Preface and acknowledgments

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I have had longstanding interest in learning about the genesis of the ideas (that is, research questions) that scholars find themselves interested in and the fruits of their academic labors. Now as I commence the writing of this book on psychological ownership (the possessive sense that something is *mine* or *ours*), I find myself reflecting on the origins of this work, the confluence of events that pushed my thinking and inquiry in one direction as opposed to another, and the people who played a significant role in this process. It is this story and those individuals who played an instrumental role in my journey that will be acknowledged in this preface. If it were not for their influence and contributions this treatise on psychological ownership would have never been written.

Portions of our thinking as expressed here have been published piecemeal and elsewhere, often appearing in this text without self-quotation, yet not without citation and referencing when deemed important to do so. The intent behind this book is to bring the psychological ownership literature (theory and research evidence) together in a single place for those students, academics, and practitioners who find themselves interested in the topic. In addition and to the extent possible, in the closing chapter we offer those managerial implications that we believe can be drawn at this point in time. We also intend to use this platform to make suggestions as to directions for future research with the hope that such direction will contribute to moving this body of knowledge forward.

My journey into psychological ownership began in the mid-1980s, a time during which there was a surge of interest (both in practice and the academy) in employee ownership as an organizational arrangement. An entrepreneurial friend, Scott Harrison and a small group of investors decided to re-open a recently closed meat processing plant, and to operate the organization under an employee-ownership arrangement known as an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). Harrison, a venture capitalist and trained in finance, inquired as to my willingness to monitor the ‘psychological climate’ of the organization during its first few years of operation, as he wanted to make sure that the employee-ownership scheme

that they were putting into place was having, what he intuitively believed would be, positive attitudinal, motivational, and behavioral (performance) effects amongst those who were, from day-one, to be the employee owners. It was Harrison's intention to create an ownership trust fund for the employees of Elliott Meat Packing. Joining me in this effort was my colleague Professor Steve Rubinfeld and Susan Morgan (an undergraduate student who was studying here at the University of Minnesota Duluth).

At the start of this journey, ownership was not a construct that I understood outside of the fact that I knew that I owned land, a home, and a variety of other physical objects. While employee ownership as an organizational arrangement was foreign to us, we were quick to discover the existence of a scholarly literature that we needed to familiarize ourselves with if we were going to be of any real assistance to Harrison, his co-investors, and the employees of Elliott Meat Packing.

Our review of the employee-ownership literature resulted in a paper that was published in the *Academy of Management Review* (Pierce, Rubinfeld, and Morgan, 1991). This literature review revealed that unlike conventional wisdom as espoused by advocates, practitioners, and a few scholars, there was no simple and direct ownership effect.¹ Employee owners were not necessarily more motivated, satisfied, and productive than their counterparts in conventionally owned organizations. In that paper we suggested that unless employees *feel* as though they are owners the full and positive intended effects (that is, increased job satisfaction, work motivation, performance) are unlikely to be realized. We went on to note that the *feeling of ownership* was unlikely to take root unless the design of the employee-ownership scheme more-or-less paralleled the rights traditionally associated with ownership as experienced outside of the employment context. Ownership of one's home, for example, meant and involved more than a financial stake, the central feature of most employee-ownership arrangements (that is, ESOPs) that were operating at the time. Explicitly we stated that ownership is 'multidimensional in nature, existing as both a formal (objective) and as a psychologically experienced phenomenon' (Pierce et al., 1991, p. 124). We offered, without elaboration, the notion that *psychological ownership* is an important mediating condition linking the formal employee-ownership arrangement with its individual-level effects. In addition, we speculated on some of the design features of an employee-ownership arrangement that should influence the sense of ownership and related effects.

While Scott Harrison's venture into employee ownership launched my inquiry into the ownership construct, it was a single comment by an anonymous reviewer of our *Academy of Management Review* paper (Pierce

et al., 1991) that served as the catalyst to my exploration of the psychology of mine, possession, and property literature. Quite simply, this reviewer indicated that one of the most intriguing parts of our paper that should eventually be developed is the notion of ownership as a psychological phenomenon (that is, the construct psychological ownership). This reviewer's comment was powerful, as it launched a stream of questions and an inquiry into the psychology of my, mine, property and ownership that is about to enter its second decade. In addition and importantly, it contributed to the birth of several collegial relationships that would have unlikely developed if it were not for this encouragement.

In the fall of 1995 I took a leave of absence from Minnesota and accepted a visiting scholar appointment in the Department of Psychology at The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. I had discovered that there were a number of scholars, working in disciplines outside of the organizational sciences, who had focused their attention on the psychology of possessions, property, and mine, and its central role as a part of the human condition. It was my intention to devote my leave to giving meaning to the construct psychological ownership, and to this end I buried myself in the child development, animal territoriality, anthropology, geography, philosophy, sociology, social and environmental psychology literatures in an attempt to come to understand this psychology, and the role that possessions play in human development and function.

For the second time in my love affair with the construct psychological ownership, it was once again a serendipitous comment offered by an anonymous reviewer that served to push and expand my thinking about the psychology of ownership. As a result of my teaching a section on job design, in an introductory Organizational Behavior course, I found myself thinking about the role played by job design in the formation of ownership feelings of one's job and the work that an individual does. Accompanying my discussion of Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (1975), I came to believe that psychological ownership may be a more robust and parsimonious mediating condition than the critical psychological states (for example, experienced meaningfulness of work, experienced responsibility for work outcomes) in their theory.

Joining me in the conceptual examination of the relationship between job design and psychological ownership were Drs Iiro Jussila and Anne Cummings, and together we authored a paper entitled 'Psychological ownership within the job design context: revision of the Job Characteristics Model.' It was as a part of the review process for that paper, that yet another anonymous reviewer made a significant contribution to our thinking about psychological ownership. While that paper was ultimately published with a focus at the individual-level, the reviewer indicated that with

the rapid growth of teamwork, he/she felt that we failed to address the role of psychological ownership at the group-level, and encouraged our doing so in a different paper. Subsequent to the publication of the Pierce, Jussila and Cummings paper on job design and psychological ownership in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (Pierce, Jussila, and Cummings, 2009) Jussila and I commenced work on a construct that we call ‘collective psychological ownership.’ The fruits of this labor appeared in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (Pierce and Jussila, 2010).

For me, my time spent with the construct has been a rich one. This is in large part a function of my good fortune to have discovered and benefitted from the scholarly work of Helga Dittmar, Lita Furby, and Floyd Rudmin – for their thinking about the psychology of mine and possessions I say thank you. In addition, I have been extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to share my thoughts about psychological ownership and to be the recipient of the reflections of many colleagues. Among those who have played a significant role in shaping my thinking about and work with psychological ownership are: Larry L. Cummings (The Institute and the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis), Tatiana Kostova (University of South Carolina), Kurt T. Dirks (Washington University-St Louis), Lynn Van Dyne (Michigan State University), Michael P. O’Driscoll (The University of Waikato), Loren Rodgers (National Center for Employee Ownership), Anne Cummings (University of Minnesota Duluth), Graham Brown (University of British Columbia-Kelowna), Craig Crossley (University of Nebraska), and my co-author Iiro Jussila (Lappeenranta University of Technology). I have benefitted greatly from my collaboration with each of you, and for this I am truly grateful for all of your contributions to my journey. A special thank you goes to you Iiro, for your partnership in the writing of this book.

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NOTES

1. Catherine Webb (1912, p. 138) speculated that ‘by making [an employee] a shareholder in the business employing him . . . it stimulates his zeal and careful working.’ A similar observation was made in a *US News and World Report* (1976, p. 68) article stating that ‘when a worker is given a piece of the action, he will be motivated to work harder, grip less. Turnover, absenteeism, and grievances all might diminish.’ It had also been claimed that worker alienation and organizational effectiveness problems could be ameliorated by the implementation of an employee-ownership arrangement (Derrick and Phipps, 1969; Vanek, 1975).