# WORK-PLACE IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIP

**An individual's work identity refers to a work-based self-concept, constituted of a combination of organizational, occupational, and other identities that shapes the roles a person adopts and the corresponding ways he or she behaves when performing his or her work.** Identities, in general, refer to ***"who the individual thinks he or she is and who is announced to the world in word and action***" (Charon,1992, p. 85). They are important because identities "suggest what to do, think and even feel" (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, p. 417) and therefore what corresponding roles individuals assume (Katz & Kahn, 1966).

**Work identity, therefore, is a multidimensional work-based self-concept reflecting individual's self-image that integrates organizational, occupational, and other identities shaping the roles and behaviors of individuals when they perform work** (Walsh and Gordon 2008; Martire, Stephen and Townsend, 2000), Figure 1. In other words, unlike occupational identity that expresses a sense of possessing specific professional skills and capabilities, work identity is a self-concept that reflects the situatedness of these skills in the context of specific work tasks (Howie, Coulter and Feldman 2004). While examining the relationship between work, occupational, and organizational identities is beyond the scope of this paper, research strongly suggests that it is through work identity that individuals integrate learned professional skills and internalized organizational norms and make them meaningful.

- **Constructing Work Identity**

The construction of work identity is an interplay of individuals' life experiences, occupational skills, organizational context, work practices, and social memberships(Rudman and Denhardt 2008; Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann 2006; Casey 2008; Walsh and Gordon 2008). According to Collinson (2004), individual biographies that individuals bring to work influence work roles and ways they identify with work.Individuals have to make sense of their formal training and professional membership within the context of specific work practices and negotiate professional group membership and individual self-image as they relate to work (Brewer and Gardner 2004). As shown by Apesoa-Varano (2007), nurses have to negotiate their formal credentialing and science-based training with daily caring for patients. Among these two elements, caring for patients – and not academic occupational knowledge – becomes

the key selfidentifier for the nurses at work. In the case of medical residents, they have to reconcile professional self-images and the "scut work" that they often have to perform (Pratt et al.2006). Together with making sense of their professional skills within the work context, constructing work identity also means negotiating "culturally supplied" elements (in terms of Martin and Wajcman 2004) such as the meaning of paid work attributed by society (Hoare, 2006) or images of occupational groups that society imposes, for instance"male" vs. "female" or prestigious vs. non-prestigious occupations (Greene, Ackers, and Black 2002; Collinson 2004, Casey 2008; Warriner 2004; Baldry et al. 2007). From this perspective, identity construction becomes a tension between occupational and work selfconcepts and external perceptions of individuals by others based on their occupational membership or gender (Collinson 2004; Casey, 2008). Individuals often do not conform to narrow definitions of their occupation imposed by society and actively construct their work identities by incorporating their memberships in social and cultural groups (Casey 2008; Westenholz 2004; Walsh and Gordon 2008). Identifying with an organization, together with occupational training and membership, is an important element of work identity, since while engaging in work, individuals have to make sense of their organizational environment and use organizational strengths (or competencies) as a source for creating "a distinctive self-image relative to others" (Walsh and Gordon 2008, 51). Career prospects within the company, as well as the amount of time an individual invests in work can also influence their work identities (Baldry et al. 2007; Pratt et al. 2006).

- **Work Identity Processes:**

Research shows that individuals use a number of processes to construct and articulate their work identities through engagement into and reflective sense-making of larger social and cultural frameworks (Martin and Wajcman 2004) or through selecting those components of organizational and occupational identities that enhance individual's sense of distinction and distinctive self-image (Walsh and Gordon 2008). The construction of work identity is also predicated on learning about work and situating professional skills within the work context (Pratt et al. 2006). The identity-construction process starts with an assessment of work-identity integrity, and when the nature of work and professional skills do not match, individuals "customize" their work identities by seeking a new identity-related meaning. As a result, individuals deepen the understanding of their identity (identity enrichment), use one identity to "patch" the holes in another one, or evoke their prior identities ("identity splinting").

Customized work identities are then validated through interaction with peers or selecting role models (Pratt et al. 2006).

## ➢ Creating an Individual Work Identity Based on Theory :

Social identity theory explains how and why individuals might create a work identity. According to this theory**, individuals create their self-identity through first comparing themselves with one another and then classifying themselves and others into different social groups** (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Turner, 1982; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). In doing so, they attach value to these categories (Pettigrew, 1986). Thus, their social identities represent individuals' sense of both belonging to and differentiating from their community and culture (Hewitt, 1989). Social groupings enable individuals to distinguish themselves as different from out-group members, yet at the same time as similar to their other desirable in-group members (Ericson, 1980; Hogg & McGarty, 1990). Through social identity, individuals make sense of their social environment, as well as locate a place for themselves within it. Individuals have a strong desire to select identities that positively reinforce themselves, specifically their self-image (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Hogg & White, 1995). They work toward maintaining an optimal level of distinction for themselves, whereby they select membership in social groups that are inclusive yet also distinctive, and in doing so maintain a sense of both social belonging and individuality (Brewer, 1991). For example, individuals may be attracted to membership in groups that are large enough that most people recognize them, but small enough that they offer a sense of uniqueness.

Creating an identity through socially comparing oneself with others, often through the groups to which the person belongs and does not belong, is a continuous self-defining process. Identities are defined and redefined as individuals interact and associate with others (Charon, 1992; Wharton, 1992) and therefore are always subject to change and development. “It [identity] arises in interaction, it is reaffirmed in interaction and it is changed in interaction” (Charon, 1992, p. 85). The process of social identity represents for individuals an ongoing process of self-construction that reflects multiple and complex dimensions (Gergen, 1991; Fine, 1994; Hewitt, 1989). They do so by interpreting first the identity that membership in each

group offers and next the degree to which this identity resonates with them, a process termed organizational identification.

## WORK-PLACE RELATION

Workplace relationships are unique interpersonal relationships with important implications for the individuals in those relationships, and the organizations in which the relationships exist and develop.

Workplace relationships directly affect a worker's ability and drive to succeed. These connections are multifaceted, can exist in and out of the organization, and be both positive and negative. One such detriment lies in the nonexistence of workplace relationships, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Workplace relationships are not limited to friendships, but also include superior-subordinate, romantic, and family relationships.

The workplace retains a central role in many people's lives. With the average person spending more time at work than on any other daily activity, it is vital that individuals within any organization feel connected and supported by peers, subordinates, and leaders. Indeed, a significant contributor to workplace stress is psychosocial hazards related to the culture within an organization, such as poor interpersonal relations and a lack of policies and practices related to respect for workers (Stoewen, 2016).

While prolonged exposure to these psychosocial hazards is related to increased psychiatric and physiological health problems, positive social relationships among employees and colleagues are how work gets done. Thus, whether organizations – and their employees – flounder or flourish largely depends on the quality of the social relationships they possess.

This article will take a look at the science behind positive relationships at work, the importance of positive social interactions, and discuss just some of the ways positive employee interaction can be introduced and encouraged in the workplace.

- **IMPORTANCE OF WORK-PLACE RELATION :**

As with any interpersonal relationship, those formed in the workplace reflect a varying and dynamic spectrum of quality.

At their very best, work-place relation can be a source of enrichment and vitality that helps and encourages individuals, groups, and organizations as a whole to thrive and flourish.

Conversely, negative workplace interactions have the potential to be a source of psychological distress, depletion, and dysfunction. Positive work-place relation are often referred to as appetitive. They are characterized by the pursuit of rewarding and desirable outcomes, while negative ones are aversive and commonly characterized by unwelcome and punishing results.

Co-workers spend a good deal of time together, especially in team environments. It is unavoidable for employees to eventually develop personal relationships among themselves in addition to their formal co-worker relationships. Workplace relationships can be a good thing for businesses in a number of ways, and small business owners who realize the importance of forming workplace relationships are better equipped to develop high-performance teams.

**Team Cohesiveness**

Team cohesiveness relies on mature and professional relationships. People tend to function more smoothly together when there is a personal component to their relationship. Employees may hold back in group discussions with people they are unfamiliar with; good ideas and positive conflict can be stifled in the interest of politeness and professionalism.

Team-building activities, shared after-work experiences and problem-solving successes can all contribute to team cohesiveness, strengthening workplace relationships in the process.

**Psychological Factors**

People have a psychological need to be accepted as a part of group or to feel a sense of social belonging. Workplace relationships can enrich employees' experiences at work by satisfying

their psychological needs for affiliation. Employees who struggle to form personal relationships with co-workers can find their morale decreasing on the job, and they may be more likely to leave a job than employees who look forward to seeing friends each day.

**Social Life**

Full-time employees spend a good deal of their lives at work and may see their co-workers more often than personal friends or family members. Without forming personal relationships at work, employees can find it difficult to find friends in their home lives. Because of this, it is important to blend home and work life a bit to develop lasting personal friendships with co-workers. Current co-workers can form personal relationships that last for years after the employees' formal work relationship ends.

**Personal Support**

Work life does not always deliver positive experiences, and employees may find themselves needing others to support them during stressful or discouraging times on the job. Employees who form personal relationships at work are more likely to rebound quickly from things such as negative performance reviews or gossip around the office.

By the same token, it is also nice to have people on your side to celebrate work-related victories, such as promotions and pay raises. Workplace accomplishments can turn into memorable experiences with a group of friends at your side. Even birthdays spent at work can become memorable occasions with good friends by your side.

- **BENEFITS OF WORK–PLACE RELATION**

- Work place relation play an essential role in wellbeing, which, in turn, has a positive impact on employee engagement. Organizations with higher levels of employee engagement indicated lower business costs, improved performance outcomes, lower staff turnover and absenteeism, and fewer safety incidents (Gallup, 2015).
- It can lead to knowledge and productivity spillover from trained to untrained workers, in collaborative team settings, or between senior and junior workers: particularly in low-

skilled tasks and occupations (Cornelissen, 2016). For instance, Mas & Moretti (2009) found that productivity was improved when employees were assigned to work alongside faster, more knowledgeable co-workers.

- Employees who are satisfied with the overall quality of their workplace relationships are likely to be more attached to the organization. Thus leaders who encourage informal interactions – such as out of hours social gatherings – can foster the development of more positive relationships and significantly influence and improve employee satisfaction (Sias, 2005).
- A lack of work place relation in the workplace can have potentially negative consequences in relation to social support. Several studies have indicated that the sense of isolation that comes from this lack of social support is associated with a host of negative health consequences, including a higher risk of cardiovascular disease, compromised immunity, increased risk of depression, and shortened lifespan (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Cacioppo et al., 2011; Mushtaq et al., 2014).
- Strong 'within-group' ties with co-workers (characterized by frequent social interactions) provide opportunities to facilitate innovative thinking. According to Wang, Fang, Qureshi, & Janssen (2015), the strong ties developed by social interactions assist innovators in the search for inspiration, sponsorship, and support within the workplace.
- Work place relation in the workplace help to ensure everyone in a group is on the same page. According to Sias, Krone, & Jablin (2002), peer relationships (also referred to as equivalent status relationships) represent the most common type of employee interaction.

These peer relationships exist between co-workers with no formal authority over one another and act as an important source of informational and emotional support for employees. Co-workers who possess knowledge about – and an understanding of – their specific workplace experience are given opportunities to feel connected and included through the sharing of information through regular social interactions.

- Relationship in the workplace have been found to increase self-reported positive feelings at the end of the workday (Nolan & Küpers, 2009).
- Repeated positive social relation cultivate greater shared experiences and the gradual development of more trusting relationships (Oh, Chung, & Labianca, 2004). When trust exists between team members, they are more likely to engage in positive, cooperative behavior, which in turn increases employee access to valuable resources.

Employees who engage in positive social relation also tend to exhibit more altruistic behaviors by providing co-workers with help, guidance, advice, and feedback on various work-related matters (Hamilton, 2007).

- The information collated through work place relation can help a team collectively improve its performance and the precision of its estimates (Jayles et al., 2017).
- Work place relation and positive relationships are important for various attitudinal, well-being, and performance-related outcomes. Basford & Offermann (2012) found that employees in both low- and high-status positions reported higher levels of motivation when interpersonal relationships with co-workers were good.