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Personal Constructs of Organisational Identity and Identification Following Education Reform in the New Zealand Polytechnic Sector

Denise M Conroy

ABSTRACT

Organisations face massive changes as they adapt to mergers, takeovers, downsizing or simply adding .com to their name, and all of these changes challenge the organisation's identity. Despite this understanding, little research has been done in the area of how employees react to a change in their organisation's identity, and how such a change may impact upon their own identification.

The New Zealand environment represented a unique opportunity to address this gap in the literature. Local expressions of worldwide economic reform have been swift and extensive, with the commercialisation of the tertiary sector presenting a rare opportunity for exploring how change impacts upon the organisation's identity and employees' identification. From this base, the following research question was developed:

*How do polytechnic tutors interpret the changes to their organisation's identity and their own identification, following education reform in the New Zealand polytechnic sector?*

A constructivist approach was used, utilising three means of inquiry. Firstly, three separate institutes were selected, with the business school being the site of inquiry for each Case. At each site, repertory grid interviews with long-term employees were conducted to generate data at the level of the individual, and at the level of the organisation. And finally, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with senior management to provide background information on strategic direction and vision. A content analysis of both the repertory grid interviews and the semi-structured interviews provided a rigorous process of analysis.

Results from this research make several contributions to our knowledge of identity and identification. The data revealed that the organisation's identity consists of a plurality of identities, with one overarching Meta Identity. Whilst other aspects of identity may change to adapt to the demands of the external environment, the Meta Identity is far more resilient, or 'sticky.'
In addition to revealing the hierarchical nature of organisational identity, the data also demonstrate evidence of two paths for employees ‘becoming’ identified, specifically emulation and affiliation. The findings also indicate that whilst change may not create a reduction in the strength of identification, it may create a change in the need it is serving for the employee. Such changes can be detrimental to both the employee and the organisation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There can be little doubt that the PhD route is a lonely journey, yet one that cannot be successfully navigated without the assistance of many other parties. My own adventure was no different, and there are many to whom I owe a debt of gratitude.

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