation and Relationship between Hospital Workers' out-group Trust and Job Satisfaction before Hospital Mergers — a Merger Study Based on a Combined Grade A Tertiary Hospital in Ningbo, China

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the current situation and the relationship between out-group trust and job satisfaction among hospital workers in anticipation of hospital mergers. Using the Out-group Trust Scale and Job Satisfaction Scale, a questionnaire was conducted on 713 hospital workers in Grade-A tertiary hospital CDH in China. Factors influencing out-group trust and job satisfaction were examined through an independent sample t-test and one-way analysis of variance. Correlation testing and regression analysis were employed to explore the role of out-group trust in job satisfaction. The research revealed that the overall out-group trust and job satisfaction of hospital workers in Hospital CDH before the merger were at a medium level. Factors such as gender, age, education, years of work, and predicted time of merger were found to affect out-group trust and job satisfaction. Furthermore, the occupation of hospital staff only influenced job satisfaction. Notably, out-group trust demonstrated a direct positive effect on job satisfaction. The study concludes that there is a need for increased attention to the psychological changes of hospital workers before a merger, as evidenced by the findings from Hospital CDH. The insights gained from this research provide valuable reference points for organizations undergoing mergers and emphasize the importance of addressing the well-being of employees during such transitions.

Keywords: Hospital, Merger of Organizations, Out-group Trust, Satisfaction

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Introduction

Mergers are essential for organizations to acquire resources and continue to grow. In recent years, the reform of China's state-owned enterprises and measures to promote corporate mergers and restructuring have led to a steady increase in merger activity and transaction volume in China. However, the success rate of corporate mergers is relatively low. Many case studies show that the success of a merger often requires the merging parties to resolve various conflicts and build trust and cooperation to achieve the merger (Maguire and Phillips, 2008). However, resolving conflicts, building trust, and collaborating in a merger are very difficult.

Mergers bring about changes in the psychology of the merged organization's employees. The employees of the merged organization often see the merging organization and its employees as a threat. They may have conflicts with them regarding goals, resources, interests, culture, etc., leading to post-merger consequences. Attitudes of mistrust, hostility and distrust make effective collaboration difficult (Greve and Man, 2017). In this study, hospital CDH (CDH, used as a pseudonym throughout the paper) as the merging party has a lower status in the merging organization, while hospital CIH (CIH, used as a pseudonym throughout the paper) as the merging party has a higher status in the merging organization. Therefore, the employees of hospital CDH showed too many negative attitudes towards the merger, which affected their current job satisfaction.

In August 2022, the Ningbo City of China officially released the *Ningbo City Implementation Plan for Promoting the High-Quality Development of Public Hospitals* (Yao, 2022), and the merger plan of CDH Hospital and CIH Hospital was again significantly advanced. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the current trust relationship between CDH Hospital and CIH Hospital and to determine whether the trust relationship affects the job satisfaction of hospital employees in the two hospitals. By analyzing the external trust and job satisfaction of hospital CDH employees, this study can improve hospital management's awareness of the psychological changes of employees before and after the merger. It provides theoretical and data support for formulating effective transition plans and serves as a model for large-scale corporate mergers in China.

Research Objective

1. To evaluate and analyze the level of hospital staff's out-group trust and job satisfaction before the hospital merger.

2. Analyze the differences between demographic variables in out-group trust and job satisfaction among hospital staff before hospital mergers.

3. To evaluate and analyze the relationship between out-group trust and job satisfaction among hospital staff before hospital mergers.

Hypothesis

1. H1: Pre-merger hospital staff have low out-group trust and low job satisfaction.

2. H2: There are differences in demographic variables (gender, age, education, years of work, occupation and predicted merger time) on out-group trust and job satisfaction.

3. H3: Out-group trust among hospital staff before the merger can positively predict job satisfaction.

Literature Review

1. Out-group Trust

Social Categories Theory believes that people will distinguish one group of people from another based on similarities in attributes such as gender, race, and economic status, and divide social members into different social groups (Zhang and Xu, 2018). This process emphasizes the characteristics of the group to which an individual belongs, thereby distinguishing his or her group from other groups; members of the same group often have similar characteristics in terms of goals, values, and culture. Based on the perception of intergroup conflict, employees will regard the merging organization and the merged organization as different organizations, and automatically classify and self-categorize employees, thereby creating "in-groups" and "out-groups." Organizational merger behaviour will show more trust and tend to cooperate with employees in the in-group, while the opposite will be valid for out-group employees (Zhang and Xu, 2018).

During the process of organizational merger, merged employees will face many uncertainties, such as work, organization and interpersonal relationships. At this time, employees will conduct social categorization and self-categorization to identify the group they belong to, and obtain organizational support or group support from them to weaken insecurity (Muhlhaus and Bouwmeester, 2016). In a merger situation, intergroup conflicts between the merging organization and the merged organization will produce negative emotions in the merging organization. Employees of the merged organization divide the employees into different groups and generate negative emotions such as tension and hostility toward the merged organization (Gaertner and Dovidio, 2014). Out-group bias will cause employees of the merged organization to reduce their consideration of its goals, capabilities, and interests in the decision-making process. It ultimately leads to employees of the merged organization reducing their sense of belonging to the merged organization, resulting in lower in-group preference (Zhang and Xu, 2018). Based on the above analysis, when employees of the merged organization have a high perception of intergroup conflict, they will regard employees of the merged organization as an out-group, increasing out-group bias.

2. Job satisfaction

Lekić et al. (2019) proposed that job satisfaction refers to employees' work attitude, which involves environmental factors, such as salary opportunities, promotion opportunities, self-development opportunities, supervisors and colleagues. These work categories will affect employee satisfaction. Research shows that distributive justice, information justice, and procedural justice have significant predictive power on salary satisfaction and leadership satisfaction, among which distributive justice has the strongest predictive power (Liu et al., 2007). By studying the job satisfaction of intellectual workers, satisfaction can be summarized into three types of influencing factors: The work itself, including autonomy within the work and the content of the work; Collaborative relationships including upward management relationships, downward management relationships, horizontal relationships, team atmosphere, etc.; Work environment: including office conditions, company culture suggestions and management policies (Hu and Chen, 2003). It shows the importance of trust in the organization, leaders and colleagues on job satisfaction.

Psychological factors are directly related to the work itself. Employees who obtain corresponding satisfaction during the work process will be motivated and improve work efficiency (Obrenovic et al., 2020). These factors include recognition, nature of work, job achievements, responsibilities, job advancement, salary, the possibility of job advancement, relationships with bosses, subordinates, and colleagues, social status, company policies and management, working conditions, personal life, job security, and management skills. Stimulate employee satisfaction with the company and create corresponding conditions for managers to formulate systems to improve employee satisfaction (Basalamah and As'ad, 2021). For example, providing corresponding compensation can determine job stability and work environment safety (Raziq and Maulabakhsh, 2015).

3. The relationship between out-group trust and job satisfaction

Job satisfaction reflects employees' evaluation of their work status. When employees are satisfied with their work status, they will take corresponding actions to maintain or support the status quo, and at the same time positively impact improving work performance. The more a person's work environment meets an employee's needs, values, or personal characteristics, the greater the employee's job satisfaction. This environment includes trust and commitment factors that are determinants of employees' overall satisfaction with their jobs (Mohamed et al, 2012).

The extent to which employees identify with organizational values can be reflected through organizational commitment. Research by Kehoe and Wright (2010) showed that organizational affective commitment is positively related to employee job performance, while organizational continuance commitment is negatively related to employee job performance. From an organizational perspective, the higher the trust within the organization, the higher the employee satisfaction.

In the context of a merged organization, out-group trust is the trust and degree of trust that employees of the pre-merger organization have in members of the post-merger organization (Lipponen et al., 2017). Out-group trust is a positive subjective perception of employees towards the new organization, which is both belief and perception (Yzerbyt et al., 2004). According to social exchange theory, when the behaviour of the organization or superiors is beneficial to employees, employees will positively repay the organization or superiors (Wang and Pan, 2014). Out-group trust helps to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and harmony between the organization and employees and maintains the exchange relationship between the organization and employees. Existing research has shown that trust promotes job satisfaction. According to research, one of the prerequisites for high job satisfaction among employees is their complete trust in the organization and their colleagues (Sarıkaya and Kara, 2020). Specifically, the higher employees' trust in the organization and its members, the higher their job satisfaction will be (Zeng et al., 2010). Some studies have further confirmed that trust in organizations and members is significantly positively correlated with employee job satisfaction (Yang and Wei, 2016). Suppose the employees experience that the merged company values them and rewards their hard work and loyalty to the merged company better. In that case, the employees will have more trust in the new company, which will increase their job satisfaction.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study used quantitative analysis to investigate out-group trust and job satisfaction among staff at CDH hospitals before the merger. The impact and current out-group trust and job satisfaction levels were analyzed separately. And the relationship between out-group trust and job satisfaction was studied.

Population and Sample

Delhey and Welzel (2012) made a more specific distinction between in-group and out-group trust in inter-group trust, referring to trust in familiar people as in-group trust and in unfamiliar people as out-group trust. Delhey and Welzel (2012) emphasized that familiarity should not focus on the relationship with a specific person, but on a broad range of other people. Therefore, this study took the staff of Hospital CDH as the survey subjects as the in-group, and the hospital staff of Hospital CIH who plans to merge and has not yet worked together as the out-group. Hospital workers were stratified according to their job categories, including doctors, medical technicians, nurses, administration, and logistics. As of the time of the survey, Hospital CDH had a total of 1,704 staff members, of whom 713 were used as the research sample for this study. Their personal information, out-group trust, and job satisfaction were collected through questionnaires.

Research Instrument

This research used Out-group Trust and Job Satisfaction among Hospital Workers Before the Merger as the questionnaire. The questionnaire includes three parts: basic personal information, out-group trust and job satisfaction. Among them, basic personal information includes age, gender, education, length of service, position and expected merger time, a total of 6 items. The out-group trust scale used the out-group trust scale used by Noor in 2008 (Noor et al., 2008). The scale contains 6 items, including 4 positively scored items and 2 reverse scored items. Some items were revised after discussions with psychological experts. For example, "I think most people at Hospital CIH will try to be fair", "I think there are very few people in Hospital CIH that I can trust" etc. The questionnaire adopts a 5-point Likert scoring method, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The higher the score, the higher the trust in the out-group. The results of single factor analysis are: χ^2 / df = 17.891, CFI = 0.903, NFI = 0.899, TLI = 0.839, RMSEA = 0.104. In this study, Cronbach's α= 0.826 for the out-group trust scale.

The job satisfaction scale adopted the one used by Faye (Faye and Long, 2014). This scale is based on the Job Satisfaction Index questionnaire by Schriesheim and Tsui, which has been used many times to measure job satisfaction among doctors, nurses, and administrative staff. The job satisfaction scale contains 6 items, for example, "Are you satisfied with the nature of the work you do?", "Are you satisfied with your superior?" etc. The questionnaire adopts a 5-point Likert scoring method, ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). The higher the score, the higher the job satisfaction. The results of single factor analysis are: χ^2 / df = 20.034, CFI = 0.900, NFI = 0.897, TLI = 0.834, RMSEA = 0.125. In this study, Cronbach's α= 0.853 for the job satisfaction scale.

Data Collection

This study adopted a stratified random sampling method for sample extraction. A questionnaire survey was conducted through online and paper questionnaires for 2 weeks in August 2022. The investigation was reviewed ethically by CDH Hospital. All questionnaires are anonymous and strictly confidential. The name of the hospital was pseudonymized in the study to ensure that the results would not have a negative impact on the study subjects.

Data Analysis

SPSS and AMOS software were used in this research. The reliability and validity of the Out-group Trust Scale and Job Satisfaction Scale were tested. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyze the collected data. The t-test and one-way analysis of variance were used to analyze the differences between demographic variables in out-group trust and job satisfaction. A correlation analysis was conducted on the relationship between out-group trust and job satisfaction. Regression analysis was conducted using gender, age, degree, occupation, years of work, predicted time to merge, out-group trust as control variables, out-group trust as the independent variable, and job satisfaction as the dependent variable.

Findings

Basic information about the samples

Among the 713 respondents (Table 1), 187 (26.2%) were male and 526 (73.8%) were female; The age groups were concentrated in 298 people (41.8%) between 30 and 39 years old, and 228 people (32%) between 40 and 49 years old; 477 people (66.9%) have bachelor's degree; There are 210 doctors (29.5%), 62 medical technicians (8.7%), 300 nurses (42.1%), 72 administration staff (10.1%), and 69 Support staff (9.7%); 308 people (43.2%) have working experience of 11 to 20 years;182 people (25.5%) expected the merger to be within 3 months, 280 people (39.3%) expected it to be between 3 and 6 months, and 224 people (31.4%) expected it to be within 6 to 12 months, there are 27 people (3.8%) thought it would be above 12 months.

Table 1 Descriptive analysis of the hospital CDH's staff before the merger

Variable		n	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	187	26.2
	Female	526	73.8
Age	≤ 29	136	19.1
	30 ~ 39	298	41.8
	40 ~ 49	228	32.0
	≥ 50	51	7.2
Degree	≤ College	90	12.6
	Undergraduate	477	66.9
	Graduate	146	20.5
Occupation	Doctor	210	29.5
	Medical technician	62	8.7
	Nurse	300	42.1
	Administration staff	72	10.1
	Support staff	69	9.7
Years of Working	<1	34	4.8
	1~5	149	20.9
	6~10	79	11.1
	11~20	308	43.2
	>20	143	20.1
Predicted Time to Merge	<3 months	182	25.5
	3 ~ 6 months	280	39.3
	6 ~ 12 months	224	31.4
	>12 months	27	3.8
	Total	713	100%

Analysis of respondents' trust in out-groups

According to the statistics results (Table 2), before the merger, the out-group trust of hospital CDH workers was at a medium level (19.54±2.13). The analysis results through the significance test showed significant differences in out-group trust between the gender, age, education, years of work and predicted merger time of hospital workers before the merger (P < 0.001). Combined with Scheffe's statistical results, it is shown that women are significantly higher than men in terms of trust in out-groups; The age range under 29 years old is significantly lower than other age groups; Bachelor's degree is significantly higher than other degrees; Those with 5 to 10 years of work are significantly higher out-group trust than other worker; The predicted merger time is significantly higher out-group trust over 6 months than within 6 months. However, there is no significant difference in out-group trust between occupations.

Analysis of respondents' job satisfaction

According to the difference analysis (Table 2), the overall job satisfaction of hospital CDH workers before the merger was at a medium level (19.47±2.12). The analysis results through the significance test showed significant differences in job satisfaction between the gender, age, education, occupation, years of work and predicted merger time of hospital workers before the merger (p < 0.01). Scheffe's statistical results, it is show that women are significantly higher than men in terms of job satisfaction; the age range of 30 to 49 in Job satisfaction is significantly higher than those under 29 and over 50; The postgraduate students' job satisfaction is significantly lower than that of other degree; The job satisfaction in medical technicians and nurses are significantly lower than that of other occupations, while the job satisfaction in administrative staff is significantly higher than that of other occupations; There are significant differences in job satisfaction between different years of work, among which those with 10 to 20 years of service have the highest job satisfaction scores; job satisfaction after the predicted merger time of 12 months is significantly higher than other predicted times, while job satisfaction within the predicted merger time of less than 6 months is significantly lower than that of more than 6 months (Table 2). The statistical analysis of six aspects of satisfaction in this study shows that before the merger, hospital CDH workers had the lowest satisfaction scores for item 4 satisfaction with salary (2.57±0.76) and item 5 satisfaction with job promotion (2.81±0.78) of the job satisfaction scale. At the same time, satisfaction with colleagues (3.72±0.67) has the highest score. According to the division of in-group and out-group in this research, it can be simply explained that the workers of hospital CDH had better in-group trust before the merger.

Table 2 Analysis the differences between demographic variables in out-group trust and job satisfaction among 713 staff members of Hospital CDH before the merger (M±S.D.)

Variable		Out-group Trust		Job satisfaction	
		M±S.D.	*t/F*	M±S.D.	*t/F*
Gender	Male	18.83±3.16	3.40[***]	18.70±3.31	3.82[***]
	Female	19.80±3.43		19.74±3.17	
Age	≤ 29	18.25±2.88	8.65[***]	18.33±3.49	8.63[***]
	30 ~ 39	19.80±3.87		19.65±2.88	
	40 ~ 49	19.97±3.05		20.01±3.51	
	≥ 50	19.67±2.07		19.02±2.40	
Degree	≤ College	18.44±2.68	17.66[***]	19.37±2.77	10.27[***]
	Undergraduate	20.07±3.10		19.81±2.96	
	Graduate	18.53±4.21		18.44±4.06	
Occupation	Doctor	19.69±3.22	0.29	19.61±3.89	6.97[***]
	Medical technician	19.18±3.27		18.10±4.25	
	Nurse	19.53±3.67		19.20±2.32	
	Administration staff	19.60±3.16		20.68±3.38	
	Support staff	19.46±2.97		20.17±2.72	
Years of Working	<1	18.79±3.51	6.72[***]	19.50±3.79	4.80[**]
	1~5	18.44±2.89		18.50±3.45	
	6~10	20.41±3.16		19.73±3.35	
	11~20	19.88±3.68		19.87±3.21	
	>20	19.69±3.01		19.48±2.63	
Predicted Time to Merge	<3 months	18.59±2.30	37.235[***]	19.07±2.45	20.62[***]
	3 ~ 6 months	18.67±1.56		18.70±2.43	
	6 ~ 12 months	21.10±4.21		20.43±3.14	
	>12 months	22.19±3.89		22.19±4.86	

Note: [***]p<0.001, [**]p<0.01

Analysis of the relationship between out-group trust and job satisfaction

This study innovatively used trust in other groups as the independent variable and job satisfaction as the dependent variable. Currently, very few studies examine out-group trust and job satisfaction, especially trust relationships across different units. This research used SPSS to test the correlation between out-group trust and job satisfaction among various types of hospital workers before the merger (Table 3).

Table 3 The correlation between out-group trust and job satisfaction among hospital workers in various occupations before the merger.

Variable	Job Satisfaction		
	r	p	correlation level
Out-group Trust	0.65	0.000	Moderate positive
Out-group Trust (Doctor)	0.69	0.000	Moderate positive
Out-group Trust (Medical technician)	0.74	0.000	High positive
Out-group Trust (Nurse)	0.74	0.000	High positive
Out-group Trust (Administration staff)	0.58	0.000	Moderate positive
Out-group Trust (Support staff)	0.58	0.000	Moderate positive

The results in Table 3 show that there was a positive correlation between out-group trust and job satisfaction among hospital workers before the merger ($r=0.65$, $p<0.001$). At the same time, there is a positive correlation between out-group trust and job satisfaction in each occupation. Regression analysis was conducted using out-group trust (X) as the independent variable, and job satisfaction (Y) as the dependent variable (Table 4). From the Model in Table 4, the out-group trust of hospital workers before the merger has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction ($\beta=0.56$, $p<0.001$). The constant term is 312.435, and the regression equation is expressed as:

$$Y=312.435+0.56X.$$

Table 4 Regression analysis of out-group trust and job satisfaction among hospital workers in each occupation before the merger

Predictor variable	Job satisfaction		
	β	t	p
Out-group Trust	0.56***	2.916	0.000
R	0.163		
R^2	0.072		
F	2.277***		

Note: ***$p<0.001$

Conclusion

This study used statistical methods to process 713 valid questionnaire data from Hospital CDH before the merger. It explored the impact of out-group trust on job satisfaction among hospital staff before the merger. The survey analysis results further verify that before the organization merger, the members of the merged organization had a medium level of trust in out-groups

of the members of the merged organization, which affected the members' job satisfaction. The job satisfaction of members of the merged organization is at a medium level, with considerable room for improvement. The organization's gender, age, education, position, length of service and the time of the merger will all affect the job satisfaction of members of the merged organization. In terms of out-group trust, in addition to occupation, other surveyed demographic information will also affect out-group trust. Finally, this study found through correlation research and regression analysis that the out-group trust of hospital staff before the merger had a significant predictive effect on job satisfaction.

Discussion

Organizational mergers are stressful, especially large ones. Considering the large-scale changes, the speed of integration and the uncertainty of development, employees will face various psychological problems. Including the threats felt by employees, uneasiness about future work development, and high identification with the pre-merger organization (Degbey et al., 2021). This study also confirms that out-group trust and job satisfaction are lower for mergers expected to take place less than six months later than for more than six months. As the threat of hospital mergers increases, it will have a negative impact on hospital workers' out-group trust and job satisfaction. At the same time, this research survey shows that Hospital CDH's out-group identification and job satisfaction are both at a medium level, and there is much room for improvement.

As the plan to merge Hospital CDH and Hospital CIH is gradually progressing, Hospital CDH has been vague about the specific merger time and future development plans since the merger idea was disclosed at the first hospital conference. It caused hospital workers in Hospital CDH to feel anxious due to uncertainty about future work arrangements and a sense of threat from Hospital CIH. Ma (2021) proposed that as management, the organization should pay attention to the specific time of the merger, make preparations before the merger at each time point, clarify the organizational merger plan, and popularize the organizational and personal development advantages brought by the merger, develop manuals related to improving trust in out-groups and job satisfaction, and conduct regular pre-merger psychological surveys and group psychological training to reduce the negative impact on workers.

In the six months since the merger plan was first proposed, Hospital CDH has failed to make any prevention or intervention in the face of the negative emotions caused by the merger, and lacked attention to the interests of the workers in the pre-merger hospital. Chen et al. (2017) and others proposed that intergroup contact significantly affects out-group trust. Huang & Zhao (2013) and others proposed that imaginary contact can reduce the sense of intergroup threat.

Therefore, actively carrying out cooperative work or activities before the merger and increasing the out-group trust of the two organizations through intergroup contact can improve their job satisfaction.

Suggestion

Effective management has a positive effect on employee trust, whereas poor management has a negative impact on employee trust (Bansal, 2016). Hospital CDH must not only provide a certain quantity and quality of senior managers after the merger, but also be able to cross-promote to higher positions in the other hospital to build trust for hospital workers. Therefore, hospital CDH managers should actively prepare for the merger, referring to the merger cases of large organizations such as Lenovo. At the same time, the top management of the two hospitals should actively meet to understand each other's hospital structure and operations and make adequate preparations for the post-merger work.

Generally, only the organization's top management has the right to obtain information on organizational merger decisions. The dissemination of some internal information will affect employees' work emotions and moods, and cause unnecessary psychological pressure. Therefore, the organization must establish effective communication channels to ensure the smooth dissemination of relevant information. To allow employees to obtain the information they should know promptly, various communication methods can also be used, such as oral information, written communication, online communication, non-verbal communication, etc., to convey the purpose and goals of the merger to employees. Achieving symmetry and sufficient information can reduce the imbalance of employees' trust in the organization and out-groups to the greatest extent, and restore employees' job satisfaction as soon as possible.

During the merger process, to give full play to employees' enthusiasm, it is also possible to increase employee participation and allow employees to contribute and express their ideas. Increasing employees' sense of participation and accomplishment shows senior management's respect for employees and helps cultivate employees' trust in the organization's senior management. By giving employees the right to speak and allowing them to participate actively, the organisation's top management can promptly understand their honest thoughts. It calms the employees' sense of instability and prepares them for an open commitment to the organization. They can correctly identify their position in the merged organization and create a familiar feeling among the management and employees of the organization.

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