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IDENTITIES IN ORGANIZATIONS: THE IMPACT OF IDENTITY
WORK ON JOB PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of identity work on job performance in Melaka (Malaysia). Identity work refers to how individuals act or behave on the ground of work based self-concept when carrying out their work. A sample size of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents from different industries was selected to participate in this study that adopted five essential notions of the contemporary identities research that cover choice, stability, positivity, coherence and authenticity of Brown (2015) in examining their influence on job performance. The result showed positive significant relationship between identity works and job performance which positivity scored for the highest contribution as compared to other determinants. This study also enlightens the notion of a harmonised identity may lead to a strong identity work development. It is believed that consistency in roles and manners may create positive atmosphere in the organisation and boost the job performance and job engagement. Understanding of the human capital well-being will bring success to the organisation in terms of sustainability and profitability, at the same time the satisfaction of the employees will be taken care of tool.

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1. Introduction

Organisational identity becomes one of the key determinants in examining job performance because understanding the behaviour of the human resource and their attitude is important in the organisation. Nowadays, to optimise the performance of an organisation in a highly competitive world, the organisation should be aware that the main factor is the well-being of the human resource.

According to Karanika-Murray et al. (2015), a strong connection between the employees and their organisation is an important prerequisite for their attachment with their work, and one that is strongly related to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. This study also found that the work engagement is able to mediate the relationship between organisational identity and organisational action.

Individual identity work means work based self-perspectives which incorporates organisational, occupational, and other identities, that influence the role and behaviour of the employees and how they perform their work in the workplace (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). In a simpler definition, identity work means how a person characterise themselves at work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). According to Van Knippenberg (2000), identification make the concept of individual and group become less visible, and fit the group into the part of the self psychologically in the organisation.

There are three elements in understanding the development of identity in an organisation, which include self-identity, identity work and identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). In an organisation, the development of employees' identities is referring to a concept called identity work. This concept requires continuous cognitive activity that ensures an individual understanding of who they are through self-coherent, definite and positively valued (Alvesson et al., 2008). Moreover, Snow and Anderson (1987) defined identity work as series of activity that construct and maintain a consistency between individual identity and self-concept. Identity work is a significant notion to determine the most influential factors of identity construction (Walseth, 2006). Identity work is one of the areas that being focus among researchers in identity construction, identity management, identity achievement, identity manufacture, identity project and identity shaping studies (Watson, 2008). However, it is worth to note that identity work is difficult to be determined as it involves an individual and others' interpretation on what we should be doing and who we are (Warhurst, 2011).

Through daily life routine, people actively engage in identity alteration (Kreiner et al., 2006) that indicates the individual's conception of who and what they are (Watson, 2008). Individuals will tend to retain and express their identity work (Elsbach, 2003). Identity work is powerful for every individual as it influences individual's commitment in designing, adjusting, strengthening and modifying their identities (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). From the social context, identity work nails down the members of organisation's negotiation that minimise the personal and social identity barriers (Kreiner et al., 2006). In order to avoid any type of manipulation across the organisation, identity work may particularly benefits in dealing with individual that 'actively manoeuvre' (Sturdy et al., 2006).

The objective of this paper is to examine the impact of identity work on job performance. Numerous studies were conducted to investigate identity work and job performance in organisational behaviour research. In addition, the study of work engagement and job performance has been one of the key issues studied in organisational behaviour research (Van Knippenberg, 2000). Job performance undeniably depends on the attitude of the worker and the attitude of the human resource depends on their

identity work. Although, there are extensive number of research have studied about this issue, this study will fill up the scarce area in terms of the specific measurement of the identity theory within the context of this study.

1.1. Literature review

Brown (2015) suggested five essential notions of the contemporary identities research that cover choice, stability, positivity, coherence and authenticity. This five perspectives highlight on the disagreement notions that unify the way that an identity should be i) selected, chosen by or attributed to individuals ii) stable, expansion or easily change iii) affiliated and consistent or inversely iv) inspired and motivated v) genuineness or purity. From the perspective of choice, agency concept will be used to explain the concept of identity work as an individual acts as an agent to direct their intentions and decide their choice that contribute to action stimulation (Rounds, 2006). Thus, identity is a choice for an individual for not being something else that beyond their choice. Choice of identity is produced by self-governing or self-ruling that established through past experience, socio- historical contexts or institutional framework (Howard, 2000). Empirical studies have shown how the choice of identity significantly influences the attitudes of many entities such as minorities in a country (Citrin & Sides, 2004), critical management studies (Thomas, 2009), educational professionals (Billot, 2010) gender socialization in the workplace (Lester, 2008) and identity crisis (Ecclestone, 2007).

Identity work ensures stability and ontological security of identity even though the existence of contexts that may limit this objective (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). Identity stability is a concept to explain the identity construction that is relatively stable with an existence of moderate changes (Brown, 2015). However, this author also stated that psychologist also suggested that identities can be develop, invisible and instantly altered due to changes of individual preferences. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) suggested that identity stability enhances individual understanding of their selves which contribute to an increase in individual's work productivity. Numerous scholars venture in studies of identity stability, such as studies that involve workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008), racial identity (Yip et al., 2010), organisational analysis (Meyer et al., 2002) and work related identity loss (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014).

Identity work also inquires coherent identities as coherence focuses on individual's sense of their selves' continuity, clarity and completeness (Brown, 2015). A successful identity work will ensure an increase in identity coherence (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). However, some studies found that identities are not absolutely coherence as it may cause self-doubt, inconsistency and ambiguity (Lawler, 2008). Past studies measure the influences of identity coherence in broad areas such as cultural diversity and ethnic identity (Syed et al., 2013), adolescent adjustment (Ferrer-Wreder et al., 2008), entrepreneurial identity (Navis & Glynn, 2011), digital media and identity (Davis, 2013) and organisational identity (Boers, 2013).

Identity work also influences by individual desire for positive identities (Brown, 2015). Positive identities explain the value of being good and beneficial to others (Dutton et al., 2010). Positivity of identity is about an evaluation of individual attitude which influenced by the choice between positive or negative attitude toward their social identity (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014). Hence, the evaluation of individual's social identities is a critical feature to influence social identification (Crocker & Luhtanen,

1990) and dominate the identity construction (Dutton et al., 2010). Among studies that cover positive identity are study of dirty work and identity (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), corporate identity (Balmer & Gray, 1999), job crafting and positive identity (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013) and prosocial practices and positive identity (Dutton et al., 2011).

Authentic identity focuses on the tendency of an individual to justify their inner authentic foundation (Ybema et al., 2009). Identity work acknowledged the important of authenticity identities that include formation of opinion based on logic discussion and reflective process (Roberts et al., 2009). Individual believes that they acquire authentic identity that consists of valid and chosen identities. Accurate information should be delivered to represent the corporate identity that ensures truly authentic identity of an organisation (Fukukawa et al., 2007). Authentic identity continuously grabs the attention of studies such as Haimson and Hoffmann (2016), Kimmons (2014), Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014) and Kreber et al. (2007).

2. Problem Statement

The more the people in the organisation feel that they are sharing the same identity, the more they are engaged to the work and this will lead to better job performance and give the benefit to the organisation. In the context of investigating identity work, there are many continuing debates on how the identities should be theorised and analysed.

According to Brown (2015), there are five significant attention of disputes of identity theory contemporarily. Namely, choice (identities are assigned to or chosen by individuals), stability (fluid or generally stable, evolutionally adaptive), positivity (motivated (or not) by a need for positive meaning), coherence (fragmented and possibly contradictory or unified and coherent) and authenticity (framed (or not) by a desire for authenticity).

In connection to that, our study will adapt the five identity theories that is proposed by Brown (2015) in understanding the effect of identity work on job performance. This is also intended to find out which of the variables will impact the job performance the most in an organisation that may enlighten other comprehensive studies to be conducted in Malaysia.

3. Research Questions

This study calls to answer the following research questions:

- Does choice affect job performance?
- Does stability affect job performance?
- Does positivity affect job performance?
- Does coherence affect job performance?
- Does authenticity affect job performance?
- Which of the 5 notions of identity theory has the most impact towards the job performance?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to measure

- Relationship between choice and job performance.
- Relationship between stability and job performance.
- Relationship between positivity and job performance.
- Relationship between coherence and job performance.
- Relationship between authenticity and job performance.

5. Research Methods

There are five independent variables will be examined to ensure these are the factors that influence job performance in any industry in Malaysia. Quantitative method has been chosen for this study as it is more appropriate due the huge sampling size with 150 sampling. In this study, questionnaire is using by conducting survey to 150 respondents in order to examine the association of independent variables and dependent variable. The questionnaire was distributed among employee in any industry and the data is collecting after 1 week by researcher.

The questionnaire is divided into three parts that consist of Part A, Part B and Part C. Part A contains demographic information of respondents by using nominal scale to gather the data. Part B comprise of five independent variables that include stability, choice, authenticity, coherence and positivity. There are five questions for each variables and Likert scale is using for respondents to respond for this survey. While Part C particularly discuss on dependent variable which is job performance with four questions to be asked by using nominal scale for measurement.

SPSS has been used to analyze data for this study as to attain a result. The data analysis techniques that used to analyse data by using SPSS are univariate analysis (descriptive analysis), reliability test, normality test, and multivariate analysis (multiple linear regression).

6. Findings

6.1. Descriptive analysis

There are 200 sets of questionnaires that are distributed to the employees who are working in any industry in Melaka area. Nevertheless, only 150 or 75% from the distributed questionnaire were completed and able to be used. In this study, demographic information consists of gender, age, marital status, education, working experience and income. The respondents consist of 97 (64.7%) males and 53 (35.3%) females. The respondents' profile based on age is from the range between 21 to 51 years old and above. In term of working experiences, the respondents have minimum with 1 year experience and 9 years and above for maximum experience. As for the education level, most of the respondents with 66 (44%) holding a bachelor's degree and minimum number of respondents finished Polytechnic School of 1 (0.7%). While, for an income level, the range between RM1000 to RM4500 and above. The respondents are mainly having a single status which is 74 (49.3%), followed by the married status 64 (42.7%) and divorce/ widowed 12 (8%).

6.2. Correlation analysis

To determine the relationship between identity work as independent variables and job performance as dependent variable, Pearson Correlation test was conducted. Table 1 summarizes the result of the correlations.

As illustrated in Table 1, all determinants (authenticity, choices, stability, coherence and positivity) are significantly linked with the job performance. The result indicated that positivity has the highest correlation value with 0.539 which is significant at 0.05 level. While, authenticity has the lowest correlation value of 0.498 which significant at 0.05 level. The above results indicate that the correlation between the variables is low, showing that the multi-collinearity barrier is minimal and therefore does not hinder the interpretation of subsequent regression results.

Table 01. Correlations

		JP	Authenticity	Choices	Stability	Coherence	Positivity
JP	Pearson correlation	1	.402	.515	.517	.498	.539
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Authenticity	Pearson correlation	.402	1	.389	.309	.397	.322
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
Choices	Pearson correlation	.515	.389	1	.573	.466	.514
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
Stability	Pearson correlation	.517	.309	.573	1	.407	.598
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
Coherence	Pearson correlation	.498	.397	.466	.407	1	.559
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000	.000	.000			.000
Positivity	Pearson correlation	.539	.322	.514	.598	.559	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
Correlation is significant at 0.05 level							

6.3. Multiple Regression analysis

Multiple Regression analysis is executed to examine the influence of identity work towards job performance. Authenticity, choices, stability, coherence and positivity as independent variables are regressed to determine their relationship with job performance.

Table 02. Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin - Watson
1	.660 ^a	.435	.416	.37901	1.565

Notes: a. Predictors: (Constant), Authenticity, Choices, Stability, Coherence and Positivity

b. Dependent variable: Job performance

The result for multiple regression for job performance are summarised in Table 2. The result indicated that the value of R-square is .435 which explained that 43.5% of the job performance can be clarified by the identity work.

Table 03. Coefficients

Model	Unstandardised coefficient		Standardised coefficient	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics		
	B	Standard Error	Beta			T	VIF	
1	Constant	.834	.319		2.615	.010		
	Authenticity	.128	.062	.146	2.068	.040	.785	1.274
	Choices	.147	.072	.169	2.037	.043	.572	1.747
	Stability	.192	.088	.186	2.186	.030	.544	1.837
	Coherence	.188	.085	.177	2.207	.029	.612	1.634
	Positivity	.177	.079	.196	2.234	.027	.511	1.957

a. Dependent variable: JP

The above table showed that all variables, the coefficient estimate of authenticity (Beta=0.146; p=0.040), choices (Beta=-0.169; p=0.043), stability (Beta=0.186; p=0.030), coherence (Beta=0.177; p=0.029) and positivity (Beta=0.196; p=0.027) was significantly related with job performance.

The indication of the regression standardized coefficient(Beta) shows either positive or negative effect of all determinants on the dependent variable. Thus, it is indicated that all determinants (authenticity, choices, stability, coherence and positivity) have positive effect on job performance. Referring to the table 3, the regression equation is stated below:

$$\text{Job Performance} = 0.834 + 0.128 \text{ Authenticity} + 0.147 \text{ Choices} + 0.192 \text{ Stability} + 0.188 \text{ Coherence} + 0.177 \text{ Positivity}$$

7. Conclusion

The result of this study recommended that identity work give noteworthy effect on job performance in an organisation in Malaysia. With the results of this study, employers in any industry may know the reasons related to the worker's performance and may know a particular solution to overcome it. A study conducted by Walsh and Gordon (2008) proposed a conceptual model to understand determinants for identity work that can affect job performance. This study found that when individual occupation and organisation have congruent identities, the individual may build a strong identity work that ensures a consistent role, manners as well as job performance that align with the organisation's expectations. Thus, five determinants of identity work should be given a serious attention by the employer in order to create a good environment in the organisation and employees can perform well in their work for the long-term success of a business.

Identity work plays an important aspect of the organisation's day-to-day operations as it emphasizes different identities that people work like from a leader to followers as a control structure to coordinate and make daily decisions. Identity work rules are considered as how different identities are organized to develop self-orientation and work orientation that are considered congruent with the stated

objectives. The different types of identities that people bring have effect for daily decision-making within the organisation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Identity work plays an important part in the process of socialization and essential as a thorough explanation of why and how people engage in entrepreneurship (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). Probably some have suggested that personality and character work are linked to every theme in the association and administration of governance issues within a business groups (Brown, 2015).

In conclusion, all the five notions of identity work are positively related with job performance with stability as the most significant determinant. This is in line with the result of previous studies that used identity work as the determinants for job performance. Neuroticism or emotional stability or is likely the main persisting identity idea in brain science. Therefore, it is very important for the company to ensure their employees are in stable emotional as nowadays many employees have suffered with what we call as depression. This is due to the too many workloads given to them which they cannot handle it and need to settle it on time. Once everything is needed on time, the employee feels stress and not stable which directly will affect their job performance. Social therapists also recommend that individuals in associations require “a generally secure and stable” comprehension of their selves keeping in mind the end goal to work viably (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

The contribution that this paper brings includes the focus on identity work development within the organisation. The result of this study also suggested the crucial procedures in designing the criteria for staff recruitment by applying the five elements of identity work. Potential workers is able to align their identities and the identities work that expected by other organisation members. Hence, a proper practice can be adopted to highlight to the potential workers about the policy and procedure of the company to make sure that it may suit with their identities. In addition, documented and recognised identity work will be more understandable and acceptable by the people in the organisation and this will lead to the positive workplace environment.

For the organisation, understanding the need and the factors that lead to a better performance is a critical issue for human capital management. Appropriate job specification and criteria that match with the needs and the interest among employees will build the positive identity work and environment and finally bring success to the organisation.

Our study is limited in terms of the samplings. The respondents are the employees who are working in any industry in Melaka area only. It is suggested that the future research about the effect of identity work on job performance can fill the gap by examining larger sample and includes all states in Malaysia.

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