1. Life’s ownership experiences: an introduction to psychological ownership

Think of the word ownership. What does it mean? For most people that we encounter our students in particular, initial thoughts focus on ownership in terms of having, holding, and belonging to oneself. Ownership is a legal right of possession. This emphasis upon the word ‘right’ expands, such that ownership can be seen as entailing a ‘bundle of rights’ relating to control over, information pertaining to, and a financial stake in the target of ownership (that is, rights to a ‘piece of the rock’). These three rights are commonly associated with and are the most often recognized in modern societies as to the meaning of ownership.

Upon reflection, it is common for us to express our relationship with objects by employing the personal and possessive pronouns, such as – mine, my, ours, and theirs. In recognition of this mindset, Heider (1958) wrote that ‘attitudes of ownership’ are common among people. Similarly, it was Etzioni (1991, p. 466) who commented that ownership is a ‘dual creation, part attitude, part object, part in the mind, part “real”.’ These views are consistent with the thesis, offered by economic psychologist Leon Litwinski (1942) and social psychologist Lita Furby (1991), that a ‘psychology of mine and property attaches itself to objects.’ As a psychological state, the existence of ownership is present within the individual, it attaches to objects that may or may not be owned legally, and its accompanying rights and responsibilities are defined by the individual and not the legal system.

Taking a ride ‘back in time’ reveals that the meaning of ownership varied dramatically dependent on time and place. The works of Rudmin (1999) and Dittmar (1992), among others, point out that there has been little consensus on the ‘true basis of ownership.’ Classical philosophers, drawing arguments from both religion and politics, debated whether ownership should be conceptualized as private or common, and whether it should be treated as primarily objective or subjective phenomenon (cf. Rudmin, 1999). While taking a neutral stance to these debates, we note that there appears to be widespread agreement that it is common
for people, especially for those under the influence of Western cultures (that is, those with historically and geographically defined value and belief systems that highlight (personal) ownership as a central element of social organization), to develop feelings of ownership for objects that are material (for example, homes, automobiles) and immaterial (for example, ideas, relationships) in nature.

In the Western context, possession, locked-up in a box labeled ‘mine,’ emerges in children at a very young age (Isaacs, 1933; Kline and France, 1899), and when anchored psychologically the concept ‘mine’ comes to play a major role in the self-identity (‘Who am I?’), which also reflects on relationships among people. Expressing a ‘classical’ perspective, Rousseau (1762/1950) even suggested that ‘civil society’ most likely began when a person fenced off a plot of ground and took it into his/her head to claim ‘this is mine,’ and others accepted this assertion.

For more than a century, academics representing various disciplines have studied the role played by possessions and ‘feelings’ associated with ownership. There are those scholars who have been interested in the genesis of possessive tendencies, some claiming support for its genetic anchoring, while others have argued that it is the product of the socialization practices carried out in different societies. There have been those who are interested in the psychology of ownership and its role in child development (for example, Isaacs, 1933; Kline and France, 1899); in consumer behavior (for example, Belk, 1988); among the elderly (Cram and Paton, 1993; Kampner, 1989); within the customs and practices of different societies (Kline and France, 1899); in the holding of land and the having of a house with its four walls (for example, Duncan, 1981; Porteous, 1976); across different socioeconomic strata of society (for example, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981); and within the philosophical discussions of ‘being’ (Heidegger, 1927/1967; Sartre, 1943/1969).

Despite the long interest in other disciplines, scholars working in the organizational sciences focused mainly on the objective functions of property until Pierce, Rubenfeld, and Morgan (1991) suggested that the construct ‘ownership’ should in fact be treated as multidimensional in nature. Recognizing the psychology of possession and property they went on to note that ownership also exists as a psychologically experienced phenomenon. Later, building on the above perspectives, Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks (2001, 2003) provided organization scholars with a new lens with which to view possessions, property, and ownership. They introduced the construct *psychological ownership*, defining it in terms of the possessive feelings that attach the individual to objects (material or immaterial in nature), manifesting itself in such expressions as ‘my’ and ‘mine.’ When the state of psychological ownership exists, the individual feels psychologically tied to
an object. While that object lies outside of the individual’s physical self, it has come to be experienced as a part of the extended self (cf. Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992). Within the work and organizational context the potential targets of ownership are many and varied, encompassing such objects as the organization, the work that one does, the product of that time and effort, tools, workspace, and one’s co-workers.

At this stage you may have come to wonder – How about collective ownership? You have most likely observed that in many situations people develop collective feelings of ownership towards a variety of objects, such as their home. Clinical evidence suggests the existence of ownership as a collective reality. For example, fans of Formula-1 racing often hear their champions sentimentally proclaiming their victories as ‘ours,’ and basing their judgment and feelings on the fact that each member of the team played a crucial role in achieving the title to which there exists a collective feeling of possession among team members. A similar sentiment was expressed by Taliban spokesman Azam Tariq when he told The Associated Press (2009, emphasis added) ‘This is a war imposed on us and we will defend our land till our last man and our last drop of blood. This is a war bound to end in the defeat of the Pakistan army.’ Building on similar observations, the French political philosopher Simone Weil (1952, p. 34), for one, notes that ‘participation in collective possessions – a participation consisting . . . of a feeling of ownership – is no less important a need’ than the need for personal belongings.

The psychology of collective property has also been introduced to organizational sciences, but only recently. We (see Pierce and Jussila, 2010) recognized that prior scholarship (for example, Dittmar, 1992; Etzioni, 1991; Furby, 1978a, 1980; James, 1890; Litwinski, 1947; Pierce et al., 1991, 2003; Rochberg-Halton, 1980, 1984) treated the psychology of possession at the individual-level, both in terms of the individual feeling a sense of exclusive ownership (for example, this fly rod is ‘mine’) and the individual experiencing a sense of shared ownership (for example, ‘our’ university library). We refer to this lens as individual psychological ownership – the human condition best recognized by that expressed possessive state – that is mine! Paralleling and building upon this earlier work we suggested that among group members, collective psychological ownership is the collectively held sense (feeling) that this target of ownership (or a piece of that target) is collectively ours. This collective cognitive/affective state is an emergent group-level phenomenon. It is a socially constructed state (for example, Gibson, 2001; Gibson and Earley, 2007; Hinsz, Tindale, and Volrath, 1997; Sandelands and Stablein, 1987) that transcends the limits of individual cognition/affect through ‘group processes involving the acquisition, storage, transmission, manipulation, and use of information’
(Gibson, 2001, p. 122) resulting in shared (that is, common) feelings, knowledge and beliefs about the target of ownership, and their individual and collective rights (for example, use control) and responsibilities (for example, protection of) in relation to that target.

Both individual and collective feelings of ownership manifest themselves in all settings – work and non-work. As individuals enter organizations they bring with them the same human conditions that characterize their lives outside of the work environment, and thus under certain conditions, they come to individual and/or collective feelings of ownership for different elements of the organization (for example, tools, workspace, work teams). It is this psychology of possession in the lives of people, especially people at work, which is the focus of this book. Before commencing the scientific side of this journey, we turn our attention to its anecdotal side as we address both the importance of psychological ownership in our non-work and work lives.

WHY IS PSYCHOLOGICAL OWNERSHIP IMPORTANT?

Heider (1958) among others have noted that it is common for people to have attitudes of ownership. At the same time it appears natural and/or logical to ask – So what? Why should I, as a member of a society, a manager, an employee, or a firm owner pay particular attention to an individual and/or a group of people coming to feel a sense of ownership?

In the first instance, we simply assert that it, at least in Western societies, is a general part of the human condition. We will argue later that it plays a role in helping us define who we are and a role in our expression of that identity to others. We will argue that during the ‘fall and winter stages of life’ objects to which our sense of possession have become attached increasingly become important repositories of one’s life experiences providing comfort and joy as they occupy space in the rooms in which we dwell. We also will argue that feelings of ownership are important because they play a powerful role in shaping our emotions and subsequently many of our behaviors, some constructive and some destructive in nature. Possibly not limited to the West, we may be witnessing a part of this in the form of Jihad, and the efforts to remove Westerners and their influence from many parts of the ‘Muslim world.’

In most societies that have been touched by Western values and beliefs, feelings and expressions of ownership are everywhere. Take a drive through your neighborhood and surrounding countryside and signs of possession are everywhere – ‘Welcome to Our Cabin,’ ‘The Hansen
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Residence,’ ‘Private Property – Keep Out!’ Listen in on almost any conversation, our own included, and expressions of a sense of ownership (for example, my daughter, our apartment, that parking space is mine, that was my idea) are commonplace.

If you are a manager, you probably find it your concern to promote employee performance and negotiate organizational conflicts. As an employee you are likely to be puzzled with the origins of your own attitudes and behaviors, as well as those of others in the workplace. Which one of us has not observed that co-worker who hoards information, the co-worker who will not share his/her tools, and/or the one who takes full credit for work accomplishments in which you (or others) were involved. As a firm owner you may wonder why is it that the sophisticated mechanisms designed to control managers seem inefficient in some cases and unnecessary in others. What makes psychological ownership important is that it helps you unravel many of the mysteries of organizational life.

Feelings of ownership for the same target can and often do conflict impacting interpersonal relations. Will Steger, Artic and Antarctica explorer, in his book *North to the Pole* (Steger with Schurke, 1987), comments on the sense of ownership amongst his comrades on the final days of their trip to the North Pole in 1986. After 42 grueling days on the ice pack between the north end of Canada’s Ellesmer Island and the North Pole, experiencing temperature ranging between $-14$ to $-70^\circ F$, wind chills to a low of $-140^\circ F$, living on a diet of rolled oats, butter, pemmican (finely ground dried beef and lard), tea, and cheese, suffering from numerous setbacks due to ice ridges and shifting sea ice, the tempers among the remaining six members of the expedition were raw. Several days earlier a tentative decision had been made, by the expedition leaders Steger and Paul Schurke, that only two (possibly three) members of the expedition team would make the final dash to the pole, because the remaining supplies upon which they and their dogs were dependent were running low; going forward with the entire team could result in their inability to complete the expedition’s goal of reaching the pole unassisted by the outside world. After nearly a year filled with planning, training, and anticipation of going to the pole, every member of the team was psychologically tied to the expedition. It had consumed their very existence, and now the prospect of having to stop short of the final goal was personally painful and that pain and anger spilled over, straining relationships amongst the members of the expedition, with the majority of that anger aimed towards Steger and Schurke. The team and their survival (that is, their dependence upon one another) came close to unraveling. It was on day 42 of their 55 days on the ice, after numerous personal sacrifices, the jettisoning of hundreds of pounds of precious gear, Steger writes in his journal just prior to their
final dash, there is this ‘burning desire in each of the other members to be among those who would reach the Pole. They now had a sense of ownership in the expedition’ (Steger with Schurke, 1987, p. 265). They were all going to be a part of the final dash to the pole and it was evident to Steger that this expedition was as much ‘theirs’ as it was his – even if he was the one who had conceived and put together the entire project. In sum, psychological ownership appears to be everywhere, filling the lives and dreams for many of us.

As a reasonable reader, you probably impugn anything that is presented as a ‘cure all.’ We can assure you that we are not suggesting psychological ownership is one. We simply acknowledge the fact that psychological ownership does have considerable power in explaining a rich number of phenomena both inside and outside work organizations. This power rests in that psychological ownership is in the core of human beings’ individual and organizational existence. In other words, as a normal expression of the relationship that we all form with certain objects, psychological ownership is a critical element of me and us in and around organizations. We now turn our attention to expressions of psychological ownership within our non-work and work lives.

FEELINGS OF OWNERSHIP WITHIN OUR NON-WORK LIVES

I fish the Campbell with a sense of ownership fully as strong as that of any legitimate owner of fishing rights in the world . . . this sense of ownership grows simply from knowing the river. (Haig-Brown, 1991, p. 350, emphasis added).

Feelings of personal and collective ownership are widespread. Similarly, expressions of and acts predicated upon these feelings towards a variety of targets are commonplace throughout the lives of many of us. Noteworthy here is the widespread agreement that the emotion associated with feelings of ownership can at times be extremely powerful (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Furby, 1991; Rudmin, 1994). The effects stemming from this state may be both positive, as revealed by acts of stewardship. They may also be negative (that is, destructive) in nature, as they are associated with insecurity, jealousy, squabbles among young children, and lawsuits among learned people over patent rights, as well as territorial conflicts among societies. Causal observations are suggestive of the powerful role that feelings of ownership (that is, possessive feelings for a particular target) can have. A common observation is that young children at play feel strong emotional attachments to objects such as teddy bears,
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blankies, and a variety of toys. When any of them are claimed by another, squabbles are commonplace as we hear expressions of ‘me, my blankie.’ This reveals the extremely powerful role possessions play in the human psyche. Commenting on this phenomenon, Rudmin (1994, p. 55) writes:

‘Mine’ is a small word . . . It is deceptive in its power and importance . . . It controls our behavior, but we rarely notice, as we move about the world restricting ourselves to narrow walkways and to those places for which we have the keys.

It is not only children that Rudmin (1994) refers to. His comment serves as a convenient bridge to the sense of ownership that many people across generations often develop towards a particular territory – a sense referred to, for example, in tales of proprietary attachment to land:

As I look back to earlier days, there were so few travelers in the Sierra that I began to feel a certain sense of ‘ownership’ they were my mountains and streams, and intruders were suspect. (Ansell Adams, in Stillman, 1994, Print #54, emphasis added)

While we do not know for sure, the sentiment expressed by Ansell Adams, the famous American photographer, and the sensitivity that is so often expressed in his art work, leads us to believe that upon leaving the wilderness he most likely ‘wiped away his footprint,’ manifesting a positive behavioral effect (stewardship) of psychological ownership.

Sometimes geography plays a different role in the sense and expression of ownership. For example, the citizens of Green Bay, Wisconsin seem to have a very unique ‘love affair’ with ‘their’ Green Bay Packers. This relationship is often expressed by fans in Curley’s Bar and on Lombardi Street in downtown Green Bay. A few years back, Sean Jones a former right defensive end took an $800 000 cut in pay in order to play in Green Bay. Commenting on why, Jones said, ‘It’s unique because there’s an affinity for their football here, but beyond that, there is an ownership’ (Jones, in Stapleton, 1977, p. 6c). Not only from a stockholder perspective (the Green Bay Packers are a community-owned team – 1915 people anted $25.00 a share nearly a half century ago – these shares have virtually no financial value as they are not traded on the stock exchange, yet they are coveted and lovingly transferred from one generation to the next), but in their emotional orientation with a team. In Green Bay residents have a ‘certain psychological ownership’ for the team that has survived for 77 years in a city of only 97 000. Jones’ description of football in Green Bay is that ‘the whole thing is “we, we, we” and “ours” ’ (Jones, in Stapleton, 1977, p. 6c, emphasis added). Jones goes on to note, that it is commonplace for a Packer fan to inquire as to ‘our’ game play this weekend against
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the Cowboys. Conversations with fans about football, training camp, games played or games yet to be played are dotted with expressions of my (my team), we, us, and ours! In this case, it seems such expressions (the presence of true ‘community ownership’ for the team) made a difference in a key player’s choice of team and his demand for financial pay.

The difference psychological ownership makes has also been realized by business leaders. More precisely, the feelings of ownership that customers may develop towards a particular store or place of business have been seen as an important source of competitive advantage (Jussila, 2007). Thus, S Group (a Finnish group of co-operative retailers), the market leader in daily goods and groceries in Finland has made the promotion of psychological ownership among its customers (members) a center piece of their competitive strategy. As Kari Neilimo, the former CEO of SOK (the central organization of S Group), explained it (Neilimo, 2005):

We have a vision entitled ‘Your Own Store.’ Psychological ownership, the term you have been using, is central to the vision. The goal is that when a customer enters any of our stores, she really feels as though she is entering her own store.

The sense of ownership has been called for in the school context, where it has been seen as an important factor for a viable governance system. In the United States, local control of neighborhood schools (primary and secondary) has been a long tradition. There are many School Boards and Administrators who have essentially offered arguments similar to that expressed by Richard Pearson, former Superintendent of Duluth Schools when he said, ‘we must continue to build ownership and accountability through decision making that meaningfully involves parents, teachers, principals, and others closely connected to the teaching-learning process.’ (Pearson, 1994). Concerns about the abandonment of parental control over the selection of the superintendent for ‘their’ schools results in the rejection of Wisconsin’s Governor Dole’s attempt to have control of the Milwaukee Schools via appointment of the superintendent turned over to the mayor of Milwaukee.

While the above discussion concentrates on the positive side of psychological ownership, the importance of psychological ownership lies also in its potential to explain some of the ‘dark side’ of human behavior, that is, the negative effects of psychological ownership. As a rather heavy example, there seem to be individuals who believe (in contradiction to the verdict in a court of law) that O.J. Simpson did in fact kill Nicole, quite simply because she was ‘his’ and if he could not have her neither would anyone else. On a larger scale, perhaps the most devastating examples of the ‘dark side’ of human behavior are armed conflicts that revolve around feelings of ownership of a territory. Many observers of the late 1990s/early
2000 war in the Balkans and the sixty-year struggle between Israel and the Palestinians, for example, believe that both of these conflicts revolved, in large part, around feelings that a particular territory is ‘ours’ – feelings of two competing collectives, whose distinct collective sense of being and home are reliant on the same piece of land.

Let us illustrate with expressions that surround the Israel-Palestine conflict. In 1988 in a speech to the Palestine National Council, the parliament in exile of the Palestinian movement, Mr Arafat declared (Ibrahim, 1988, p. 1, emphasis added), ‘The Palestine National Council announces in the name of God, in the name of the people of the Arab Palestinian people, the establishment of the state of Palestine in our Palestinian nation, with holy Jerusalem as its capital.’ A similar expression of ownership was expressed by the President of Israel, Chaim Weizmann (1948, p. 2):

We cannot forget Jerusalem. And if that was true then, it is all the more true today, for in this last year we have sealed afresh our covenant with our ancient other-city with the blood of our sons and daughters. In addition to our historical unbroken chain of Jewish settlement in this city, the fact of our numerical preponderance among its inhabitants, a new link has been forged – your heroic defense of Jerusalem in this past year. It gives us the right to claim that Jerusalem is and should remain ours.

From the defenders perspective, of course, a strong sense of collective ownership can be seen as useful and a source of heroic action. For example, the so-called ‘prevention victories’ of the Finnish troops over the overwhelming Soviet Red Army during World War II can be seen as fueled by the Finns’ sense of ownership for the ‘land of their fathers.’ The usual rhetoric amongst the Finnish officers at the time was that ‘One may make claims over that which is ours, but from us it is difficult to take.’ Such rhetoric might not be restricted to the context of war. In fact, one may hear such expressions anywhere.

As already noted, feelings of ownership are not restricted to our lives away from work. Psychological ownership and its positive and negative effects manifest themselves within the work and organizational context as well. It is the sense of ownership experienced and expressed at work that we will concentrate on in the next section.

THE SENSE OF OWNERSHIP WITHIN OUR WORK LIVES

We start with a comment expressed by Kurt Strand. Upon his promotion to Director of Marketing for a major textbook publishing house
he commented that ‘Without ownership, you can’t have any passion. Nobody can give me a product and say, “Here, be a product champion.” I have to be invested in it from the start’ (Irwin Author Reflections, 1995, p. 7). In other words, the sense of ownership is seen as necessary for good work performance.

Mergers often give rise to expressions of possessive feelings as employees’ territories are renegotiated. For example, the following was written by a former student of Professor Pierce’s, Heather Wiest, who wrote the following in her Organization Behavior Journal, that she kept as a part of the Organizational Behavior course that she was taking at the University of Minnesota Duluth.

Two summers ago I had employment at an organization working in the purchasing department. During my last few weeks there, before returning to school, the company gave news that they would be merging with another organization. Although not directly involved, it provided me with the opportunity to view the effects of ‘downsizing’ and ‘merging.’ Although it meant little risk for me, it was clear the other employees held a completely different viewpoint.

Previous to the news of the merger, the company had a very fun atmosphere. The employees trusted one another, joked with one another, had pot lucks, basically it was a really fun place to work. It was amazing to me how quickly that all disappeared when thoughts of merging and possible job loss began lingering in employees’ minds. The atmosphere quickly went from one of oneness and trust, to one of secrets and individualism.

The employees expressed psychological ownership over their jobs saying things like, ‘What is going to happen to my job?’ The place where they felt comfortable was being disrupted; they felt betrayed by the organization. They suddenly felt inequity. Again comments arose such as, ‘After all the years I’ve put into this organization and they sell out, leaving me without a job.’ They also expressed ownership for the organization, it was their company and now it was being invaded by people who didn’t know how they ran things, people unfamiliar with their jobs and related processes . . . I noticed that some people . . . simply walked out, not able to handle seeing the ‘old’ changed, preferring to start new somewhere else.

Another merger-related example, touching both work and non-work lives, is found in the work of Jussila, Saksa, and Tienari (2007), who conducted a study on the dynamics and tensions of governance in the context of Finnish customer-owned co-operatives. Qualitative data from 2005 indicates that a sense of shared ownership (that is, collective psychological ownership, à la Pierce and Jussila, 2010), has been an obstacle for mergers between Finnish co-operatives in both S Group and OP Bank Group – mergers that were seen as crucial for the survival of several independent co-operatives. Interviewees noted that (Jussila et al., 2007, p. 36):
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We did not begin to merge the [S Group] co-operatives early enough, what happened was that members, the owners of the co-operative, began to defend their own, the co-operative, vigorously and to say that they’ll manage. They fought for their little co-operative until all the money was gone and a merger was the only option.

In many locations, the societal change has led to a situation where the local co-operative bank is for the local citizens the only thing that is truly theirs. When the [OP Bank] group tries to negotiate mergers, the owners’ representatives in the governing body make their ownership explicit by saying: ‘This is our co-operative, we make our own decisions and nobody will tell us how to run this bank.’

We close with a conversation to which we were party, while attending the 2009 annual conference of the Academy of Management. A colleague (let us refer to her as Diana) mentioned that her university recently asked for faculty volunteers to put one or more of their courses on-line, for a ‘one-time’ flat fee. Accompanying that request, the university indicated that if they were to do so, property rights for the on-line course would belong to the university. Her reaction was strong, swift and filled with emotion. ‘“No way in hell” will I invest “my” time, energy, and understanding of the organizational behavior literature into the development of a course for which the university has ownership rights and the freedom to use and re-use those course materials without my approval.’ What appeared to be at work here was an extremely strong sense of ownership – ownership over her education and the knowledge she possesses of the organizational behavior literature, ownership of her persona, ownership of her learned interpretation of that literature, and ownership of her delivery skills in the presentation of the course content. Not only was there a frequent expression of ‘my’ and ‘mine,’ there was an extremely strong expression of emotion that filled her verbal and body language. Diana was not the first to comment on the conflicts that have existed among scientists as to the parentage of ideas or inventions (cf. Heider, 1958; Isaacs, 1933). Many of us whom have had our work plagiarized by others feel invaded!

SUMMARY

Feelings of ownership toward various objects are both real and have important and potentially strong psychological and behavioral effects. For example, the sense of ownership that people develop toward their homes typically results in preoccupation with decoration, and signs of possession dot the landscape (fences, keep out and private property signs, and the name of the resident at the drive-way entrance). In a similar vein, the
sense of ownership that people develop within the context of their work is equally strong. This is evident in recent cases involving plagiarism (cf. read the plagiarism story of the *New York Times*, May 11, Barry, Glater, Liptak, and Steinberg, 2003), as well as the numerous lawsuits involving patents and patent rights (see Microsoft’s suit over patent violations involving Linux Kernel) violations.

Causal observations not only reveal the widespread presence of feelings of ownership, these feelings are directed to a variety of objects some of which are material in nature (for example, our homes and wedding rings) while others are more abstract (for example, ideas and written stories). It is also relatively easy to envision how our possessions occupy our time and energy, and the comfort and joy that they bring to the lives of people – young and old.

As we embark on a review and detailed examination of our current understanding of the construct psychological ownership and its manifestation in the work and organizational context, we have attempted to use this introductory chapter to accomplish several objectives. We suggested that ownership is a multidimensional phenomenon. While we traditionally think of ownership in terms of a ‘bundle of rights’ (for example, the right to exercise control over the target of ownership), granted and protected by the legal system, accompanied by a set of rights and responsibilities that are also defined by that legal system, ownership is something more. In addition to it being ‘real,’ it is also a state of the ‘mind.’ It is clearly evident to most of us that people can come to feel as though something is theirs (exclusively and/or shared) even though there is no legal connection with the object. Both Jussila and I are writing this book from ‘our’ offices at ‘our’ respective universities. In addition, as I write these words, I am sitting in ‘my’ chair, at ‘my’ desk, using ‘my’ computer. Wait a minute – reality is that the university and the office, the desk, chair and computer that I use daily are the property of the University of Minnesota. I can also assure you that I would feel as though ‘my’ space is being invaded if I were to come to campus tomorrow and find someone else in my office, sitting at my desk in my chair, using my computer!

We have also suggested that feelings of ownership are both important and powerful. We can see its power and importance as a natural part of the human condition. It expresses itself both within our personal, as well as our work lives. It expresses itself both positively and negatively. We have all seen the child who will not share his/her toys and the destructiveness that has so often accompanied the jealous lover. By the same token, all of us have witnessed the sacrifices that people are willing to make in the fight for freedom (independence) and for one’s own children.

In the chapters to follow, our focus is twofold. We will spend time
laying out the psychological ownership construct, and we will anchor it within the work and organizational context. Our work draws upon the extant psychological ownership literature, with a major draw from the work that applies to the organizational sciences. Chapter Two focuses on the meaning of the construct psychological ownership. We present both its conceptual definition as well as a detailed elaboration of the construct. In Chapter Three we turn our attention to its genesis. Here we explore the ‘roots’ of this psychological state as we address the underlying motives that serve as the reason for its existence. Chapter Four addresses the questions – Who is the owner? and What are the targets to which these feelings of ownership attach? Chapter Five explores the paths down which people travel that give rise to psychological ownership. Chapter Six addresses the question – Psychological ownership, so what? More specifically in this chapter we focus on the hypothesized consequences of ownership feelings. In Chapters Seven and Eight we address the hypothesized antecedents (that is, the causal forces) that give rise to feelings of ownership. While Chapter Seven discusses several antecedent conditions, its primary emphasis is on the role played by job (work) design. In Chapter Eight the exclusive focus is on the role played by an employee-ownership organizational arrangement. It is within this context that our journey into psychological ownership began. Chapter Nine presents a review of the research evidence. There have been studies that provide some insight into both the antecedent and consequent conditions of psychological ownership. In Chapter Ten we discuss the measurement of psychological ownership, present an instrument for its measurement and discuss the evidence in support of its construct validity. In this chapter we also comment on other measurement approaches that have appeared in the literature. Chapter Eleven addresses the recent elevation of the psychological ownership construct from the individual- to the group-level. In Chapter Twelve, our closing chapter, we lay out our views on research needs (that is, areas where we believe there is a need for further theoretical work, as well as, research questions that are awaiting research attention). We also use this chapter to address what we see as the managerial implications associated with our current understanding of psychological ownership within the work and organizational context.

NOTES

1. The use of ‘cf.’ is also being employed throughout this chapter as ‘see also’ and thereby calling the reader’s attention to other works of interest.
2. Former British Columbia, Canada Provincial Court Judge and Chancellor of the
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University of Victoria, Roderick L. Haig-Brown in *The River Never Sleeps* acknowledges the existence of his feelings of ownership and he provides us with insight into one of the paths down which people travel in coming to this psychological state.

3. Quotation (emphasis added) taken from the film *The Winter War*, directed by Pekka Parikka, based on novel by Antti Tuuri, National Filmi Oy Production.

4. Quotation (emphasis added) reproduced with permission.