Wired attraction: effects of ICT use on social cohesion in organizational groups

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Chapter 2
Defining and Positioning Social Cohesion in an Organizational Context

This chapter addresses the first part of sub-question 1. Here, we will formulate a definition of social cohesion within task-related groups in an organizational context. We will also discuss cohesion in relation to other social concepts in organizations in order to obtain a better understanding of the concept itself and its assumed value for organizations. Section 2.1 introduces the concept of cohesion with a compact overview of the literature on this subject. We will discuss several approaches to cohesion. Section 2.2 describes the organizational context in which we studied cohesion for the purposes of our research. Using this description, we will choose a suitable approach to cohesion in organizational task-related groups and describe it in more detail in section 2.3. This results in a definition of cohesion in organizational groups. Having a clear picture of what is meant by cohesion in organizational groups, the concept can be positioned with respect to other social processes or concepts in organizations. Section 2.4 presents an overview of social concepts/processes that are related to cohesion and discusses the value of cohesion for the smooth functioning of the organization.

2.1 A short literature review of cohesion

A little over half a decade ago, Festinger, Schachter and Back (1950) formulated the first theory of group cohesion or cohesiveness. They defined this social concept as “the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group” (1950:164). They considered the attractiveness of the group as an important factor of cohesion and listed factors that add to this attractiveness: friendships, companionships, warmth and pleasure of emotional ties, prestige, social status, approval of the other and group goals. They developed their theory on the basis of small face-to-face informal groups, characterized by interpersonal friendship. Their approach, which emphasized the attractiveness of the group, has greatly influenced further research into this concept. In the following decade, a shift occurred from a “field of forces” to
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cohesion as the attraction of the group (e.g. Back, 1951; Libo, 1953; Isreal, 1956; Van Bergen & Koekebakker, 1959). This was also considered as a widely used approach to the concept in later reviews. In their review of cohesion (cohesiveness), Cartwright & Zander (1968), for instance, concluded that "most researchers have equated the term cohesiveness with "attraction-to-group"" (1968:92). More recently Mudrack (1989), came to the same conclusion and agreed that most researchers adopt "a variant of the attraction-to-group definition" (1989:125).

Parallel to the studies on group cohesion, other studies have focused on group formation and group structure; in them we can recognize elements of cohesion (like those described by Festinger et al.). In examining groups that have to perform a primary task, Bion (1961) pointed out that the rational planned task-performance activity of the group was imbued with, and often displayed by, activity that can be contributed to unconscious forces concerning such matters as dependence and conflict. Sherif (1967) argued that, according to the social structure of groups, the relations between members should tend - over time - to become stabilized, organized and regulated by the development of a system of differentiations in role and status and shared norms and values which prescribe beliefs, attitudes and conducts.

The concept of cohesion also emerged in theories about group processes. With regard to group processes, the so-called underlying input-process-output model is used in most literature. Inputs are described as the qualities of members, such as personality, expertise and strength, which were brought to the group. Through (the process of) member interaction, such as the exchange of information, coordination of efforts and exertion of leadership, these inputs are transformed into outputs. A large body of literature conforming the input-process-output was examined by Hackman & Morris (1975). Their review indicates that the nature of group processes might be a useful predictor of certain outcomes, such as individual affective reactions to a group. In their review, group cohesiveness in task-related groups was considered both an input and an output variable of group processes. Other researchers, however, describe cohesiveness as a variable of group processes (cf. Guzzo & Shea, 1992).

The traditional - and majority of - theories of cohesion are based on a small group context. Characteristics of small groups, in which members know each other, form the basis of the approach to cohesion as a form of interpersonal attraction. Later, another approach to cohesion was developed, an approach not restricted by size or based on small group characteristics. This form of cohesion, referred to as social attraction, concerns rather different ideas of the concept.

**Cohesion as interpersonal attraction**

The early definitions of cohesion, which were based on the attraction-to-group concept, functioned at the individual level. To obtain an index of group cohesiveness, many researchers conceptualized cohesiveness as the sum of the attractiveness of group members or interpersonal attraction. (However, it was generally acknowledged that group cohesiveness is also influenced by other factors, such as the group's activities, atmosphere, goals etc.). We
can see an example of this in a review of cohesion (cohesiveness) by Evans and Jarvis (1980): “measuring the levels of attraction of individual group members and averaging them” (1980:359). Several other reviews also confirm that group cohesiveness is widely treated as equivalent to interpersonal attraction (Cartwright, 1968; Lott and Lott, 1965; McGrath and Kravitz, 1982; Zander, 1979).

Describing cohesion as interpersonal attraction led to definitions of cohesion such as Lott’s (1961), who defined cohesiveness as “the group property, which is inferred from the number and strength of mutual positive attitudes among the members of a group...[where]...the primary condition for the development of mutual positive attitudes among group members will be seen to be the attainment of goals or the receipt of rewards in one another’s presence” (1961:279). Shaw (1976) describes group cohesiveness as an interpersonal relationship: “One such interpersonal relationship is the degree to which the members of the group are attracted to each other, or the degree the group coheres or “hangs together”. This aspect of the group is usually referred to as group cohesiveness” (1976:197).

Hogg (1987) and Turner (1982, 1984) discuss the social cohesion model. This model tends to compare a group with a molecule. The individual atoms are the members of a group, and the interatomic forces represent interpersonal attraction. The “interatomic forces” of interpersonal attraction are seen as the result of factors (of liking) as cooperative interdependence to achieve shared goals, attitude similarity, physical proximity, common fate, shared threats, being liked by the other, attractive personality traits, and success on group tasks. It is assumed that a collection of people forms a group (deliberately or spontaneously) to the degree that they have needs capable of mutual satisfaction, and in this sense, are dependent upon one another.

Cohesion as social attraction

As regarding more recent ideas about group formation and cohesion, several factors already mentioned in the early days of group research are still seen as important and relevant. Interdependence, (described earlier by i.e. Lewin (1939), Asch (1952) as a primary criteria for group formation) is pointed out by Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell (1987) as one of the major features of group formation, which can be summarized by the concepts “interdependence”, “identity” and “social structure”. Turner et al. recognizes an emphasis on forms of interdependence that are related to the satisfaction of an individual’s needs (the achievement of rewarding outcomes). According to Turner et al., the study of interdependence since the early theorists has resulted in an implicit theory of group membership which assumes that “…motivational (functional, objective) interdependence between people for the mutual satisfaction of their needs ... gives rise more or less directly (in the positive case) to social and psychological interdependence in the forms of cooperative and/or affiliative social interaction, mutual interpersonal influence and mutual attraction....” (1987:20). Thus, people have individual needs (goals, drives, desires) that are satisfied directly or indirectly by other people. If they believe that interaction with others satisfies their needs, they tend to develop
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positive interpersonal attitudes and influence each other’s attitudes and behavior in order to satisfy those needs, which can result in group formation.

With regard to identity - already emphasized by the pre-experimentalists - it has been argued that individuals should have some collective awareness of themselves as a distinct social entity. To share some common identity, it is necessary that they perceive and define themselves as a group (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). These ideas are worked out in the social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner 1982) and self-categorization (Turner, 1985) theories. More recently, cohesion has been conceptualized as social attraction instead of interpersonal attraction based on the social identity and self-categorization theory cohesion (Hogg 1992). Social attraction is not based on interpersonal relationships, but is a consequence of the individuals’ perceptions of a certain common membership. What is meant by this is that liking among individuals in a group is not based on the personal characteristics of individual members, but on the simple fact that individuals belong to the same group and share a perceived prototypicality of the group. Hogg claims that his approach to social cohesion is based on general theories of the social group, not constrained by size, dispersion, longevity of group membership and that it incorporates the role of the intergroup context into group behavior.

Multidimensionality of cohesion

At long last, the consensus is growing that there is more to cohesion than interpersonal or social attraction: cohesion has other dimensions (Carless & De Paola, 2000; Cota, Longman, Evans, Dion & Kilik, 1995; Zaccaro, 1991). This approach suggests alternate forms of cohesion, each with different consequences for individual productivity, group performance, norm development etc. (Zaccaro, 1991). Several factor-analytic studies of the various measures of group cohesion support the interpretation of multidimensionality (e.g. Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985; Gal & Manning, 1987; Stokes, 1983; Yukelson, Wienberg & Jackson, 1984). Many researchers have focused on the difference between interpersonal cohesion (interpersonal attraction) and task cohesion. Task cohesion has been defined as an attraction to the group because of a liking for, or commitment to, the group task and is broadly used in studying the performance of (small) work groups (Hackman, 1976; Mullen & Copper, 1994; Zaccaro, 1991; Zaccaro & Lowe, 1988). However, since social cohesion is the research subject of this dissertation, other dimensions, such as task cohesion, will not be discussed at any further length.

2.2 Groups in organizations

Before we go on to explore the most suitable approach to cohesion for this study, we should examine the context in which cohesion is studied here. In the first chapter, we distinguished between three aspects of the organization: the technical structure, the formal structure and the social structure. The technical structure will be discussed in Chapter 4. This section focuses
on the formal and social structure of an organization with a view to illuminating the context in which cohesion is studied. As discussed earlier, both aspects of the organization interact with each other. An organization can be considered a social entity, which is somehow structured by coordination processes that determine the formal organizational structure. Daft (1992), for instance, calls an organization a deliberately structured system of activities. Work is divided into tasks and the coordination of these tasks determines the formal structure of the organization. Thus, people and groups of people are organized such that the organization’s goals can be accomplished. This structure actually determines the formal relationships that employees and groups of employees maintain with each other in performing their jobs.

In (large) organizations, different levels of entities can be distinguished, such as larger divisions comprising smaller departments or groups. This study focuses on task-related entities in organizations. More specifically, these are entities that comprise part of the formal organizational structure, performing an assigned task that contributes to the organizational goals. At the smallest level of task-related entities in organizations, groups are often referred to as “work groups” or “teams”. These groups can be defined by the joint presence of several attributes including: 1) being embedded in a larger system (organization); 2) performing tasks relevant to the organization’s mission; 3) affecting other entities in or outside the organization; 4) consisting of individuals that are interdependent to some degree; and 5) having identifiable membership for those inside as well as outside the group (Alderfer, 1977; Hackman, 1978). Several teams or work groups can work closely together, thus forming a larger entity, such as a sales department. In turn, several departments may form a business unit, and several business units may form an organization.

Whether a task-related entity at any level within an organization should be considered a group is determined by the formal organizational structure, or the relations shaped by mutual task goals and task interdependencies (Arrow & McGrath, 1995). These relations may exist between individuals or groups and involve: 1) instrumental relations, concerning the division and adjustment of work/tasks; 2) power and dependence relations, concerning the authority actors/entities have over other actors/entities as well as the dependence of actors on actors with more authority; 3) negotiation relations between actors/entities in decision-making with respect to sharing limited resources, such as equipment, space, budget etc. (Mastenbroek, 1992). These relationships can be either vertical or horizontal. For instance, a sales department may consist of several teams that have horizontal relationships. A business unit may contain several departments, as well as teams, who interact in horizontal and vertical relationships. In other words, these units can consist of several hierarchical layers. Thus, an employee is often a member of several groups at more than one level of entities, and maintains relationships with members of his own work group (smallest level) as well as with members of other work groups, departments etc. in his/her organization.

Social-emotional relationships are a fourth type of relationship that can exist within a group. These relationships are characterized by a kind of team spirit and loyalty between
actors/entities (Mastenbroek, 1992). This kind of relationship overlaps in part with the concept of cohesion (the subject of our research), and in part with approaches to organizational culture, which appears to be related to cohesion. Granted, organizational culture is not the subject of this study. However, in discussing the organizational context of our research, we should devote some attention to this concept, especially as regarding characteristics related to cohesion.

On reviewing different approaches to organizational culture (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Bax, 1991; Frissen, 1989; Hofstede, 1995; Jellineck, Smircich and Hirsch, 1983; Schein, 1987), we can describe culture as something members of an organization share in common. Norms and values, which can function as a binding element, are an example. Secondly, organizational culture is said to be multiform (Frissen, 1989). Different subcultures may exist within an organization. These elements of culture can be linked to cohesion in organizations. If culture is a binding element, it follows that it bears a relationship with social cohesion in organizations. Moreover, the idea of subcultures is interesting. Subcultures may exist in the different entities of an organization. A strong sub-culture (i.e. a binding element) may be accompanied by a high degree of cohesion in that entity. However, the existence of different subcultures will weaken the strength of the overall organizational culture and may thus diminish cohesion within the overall organization. Although we will devote no further attention to organizational culture in this dissertation, it can be useful to take account of its assumed role, discussing further research and practical implications.

In summary, given the characteristics of an organization and its task-related entities, we can state that studying cohesion in an organizational context involves studying cohesion in groups of varying sizes, who maintain different relationships with each other. The latter can be referred to as intergroup relationships. Relationships with other groups, which can be vertical or horizontal, can also affect an individual’s relationship with his/her own group. Based on these characteristics, a suitable approach to cohesion in organizational groups should be chosen.

### 2.3 Defining cohesion in an organizational context

Considering theories of and approaches to cohesion, as well as the characteristics of organizational groups, Hogg’s approach to cohesion as social attraction appears the most suitable for studying social cohesion in an organizational context. This conclusion stems primarily from the fact that his approach can explain cohesion at a macro-social level, as well as the level of small, task-oriented, interactive groups. In other words, his approach concerns cohesion in large groups, whose members are not necessarily all acquainted, as well as small groups, whose members know each other very well and interact frequently. Secondly Hogg takes account of intergroup relations. Thirdly, Hogg considers social attraction to be the
outcome of a social process (self-categorization). In the literature, cohesion is considered as either a variable of a social process or an input or output variable of a social process. Given the characteristics of organizational groups, cohesion should preferably be considered an output variable of a social process. This is illustrated further in the section below.

**Cohesion as an input or output variable or a social process**

The structure of a group can be described as the pattern of interpersonal relationships between members. Assuming that group formation is an evolutionary process (Alblas and Wijsman, 1993), at some point, a group will manifest a relatively stable pattern of behavior and interactions. Members have adopted a certain role and have relatively stable interpersonal relationships with other members. This process can be seen in informal social groups that have emerged spontaneously as well as in formal, intentionally created work groups. As mentioned earlier, Turner et al. (1987) point out that people will interact with others if they believe that this interaction will satisfy their needs. In simple terms, people have a need for friendship and confirmation and therefore seek other people to form groups who give them the friendship they need. In the case of formal work groups in organizations, groups are not formed on the basis of a need, or more neutrally, on a voluntary basis. Work groups are formed on the basis of a task and must fit in the organizational structure. Thus, the formal structure of a group is determined by the organization. Within this formal structure, group processes will take place, which can result in the stable pattern of interactions described above. Assuming that social cohesion is a kind of attraction between members, it seems reasonable to describe it as a variable of group processes in informal voluntary groups. In the case of formal work groups, it seems more plausible to consider social cohesion as an input or output variable of a social process.

In this study, social cohesion in task-related groups in an organization is considered an output variable of some underlying social process. Influences from outside such as the use of information and communication technology may alter the underlying process, which may, in turn, result in a shift in the cohesion in the group. Thus, an understanding of the underlying process is relevant to this study.

**Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory**

Hogg (1992) argues in his book "The social psychology of group cohesiveness: From attraction to social identity" that a complete theory of group solidarity must be able to explain cohesion at a macro-social level, as well as at the level of small, task-oriented, interactive groups. "Although there are, of course, differences between groups that differ in size, longevity, dispersion, structure, function, purpose and so forth, it is very probable that these differences may be mainly "surface" or "content" differences, and that there are one or more fundamental psychological processes that are uniquely associated with groups" (1992:88). Hogg's approach to cohesion is based on the perspectives of the Social Identity (e.g. Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner 1982) and Self-Categorization (Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987) theories. Both theories have also been applied in an organizational context. Ashforth & Meal
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(1989) first introduced the Social Identity Theory to an organizational setting, followed by several others (e.g. Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994; Riordan & Shore, 1997; Tsui, Egan & O’Reilly, 1992). Hogg & Terry (2000) showed that the Self-Categorization Theory is applicable in an organizational context.

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) is based on the idea that a fundamental distinction should be made between interpersonal processes and group processes. Regarding interpersonal attraction as an interpersonal process and cohesion as a group process, this theory rejects the idea that cohesion can be defined as interpersonal attraction. According to the SIT, group behavior has characteristic features, such as ethnocentrism, ingroup bias, intergroup competition and discrimination, ingroup cohesion, conformity etc., that distinguish group behavior from interpersonal behavior. Categorization and social comparison are regarded as the underlying and responsible processes for group behavior. According to the SIT, people classify or categorize themselves and others into various groups or social categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). In order to do this, similarities of stimuli falling within the same group or category are accentuated. At the same time, differences between stimuli falling in other categories are emphasized. This process can lead to perceptual distancing and homogenization of outgroup members on stereotypic dimensions. Accentuating similarities among group members on behavioral and affective dimensions leads to stereotypic ingroup behavior and behavioral uniformity. As Hogg (1992) put it: “...contexts that make salient a specific social categorization produce stereotypic ingroup, outgroup and self-perception, ingroup normative behavior (i.e. behavioral uniformity), and intergroup differentiation and discrimination” (1992:91).

Social comparison is regarded as a comparison between one’s own attitudes, beliefs and behaviors and those of others. The SIT claims that no truth is self-evident, and that all knowledge is derived through social comparisons. When social comparisons are made (between oneself as an ingroup member and others as outgroup members, or between the ingroup and outgroup as a whole) people try to maximize intergroup differences to secure an evaluative advantage for the ingroup. The idea is that people try to make intergroup comparisons on dimensions that favor the group, because social categories contribute to the self-concept and are thus useful in defining and evaluating “self”. In this way people strive for a positive social identity through positive ingroup distinctiveness. The SIT argues that this reflects a basic human motivation for positive self-esteem through self-enhancement (Hogg and Abrams, 1990).

The Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) evolved from the SIT and can be considered as a “...component of an extended SIT of the relationship between self-concept and group behavior that details the social cognitive processes that generate social identity effects” (Hogg & Terry, 2000:123). This approach elaborates in more detail the operation of the categorization process as the cognitive basis of group behavior. It focuses more on intragroup processes than on intergroup relations and makes little reference to self-esteem as a
motivational concept. According to Hogg (1992), the SCT formalizes and systematizes the more imprecise aspects of SIT theory and provides a more complete theorization of the group. Consequently, it can provide an explanation of social cohesion that is theoretically related to the entire array of other group phenomena that occur in groups of all types (Hogg 1992, Hogg & Terry, 2000).

The basic mechanism of group phenomena according to the SCT is the cognitive process of categorization described earlier (the accentuation of similar stimuli belonging to the same category and different stimuli in different categories). This categorization can take place at different levels of abstraction. In a group process, such as cohesion, the ingroup-outgroup level is considered the most relevant. This level is also referred to as one that defines one's social identity. Social identity is described as one's conception of self in terms of defining features of a self-inclusive social category that renders self stereotypically "interchangeable" with other ingroup members and distinct from outgroup members. (Personal identity refers to one's conception of self as unique and distinct from all other humans, and/or in terms of unique relationships). Thus a process of depersonalization takes place, which can be considered as the process underlying several group phenomena, including social cohesion (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje 1997; Hogg, 1992; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Turner, 1985).

**Cohesion as social attraction**
The SIT and SCT reject the idea that group cohesiveness can be equated with interpersonal attraction, because they consider cohesiveness as a group process and interpersonal attraction as an interpersonal process. They see a clear distinction between two forms of attraction: personal attraction and social attraction. Both can be described as a positive feeling on the part of one person about another, but the generative processes underlying each are considered to be quite different.

Social attraction is regarded as "a depersonalized liking based upon prototypicality and generated by self-categorization" (Hogg, 1992:100). In other words, social attraction is an attraction to a group embodied by specific group members. The object of the attraction is not a unique, individual person, but the prototype that this person embodies and thus, interchangeably. How much individuals are liked is considered a function of their perceived prototypicality and the degree of the positive attitude of the perceiver towards the group as it is prototypically represented. Personal attraction is described as "idiosyncratic and grounded in specific interpersonal relationships" (Hogg, 1992:100). It refers to an interpersonal feeling or attitude towards another person and the perception of this person as a unique and non-interchangeable entity. It is lead by personal preferences and the course of interpersonal relationships. The diagram in figure 2.1 presents the differences between both forms of attraction.
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The effect of intergroup relations, which is relevant in an organizational context, can also be explained on the basis of the SCT. According to the SIT, people try to maintain a favorable evaluation of their own (groups). Consequently, ingroup prototypes are generally positively evaluated. Thus intragroup attraction (social attraction for an ingroup member) may vary in terms of positiveness, but is usually not negative. On the other hand, it is assumed that intergroup attraction, which is described as attraction that is depersonalized in terms of an outgroup prototype, will be less positive - or even negative. To some extent, an interaction between both forms of attraction may exist because of the need to evaluate other (out)groups less positively in order to maintain a favorable evaluation of one’s own group. This will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 3.

Defining cohesion in organizational groups
As outlined above, Hogg’s approach to cohesion offers certain advantages: not constrained by size, longevity, dispersion and the incorporation of intergroup context. In light of that, his approach is useful in studying cohesion within organizations. Moreover, Hogg describes social attraction (cohesion) as the result of self-categorization (social process), which falls in line with the idea that cohesion in organizations should be regarded as an (input or) output variable of a social process. If we were to place this approach to cohesion within an organizational context, we could define social cohesion in organizational task-related groups as follows:

"...attraction to the group as that group is embodied by specific group members, so that the object of positive attitude and feelings is not actually the unique individual person, but the prototype that he/she embodies" (Hogg, 1992: 100), which can occur in groups of any size within organizations.

This “social attraction to the group” is experienced by individual group members. Cohesion is a group phenomenon and social cohesion within organizational groups is determined by the individual’s experiences of social attraction. How these experiences should be measured and
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aggregated to a group level is a rather complex question. As explained in Chapter 3, there is no consensus on how to measure cohesion. One frequently used method, however, is by means of measuring interpersonal attraction and simply aggregating the scores to the group level. By applying this method to measure social cohesion in organizational groups, we would exclude the role of intergroup relations and may obscure the role of possible outgroupers. These difficulties should be taken into consideration in conceptualizing and operationalizing social cohesion in organizational groups.

2.4 Related social phenomena in organizations

The first chapter of this dissertation mentions several social constructs or processes related to social cohesion or attraction. This section devotes more extensive attention to these constructs (i.e. social capital, organizational citizenship behavior, trust, commitment and identification) and their relationships with social cohesion in an organizational context. Discussing social processes and concepts within an organizational context can be a rather complex task. After all, every concept is somehow related to every other concept. Moreover, benefits for the organization, which are seen as outcomes of these social processes, often overlap. This section does not attempt to present a complete overview of the literature concerning social processes in organizations. However, we will try to position cohesion with respect to other social processes and concepts in organizations with a view to improving our understanding of the concept itself and its value for the smooth functioning of an organization.

In Chapter 1, cohesion was referred to as one of the generators of social capital, which is considered to be of great value for organizations and one that is gaining attention in the literature. Several (general) definitions of social capital can be found in the literature. Examples include: 1) "... an asset that inhere in social relations and networks." (Leana & Van Buren, 1999:538); and 2) "... The sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrues to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:119). Thus, social capital involves social relations, maintained by an individual, group, community, etc. Social capital can be considered as either an individual or organizational asset. It has been referred to, for instance, as the assets tied to the manager's network (Coleman, 1988) as well as "... a resource reflecting the character of social relations within the firm." (Leana & Van Buren, 1999:538). The latter concerns social capital at organizational level. Leana & Van Buren (1999) have formulated a model of organizational social capital, describing the concept as consisting of two components: 1) associability (willingness and ability of participants in an organization to subordinate individual goal and associated actions to collective goals and action); and 2) trust. As antecedents of social capital, they listed stable relationships, strong norms and specified roles. The first two antecedents are strongly related to social cohesion as
described in the section above. This indicates that cohesion can be considered one of the generators of social capital.

Social capital is valuable to an organization at the individual and organizational level. It can, for instance, facilitate an individual’s access to information and resources (Burt, 1997; Campbell, Marsden & Hurlbert, 1986; Coleman, 1990). It may also help individuals to coordinate task interdependencies and facilitate cooperation and collective action (Gargiulo, 1993; Walker, Kogut & Shan, 1997). Nahapet & Ghoshal (1998) argue that social capital can facilitate the intellectual capability of organizations. Tsai & Ghoshal (1998) found that organizational social capital positively affects product innovation. Leana & van Buren (1999) listed benefits such as commitment justification, work flexibility, collective organization and intellectual capital as outcomes of organizational social capital. On the other hand, they also acknowledge the costs that social capital inevitably entails, such as maintenance (or the relationships) costs, resistance to change and innovation, and an institutionalized power structure. In line with these costs, Gargiulo & Benassi (2000) emphasize the limited flexibility to renew the composition of a network that results from a strong cohesive relationship. In spite of the costs, social capital is considered to be a valuable asset to an organization, facilitating its smooth functioning.

The two distinguished components of social capital, associability and trust, are also separately studied social phenomena in organizations. Associability, described by Leana & Van Buren as the willingness to perform a certain behavior for the benefit of the organization, is closely related to what is referred to in the literature as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCB involves helping behaviors and gestures that benefit the organization, but that are not required in an individual’s function or role (Organ, 1988, 1990). These kinds of behaviors are not explicitly rewarded or specifically outlined in the individual’s job description (Organ, 1988). Kidwell, Mossholder & Bennet (1997) suggest that group cohesion can be seen as an important situational antecedent of OCB. Earlier research also indicated a positive correlation between cohesion and OCB (George & Bettenhausen, 1990). These findings indirectly support the idea of cohesion as an influence in the development of social capital.

The same can be said for the concept of trust. McAllister (1995) defines interpersonal trust in organizations as “… the extent to which a person is confident in, and willing to act on the basis of the words, actions, and decisions of another.” (1995: 25). Trust can be considered as the basis for interpersonal relations, cooperation and stability in social institutions (Lewicki, McAllister & Bies, 1998). In line with these assumptions, earlier research shows a positive relationship between trust and cohesion (Bernthal & Insko, 1993).

Two other social phenomena often mentioned in relation to cohesion are commitment and identification. Both concepts are mutually related. Some researchers even consider them to be interchangeable (Becker, 1992; Ellemers, Kortekaas & Ouwerkerk, 1999), although Ashforth and Meal (1989) make a clear distinction between both concepts. Social identification or “identification with a psychological group” has been described as a form of attachment based
on a process of emphasizing similarities with members of the group, a process that occurs because of a desire for belonging (i.e., Burke, 1972; Cheney, 1983). Ashforth and Meal’s (1989) approach to identification is based on the Social Identity Theory discussed earlier. They define organizational identification as “... the perceived oneness with an organization and the experience of the organization’s successes and failure’s as one’s own” (1989:103). Their approach is closely related to the approach to cohesion as a form of social attraction, which considers the development of a social identity as the basis of group phenomena, such as social cohesion. Other researchers also argue that a (positive) relationship exists between cohesion and identification (Bouas & Arrow, 1996; Riordan & Weatherly, 1999; Hogg and Terry, 2000; Turner, 1982, 1984).

Organizational commitment has been defined by Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979) as "the relative strength of an individual’s identification with, and involvement in a particular organization.” (1979:226). This form of commitment can be referred to as affective commitment (McFarlane Shore, Barksdale & Shore, 1995; Meyer & Allen, 1984), suggesting that an employee is committed to and wishes to remain with an organization because of an emotional attachment to it and identification with its goals. A close look at this approach would show fairly clear links with identification processes and social cohesion. Ellemers, Kortekaas & Ouwenerk (1999), for instance, consider affective commitment as a separate component of social identity. From this viewpoint, commitment can be considered to be related to the approach to cohesion as social attraction. Other research supports the relationship between work group cohesion and organizational (affective) commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Mullen & Coppier, 1994; Podsakoff, Mackenzie & Bommer, 1996; Wech, Mossholder, Steel & Bennet (1998). Less recently, cohesion and commitment were considered to be interchangeable. From this perspective, cohesion has been defined as the commitment of group members to the group task. (Goodman, Ravlin & Schminke, 1987; Hackman, 1976). However, this concerns task cohesion rather than social cohesion.

Considering these social phenomena and their relationships with cohesion, we could argue that the role of social cohesion as a generator of the development of social capital within an organization may be its most valuable asset. Organizational identification and commitment may be considered as antecedents of social cohesion, although there is support for the idea of a mutual relationship between cohesion and commitment. Given the theories underlying the approach to cohesion as social attraction, identification processes, such as those described by Ashforth & Meal (1989), are particularly important to the development of cohesion. In keeping with the SIT, Ashforth and Meal (1989) describe social identification as a perception of oneness with a group of persons, which stems from the categorization of individuals. As possible outcomes of this process, they list consequences, such as intragroup cohesion, cooperation, altruism and positive evaluations of the group. According to the SIT, however, identification can arise even in the absence of interpersonal cohesion, similarity or interaction: “social identity is the cognitive mechanism which makes group behavior possible” (Turner, 1982:21). We could argue, therefore, that social identification not only precedes cohesion,
but should also be considered a condition necessary to its development. This assumption also falls in line with the (above-mentioned) ideas of Ellemers, Spears & Doosje (1997), who state that self-categorization explains when and how the salience of one’s personal or social identity may guide various social perceptions or behavior, such as the choice to become cohesive towards a group.

The diagram in figure 2.2 positions cohesion in an organizational context with respect to other social phenomena. The arrows represent the relationships between the different social constructs as discussed in this section. Organizational culture, as briefly described in section 2.2, is also related and overlaps in part with these social constructs. One could consider these constructs to be a manifestation of an organization’s culture.

![Diagram of organizational constructs](image)

**Figure 2.2: Social constructs within organizations**

In summary cohesion is very valuable to organizations, especially in its role as a generator of social capital. Secondly, in discussing the related social concepts, we noted that identification is not only related to cohesion, but should be considered a condition required for its development. We should examine this concept more closely, further conceptualizing cohesion in organizations in the following chapter.
2.5 Summary

This chapter answers part of the first sub-question. Several approaches to social cohesion were discussed, as well as characteristics of the organizational context in which this social concept is studied. Most of the literature on cohesion is based on small groups. The most common definition of cohesion is "interpersonal attraction." Several reviews confirm that group cohesion is widely regarded as equivalent to interpersonal attraction. Other approaches emphasize the multidimensionality of cohesion, regarding cohesion as consisting of social cohesion and task cohesion. However, our research focuses on social cohesion only. One approach, which was very interesting for our study, describes social cohesion as a form of social attraction that results from a social process. This approach is claimed to be applicable in smaller and larger groups, as well as to incorporate the role of intergroup contexts. In fact, it appeared to be the most suitable for studying social cohesion in an organizational context. This is because of the characteristics of organizational task-related groups as described in this chapter. (These groups are formed by the formal organizational structure, and not on a voluntary basis by their members, vary in size and maintain horizontal and vertical relationships with each other). Based on this approach, cohesion in organizational task-related groups has been defined as a form of social attraction between group members resulting from a self-categorization process.

To gain more insight into the value of cohesion for organizations, cohesion was discussed in relation with other social concepts or processes that take place in an organizational context. It appears that the contribution cohesion can make towards the development of social capital, which is considered to be highly valuable to the smooth functioning of organizations, may be considered its most valuable asset to an organization. In discussing the relationships between cohesion and other social constructs, we also gained a better understanding of the concept itself. One of the most striking findings concerns the special role that identification appears to play in the development of social cohesion. It was assumed that identification should be considered a condition necessary to the existence of social attraction. A more extensive discussion of cohesion in terms of social attraction should include the role of identification.

Although researchers have studied and formed theories about cohesion for over fifty years - resulting in different approaches to it - no consensus has been reached about this social concept. Moreover, in spite of the importance of cohesion to the smooth functioning of organizations, suitable measures for organizational research and practical application appear to be lacking (Carless & De Paola, 2000). Chapter 3 presents a conceptual model of social cohesion in organizations, addressing the second part of sub-question 1. Because of the lack of a suitable measurement for cohesion in organizational groups (which is further illustrated in the following section), the conceptualizing of cohesion should also serve as a basis for operationalizing cohesion in organizational groups.
Defining and Positioning Social Cohesion in an Organizational Context