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**EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF A WORK IDENTITY BASED ONBOARDING
INTERVENTION ON YOUNG PROFESSIONALS' WORK EFFICACY**

A Research Project

**Presented to the Faculty of
Pepperdine Graziadio Business School**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
in
Organizational Development**

**by
Samuel Liberant**

August 2019

This research project, completed by

SAMUEL LIBERANT

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of Pepperdine Graziadio Business School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Faculty Committee

Committee Chair, Gary Mangiofico, Ph.D.

Committee Member, Terri Egan, Ph.D.

Deryck van Rensburg, DBA, Dean
Pepperdine Graziadio Business School

Abstract

By virtue of their age and relative inexperience, young employees tend to lack the professional competencies their organizations need such as communication skills, suitable workplace conduct. These deficits can significantly affect how these employees select, engage, and perform in the workplace. This action research study examined the effects of a work identity intervention in a sample of young professionals. Twelve full-time working adults aged 24-30 were recruited to participate in the intervention designed to deepen their understanding of their work identity, defined as who a person is at work and how he or she is defined within the context of work. Data were collected through a post-intervention survey that gathered participants' reactions, knowledge learned, behaviors changed, results achieved, and feedback and suggestions. The study findings indicated that the intervention had a positive effect on participants' understanding of their work identity. Based on this study, continued testing of the intervention is advised.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Historically low unemployment (Rugaber, 2019), ongoing shifts in the labor market resulting from continuing retirement of Baby Boomers, and the relatively small size of the Generation X worker population mean that organizations increasingly rely on Millennials and successive generations of young professionals to fill positions up, down, and throughout the organization (Churchill, Denny, & Jackson, 2014). Young professionals are in particular demand given their relatively high education levels and qualifications uniquely suited to a globalized, digitized work setting (Deloitte, 2016; Lowe, Levitt, & Wilson, 2008). Accordingly, these young employees are attaining roles of influence and significant responsibility earlier in life than did previous generations (Hollis, 2017).

However, by virtue of their age and relative inexperience, young employees tend to lack the professional competencies their organizations need such as communication skills, suitable workplace conduct (Hettich, 2010; National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2008), and self-awareness (Iordanoglou, 2018). These deficits can significantly affect how these employees select, engage, and perform in the workplace (Hettich, 2010; Iordanoglou, 2018). This study explored the effects of an intervention focused on *work identity*, defined as the sense of who a person is at work and how he or she is defined within the context of work (Alvesson, 2001; Brown, 2004; Buche, 2006; Kirpal, 2004; O'Conner, 2007; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Svenningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Swann, Johnson & Bosson, 2009; Walsh & Gordon, 2008), within a population of young professionals.

Identity work, defined as an active process of forming, repairing, and revisiting one's self-constructions (Svenningsson & Alvesson, 2003), has been proposed as a means for strengthening work identity. However, available models have focused on workers navigating midlife transitions

(Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 2005; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Given organizations' reliance on young professionals, the skill deficits of this population, and the lack of models for helping this population achieve stronger effectiveness—particularly related to self-awareness and work identity—this research project focused on examining the potential methods for helping young professionals in the contemporary labor market explore and negotiate their work identities.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to design and evaluate a work identity interventions young professionals. Four research questions were examined:

1. What are young professionals' reactions to a work identity intervention?
2. What learnings, if any, do young professionals report as a result of the work identity intervention?
3. What behavior changes, if any, do young professionals report as a result of the work identity intervention?
4. What results, if any, do young professionals associate with the work identity intervention?

Definitions

Three definitions were relevant to this study:

1. Young professionals: individuals aged 24-30 with a college degree and less than 10 years of full-time professional work experience, working in a white-collar occupation, and living in a contemporary industrialized country. . Although in demand (Deloitte, 2016; Lowe, Levitt, & Wilson, 2008), they tend to lack the professional competencies their organizations need such as communication skills, suitable workplace conduct (Hettich, 2010; National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2008), and self-awareness (Iordanoglou, 2018).
2. Identity work: In this study, this refers to the process of work identity creation, where work identity refers to who a person is at work and how he or she is defined within the context of work (Alvesson, 2001; Brown, 2004; Buche, 2006; Kirpal, 2004; O'Conner, 2007; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Svenningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Swann, Johnson & Bosson, 2009; Walsh & Gordon, 2008). The process of work identity creation involves regulation, negotiation, and modification based on actively forming, repairing, maintaining, and strengthening or revisiting the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness (Svenningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

3. Work identity: who a person is at work and how he or she is defined within the context of work (Alvesson, 2001; Brown, 2004; Buche, 2006; Kirpal, 2004; O'Conner, 2007; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Svenningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Swann, Johnson & Bosson, 2009; Walsh & Gordon, 2008).

Organization of the Study

This chapter provided a background to the study. The study purpose, study setting, definitions, and significance also were outlined. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature. Research regarding young professionals, employability, and onboarding is examined and discussed. Chapter 3 outlines the methods that will be used in the study. The research design and procedures related to participant recruitment, intervention design, data collection, and data analysis are described. Chapter 4 will report the study findings. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the findings, including conclusions, recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to design and evaluate a work identity intervention for young professionals. This chapter provides a review of literature related to this study. Theory and research on young professionals, work identity, work identity in young professionals, identity work, and curriculum evaluation are described.

Young Professionals

Young professionals, as defined in this study, are employees aged 24 to 30, holding a college degree, working in a white-collar occupation, and living in contemporary industrialized countries. Employers note a range of major deficiencies in young professionals related to their communication skills (written, oral, and interpersonal); workplace conduct (work ethic, critical thinking, professionalism, and flexibility) and experience (Hettich, 2010; National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2008), strategic thinking and planning, collaboration, and self-awareness (Iordanoglou, 2018). Various researchers suggest that the deficiencies are a function not only of lack of experience but also of young professionals' stage of psychosocial development (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Blumenthal et al., 2016; Masten & Cicchetti, 2010). Young professionals achieving liberal arts undergraduate degrees have been noted as exhibiting gaps even more than graduates of technical programs, who tend to augment their education with internships and cooperative learning (Casner-Lotto & Barrington; Holton, 1998).

Hettich (2010) further noted that transition from college to work requires a substantial shift in ways of knowing and being evaluated. Accordingly, the attitudes and behaviors that lead to success in school are quite different from those that yield success in the workplace (Gardner, 1998; Hettich, 2010; Hettich & Helkowski, 2005). For example, whereas success in school often relies on independent focus, effort, and achievement, workplace achievement requires the ability to work well

with others, meaning communication, conflict management, and collaboration are needed. Lack of preparation for the workplace can produce culture shock and difficulties in moving smoothly through this period (Baxter Magolda, 1994). Although educational approaches in some institutions may have evolved, more recent researchers continue to note the difficulty students have in transitioning to the full-time workplace and call for various approaches to support a successful transition (Jørgensen, Järvinen, & Lundahl, 2019; Pastore, 2019; Schoon & Bynner, 2019). For example, Schoon and Bynner (2019) argue the need for institutional support systems to scaffold young people's transitions to independence so that bridges are created between education and employment. Pastore (2019) notes that in schools, industries, or countries where the educational system is rigid and students complete their education before gaining any experience, such as in Italy and southern Europe, the school-to-work transition is particularly slow. These authors additionally associate difficult school-to-work transitions with high youth unemployment. Potentially exacerbating young professionals' difficulties becoming effective in a given workplace is their tendency toward job instability. The U.S. Department of Labor (2017) estimates indicate the typical American between the ages of 18 and 25 hold at least 6 jobs, and at least nine jobs between 18 and 32. Unfortunately, the U.S. Department of Labor data do not distinguish between job turnover statistics by profession; therefore, it is unclear whether turnover rates for young professionals in white-collar professionals are consistent with those of young professionals in other types of jobs. However, given Levit's (2004) statistic that "the median length of time workers stay on the job has shrunk by half since 1983: from 2.2 years to 1.1 years now" (p. 12), it appears that this statistic may indeed be consistent across jobs types and sectors. Farber (2006) explained that that *churn*, holding a series of jobs lasting less than a year, is to be expected in industrialized societies, as new employees, even those in their 30s, are searching for the right person-job fit. Churn may be particularly

exacerbated for young professionals, who are still gaining experience, learning about the larger work world, and understanding their place in it (Hettich, 2010).

The distinctive characteristics of young professionals provide insights about their reasons and approaches for selecting, engaging with, and performing in their jobs (Chao & Gardner, 2007). Moreover, young professionals' conceptions of their work identity have a significant influence on the roles they seek, how they approach the work itself, and how competently they will utilize job-critical skills and commit to their work and organization (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Cote, 2006). Work identity also has been associated with important workplace metrics such as engagement and retention (Damayanti, Yahya, Kirana, & Tan, 2019; Leidner, 1991; Redekopp & Huston, 2018), especially if young workers view their jobs as starting points, stepping stones, or places simply for getting support and learning about themselves (Hettich, 2010).

Employers who understand the challenges young professionals face can help facilitate their progression, potentially enhancing these workers' attitudes about the employer, organizational commitment, and performance by supporting these employees in discovering and leveraging their work identities in the workplace. Promoting understanding across employees regarding each others' work identities may further enhance social connections and morale.. The next section explores work identity in more detail to examine how young professionals' identity contextualized within the workplace.

Work Identity

Gecas (1982) explained that work identity refers to the various meanings attached to a person by self and others. People claim to have a given identity by conveying images that signal how they view themselves or hope to be viewed by others. They maintain or modify their private self-conceptions by observing their own behavior and the reaction of others, who accept, reject or renegotiate these public images (Swann, 1987).

According to Schein (1978), *professional identity* is defined as the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role. As with identity in general, professional identity forms over time through varied experiences and given meaningful feedback that provides insight about people's central and enduring preferences, talents, and values.

Work identity, on the other hand, refers to identity at a given workplace, and focuses on who a person is at work and how he or she is defined within the context of work (Alvesson, 2001; Brown, 2004; Buche, 2006; Kirpal, 2004; O'Conner, 2007; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Svenningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Swann, Johnson & Bosson, 2009). The workplace provides a social context where people have the opportunity to negotiate and develop a work identity, which is important because identities are constructed and negotiated through social interaction (Gresalfi & Hand, 2019). Work identity is a multi-dimensional and multi-layered construct that provides a social representation of how individuals interact within their employment environment (Buche, 2006) based on their social role and group membership, as well as on the personal characteristics they display and which others attribute to them based on their conduct (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Gecas, 1982).

The type of work and work context additionally contribute to the development of personal identity and provide a psychological bridge between people and their work, thus culminating in employee engagement (Leidner, 1991). As people engage with the work context, they continue to define themselves (Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Verkuyten, 2005).

Through one's interactions with the workplace and the individuals encountered there, personal identity becomes the outcome of a dynamic, conscious and ongoing struggle to form a view of *who I am* (Svenningsson & Alvesson, 2004)—and this definition is rooted uniquely within the boundaries of the various social contexts in which they belong. It follows that although identity emphasizes the "I am" aspect of the person, work identity inherently reflects the aspect of "I am also

a part of.” The self must, therefore, be continuously negotiated relative to and within the context of work (Levesque, Negura, Gaucher, & Molgat, 2019).

Work identity is part of a larger context of *employability*, defined as the basic skills a worker needs to obtain, retain, and do well on the job (Ameen & Nosheen, 2011). This refers to the skills, attitudes, and actions that enable individuals to get along with their coworkers and supervisors and to make sound, critical decisions. Employability skills are generic in nature and not necessarily job specific as occupational or technical skills. Employability also refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities workers need to be successful not only in a given job but in the arc of their careers (Pool & Sewell, 2007). Employability skills are considered teachable skills and are classified in different ways across authors:

- Three categories: basic academic skills, higher order thinking skills, and personal qualities (Ameen & Nosheen, 2011).
- Three components: the worker’s (a) *employability assets*, consisting of knowledge, skills and attitudes; (b) *deployment*, including their career management and job search skills, (c) *presentation*, relating to skills associated with securing a job (e.g., resume writing, work experience, interview techniques) (Pool & Sewell, 2007).
- Four components: understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs, and metacognition (USEM; Yorke & Knight, 2004).
- Five components: disciplinary content knowledge, disciplinary skills, workplace awareness, workplace experience, and generic skills (Bennett et al., 1999).

Consistent across these classifications, common themes are that employees need certain knowledge, skills, and abilities to be employable and effective in a professional work context. Work identity and workers’ consequent understanding of themselves and how they fit and act within their jobs and organizations also can play a key role in their ability and efficacy in securing, keeping, and performing effectively on the job (Ameen & Nosheen, 2011; Bennett et al., 1999; Pool & Sewell, 2007; Yorke & Knight, 2004).

Work Identity of Young Professionals

Many young professionals, by virtue of their age, are in the midst of a transition from school to work (Hettich, 2010). Ibarra and Obodaru (2016) described such transition times as *liminality*, meaning a state of being in between, as a tool rather than an obstacle. They characterized liminality as: (a) featuring a simultaneous suspension of one's role (e.g., that of student or worker) along with the individual's subjective experience of the suspension, (b) occurring over a finite period of time, (c) involving the receipt of social guidance from elders and support from a community of peers also in limbo, (d) one's engaging in culturally legitimate narratives to assist one's personal sense-making, (e) being associated with a sense of obligation, and (f) resulting in a progressive outcome where the individual returns to society in a new role and with a new identity on the next rung in the social order. It is possible that if the high turnover and high unemployment levels experienced by young professionals (Jørgensen, Järvinen, & Lundahl, 2019; Pastore, 2019; Schoon & Bynner, 2019) were understood as liminal periods, identity growth may result (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). Ibarra and Obodaru's three steps of exploration (knowing self through introspection, enrolling trusted advisors, and experimentation and action) could help support a model for taking action.

Standing (2011) suggests that labor market flexibility across Western industrialized economies is giving birth to a new class of workers, primarily because of the transference of risks and insecurity onto employees. These workers lack stable occupational identities, access to a future career and social protection. The level of uncertainty is influenced by many factors, including individual identity and macro societal trends such as globalization, technological advancement and work flexibility. This also increases uncertainty about how to accomplish salient goals in the domains of work and family (Blumenthal et al., 2016).

At the time of this study, individuals in the Millennial generation (born 1980-2000 and currently aged 19-39), fall within the population of young employees examined in this research. The

societal shifts currently affecting young professionals are the same as those influencing Millennials (Dubin, 2018). One of the most salient tasks of the young professional is to establish oneself in the labor market and becoming integrated into society (Schoon & Silbereisen, 2009). However, the volatility and complexity present in the contemporary labor market—particularly within across Western industrialized economies, has given rise to a new social generation of young people are now defined by insecurity (MacDonald, 2009; Woodman & Wyn, 2015). Given these labor conditions, it could be argued that contemporary young professionals experience even more instability and uncertainty than previous generations regarding their work and career prospects (Higgs, 2019; Reitzle & Silbereisen, 2000). These conditions indicate a need for young professionals to deliberately and actively move through the process of identity exploration toward identity achievement in order to promote their own and their organizations' success. The next section examines processes for doing so.

Identity Work

Identity work involves resolving and balancing the tensions between self and the demands of the work context, resulting in the negotiation and reconstruction of a person's identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008). Adams and Crafford (2012) define the process of seeking constant balance between one's personal identity and the demands made by work as being identity work at work. According to Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2006), people achieve a state of balance by negotiating two aspects of their identity – work and self.

Given the social nature of identity (Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Verkuyten, 2005), Kreiner et al. (2006) suggest involving others as a strategy for identity work, particularly as a means of maintaining personal identity in the face of occupational demands. Work relationships support the achievement of goals and are also resources for emotional support. Specific identity

work strategies include examining personal philosophies, fostering relationships, actively managing one's career, and negotiating balance.

Ibarra (1999) proposes three steps of exploration, experimentation, and action as a means to examine and discover one's work identity. Exploration begins with knowing oneself—primarily through self-reflection (solitary introspection or through help). Ibarra explains that we learn who we have become - in practice, not in theory—by testing fantasy and reality, not by so-called looking inside. Knowing oneself is crucial, but it is usually the outcome of—and not a first input to—renegotiating identity.

Identity work has been researched with regard to career transitions. Researchers have explained that identity is relevant during career transitions because new roles may require new skills, behaviors, attitudes and patterns of interaction, triggering fundamental changes in an individual's self-definitions (Becker & Carper, 1956; Hall, 1976; Hill, 1992; Schein, 1978). It may be similarly argued that young professionals are particularly in need of identity work given their need to navigate a substantial cultural shift in the school-to-work transition (Schoon & Silbereisen, 2009) and an increasingly volatile and complex labor market that exacerbates instability and insecurity (Giulioni, 2019).

The remainder of this section examines three models of identity work that have been discussed in the literature. The methods of identity work in organizations have generally included in-depth interviews. Ibarra (1994) conducted 90-minute one-on-one interviews of junior consultants and investment bankers transitioning from individual contributor and project management roles to generate understanding of these workers' perceived work identities and projected future work identities.

Adams and Crafford (2012) conducted research to examine the narratives, decisions, actions, activities, and behaviors workers use in the process of identity work at work. Workers were

interviewed to discuss their passions, practices, and relationships. Identity work strategies included making sense of and coping with work life difficulties, forming relationships at work and at home, managing career, and negotiating work-life balance.

According to Ibarra and Obodaru (2016), exploring a provisional self and thinking about identity work as identity play may additionally be helpful for young adults forging a work identity. In the course of doing so, these workers need to develop their individual narratives in ways that can be understood by others. They are also often negotiating a shift from knowing how to achieve success in school environments to learning and experiencing the realities of a more dynamic, flexible and complex workplace.

This study examined the concepts of work identity and identity work for young professionals by designing and evaluating a work identity intervention for this population. Up to this point in the literature review, theories and literature about young professionals, work identity, and the work identity of young professionals was reviewed for the purpose of informing the design of the work identity intervention. The next section examines curriculum evaluation for the purpose of informing the methods for gauging the effectiveness of the work identity intervention.

Curriculum Evaluation

Curriculum evaluation is the practice of assessing an educational training program and reporting how effective the curriculum has been for the trainee, trainer, and others the training was designed to benefit (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Evaluation is important to ensure that training investments are actually yielding their desired results. Curriculum evaluation is an important practice carried out both in educational (for example, schools and universities) and organizational settings (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Phillips, 1996; Kirkpatrick, 1996). In an organization, the evaluation of training is typically in support of skill or knowledge requirements originating in the workplace (Phillips, 1996).

Evaluation of a training program in an organization is typically conducted before training, during training, immediately after training or before entry (or re-entry) in the workplace, and upon exiting the workplace (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Evaluation at repeated intervals is important to constantly monitor, adjust, and reflect changes.

As a management tool, training is conducted for many purposes (Phillips, 1996). For example, training might focus energy on particular issues, support other interventions, promote change, disseminate information, or develop skills. As training purposes vary, the evaluation processes also must vary; the most important thing about evaluation is to be clear on the purposes of the evaluation and to what audience the evaluation is being provided (Kirkpatrick, 1979).

Kirkpatrick (1979) outlined four levels of curriculum evaluation. The first level is reaction, which primarily refers to whether learners liked the training (Phillips, 1996). Kirkpatrick's (1979) rationale is that learners who like the training are more likely to apply what they learned. Reaction is typically measured informally by the trainer during training and measured formally immediately following training. While reactions are typically recorded from a historical perspective (that is, whether they liked the training), learners also may be asked to predict how they anticipate using the skills and knowledge on the job, as this indicates their intentions to use the principles taught.

The second level is learning, which refers to the principles, facts, knowledge, and techniques the learner gained during the training (Kirkpatrick, 1979; Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). As a central focus of most training programs is the transfer of knowledge, this level helps assess the extent to which knowledge acquisition occurred.

Behavior, the third level, refers to the behavior changes developed during the training and transferred to the workplace (Kirkpatrick, 1979). Behavior changes are typically measured immediately at the end of training and at one or more points following the training. Measuring behavior change in the workplace is an important part of curriculum evaluation, because learners

might be unable to transfer behavior changes to the workplace. Learners' ability to change behavior in the work setting is an important measure of curriculum effectiveness (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

Results, the fourth and final level in Kirkpatrick's (1979) model, refers to the actual effects of the learning; that is, the organizational payoffs and business results achieved as a result of the learners' new knowledge and behaviors (Kirkpatrick, 1979; Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). This level assumes that the results of training extend beyond equipping people with skills and knowledge to do their jobs. Measuring results is the most important level of evaluation according to Kirkpatrick (1979), because it is the ultimate demonstration of whether the training is valid. This step involves identifying the expected business results and measuring actual achievements against expected achievements. The method and focus for measuring results depends on the purpose of the training. For example, measuring the effectiveness of a training session designed to promote change might involve measuring the organizational support garnered, while a training session designed to develop customer service skills might measure the increase in customer satisfaction.

Summary

Young professionals generally face challenges in making the school-to-work transition. Among these challenges include their relatively nascent work identity due to both a lack of skills and lack of experience. They also are navigating a substantial cultural shift in the school-to-work transition. It is possible that deliberately engaging in identity work may produce learning, behavior shifts, and results that deepen their understanding of their work identities. This research appears to help explore a gap in existing literature, as no studies were found in the literature search for the present study that examined identity work interventions for young professionals. Moreover, specific interventions and approaches for identity work were not found, beyond Ibarra's (1999) three steps of exploration, experimentation, and action for examining and discovering one's work identity. The

next chapter describes the research and intervention design, as well as the procedures for selecting participants, assuring ethical considerations are observed, and collecting and analyzing data..

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to design and evaluate a work identity intervention for young professionals. Four research questions were examined:

1. What are young professionals' reactions to a work identity intervention?
2. What learnings, if any, do young professionals report as a result of the work identity intervention?
3. What behavior changes, if any, do young professionals report as a result of the work identity intervention?
4. What results, if any, do young professionals associate with the work identity intervention?

This chapter describes the methods that were used in this study.

Research Design

This study used an action research design, which involved cycles of action and research informing successive cycles of action and research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, an intervention was designed, piloted, and evaluated. Qualitative data was gathered to describe what occurred during the intervention and to evaluate participants' reactions, learning, acquired behaviors, and business results related to their participation in the intervention. This framework reflected Kirkpatrick's (1960) method for curriculum evaluation, which involves evaluating participants' reactions, learning, behavior changes, and results (see chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion). Data was self-reported, based on participants' perceptions.

Participants

Full-time working adults aged 24-30 holding a college degree, working in a white collar profession in Los Angeles metro area were invited to participate in the intervention. Only those individuals who volunteered became study candidates. The target sample size was 12 participants. A convenience sampling strategy was used to identify study candidates (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña,

2018). According to this strategy, the researcher listed all known contacts meeting the selection criteria and emailed them a study invitation (see Appendix A). Participants were informed that the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. They were also informed that the study would involve participation in an initial 3-hour intervention, a follow-up 1-hour focus group interview, and a 5-minute online survey. Participants responded by email and telephone indicating their interest in participating. When 12 people volunteered and the researcher confirmed by email that the candidate was aged 24-30, had a college degree, worked full time in a white-collar profession, and was located in the Los Angeles metro area, the intervention was scheduled at a time convenient to all.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted within the oversight of the Pepperdine University Institutional Review Board. All human subjects protections were observed. Confidentiality and consent procedures were implemented to protect participants from physical and psychological harm as well as to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Study participation was voluntary. Participants received an informed consent statement (Appendix B) to participate in research. They were given the option to withdraw or decline any activity at any time without penalty. Participant demographics were not gathered to shield their identities and maintain their confidentiality.

Intervention Design

Theoretical background. Theory and research on identity statuses, identity work, action research, and social constructionism were reviewed to design this intervention. Summarized findings from these reviews are outlined in this section.

1. Action research. The intervention design proposed in this occurred in three phases: an introductory 3-hour workshop to present principles and practices for identity work, a 1-week practicum period to allow participants to practice a chosen principle, and a follow-

- up 1-hour focus group interview to reflect on the results and how their experience informed their identities, identity statuses, and relationships inside and outside of work. This approach was consistent with the action research approach used by Ibarra (1994), where participants discovered generative mechanisms and identified sequences of events that accompany identity exploration.
2. Identity work. Hettich (2010) explained that identity exploration relies upon experimentation and expansion of self-awareness. When this is carried out well, Hettich argued that people are better able to reach the state of identity achievement. In this study, participants learned about and experimented with strategies to aid self-definition and achievement of identity, similar to the work of Adams and Crafford (2012). In this study, participants were invited to make sense of situational, relational, and individual aspects influencing their identities, leading to the identification of a repertoire of strategies for continuing ongoing identity work. Adams and Crafford's taxonomy of identity strategies (i.e., personal philosophies influencing individuals' sensemaking and coping mechanisms; relationships at work and family; career management; and managing work-life boundaries and negotiating work-life integration) were used as the lens for helping participants understand and negotiate identity.
 3. Social constructionism. Identity interventions inherently reflect social constructionism (Gergen, 2009, 2015), a theory, which asserts that realities are subjective and are created, maintained, and changed through conversations. In this study, participants were advised to involve others in their process of identity exploration and use this as a mechanism to create community and support (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Adams and Crafford (2012) found in their study that relationships were central to their participants' identities. Kreiner et al. (2006) added that involving others is a key strategy for identity work, particularly as

a means of maintaining personal identity in the face of occupational demands. Work relationships support the achievement of goals and are also resources for emotional support.

Design. The intervention occurred in three phases: an introductory 3-hour workshop, a 2-week practicum period, and a 1-hour follow-up focus group interview. This section describes the design of each phase.

Introductory workshop. In the 3-hour introductory workshop, participants learned about principles of work identity and the practices for identity work. The workshop was organized into four modules:

1. Introduction. The purpose of Module 1 was for participants to warm-up and ease into the intervention for the purpose of reaching the understanding and openness that taken-for-granted assumptions preclude new perspectives. To do this, a 2-minute teaser exercise was facilitated where the solution required the participant to stop viewing the presented situation in the manner in which he or she might have seen it at first glance. A follow-up group discussion helped participants open to the possibility of seeing things in a new light. The next exercise in this module invited participants to engage their positive awareness by asking them to answer the question: “What has been the highlight of your week?” A follow-up group discussion invited participants to consider that appreciative answers and deeper thinking could enable deeper connection with self and others.
2. Identity concepts. Based on literature presented in chapter 2 of this study, the researcher outlined the concepts of identity, work identity, identity work, and identity work at work. A facilitated group discussion helped participants adopt common terminology and understanding of these concepts.
3. Identity exercise.

- a. Isolating an identity characteristic. Participants sat in a circle and completed the sentence “Who am I? I am...” one by one, with a different answer each time. Participants recorded the self-descriptor they voiced on a Post-It note. This exercise concluded when participants could not think of another descriptor (which occurred after approximately 8 rounds). The aim was to achieve a depth of self-awareness and sharing. At this point, the facilitator notified participants that they now had to release one of their self-descriptors. Participants then placed the self-descriptor they released into a center pile. This process repeated until each participant had only one Post-It (one self-descriptor) remaining. The remaining self-descriptor was that which the participant most identified with at the time.
- b. Grounding the characteristic. Participants were instructed to identify the behaviors they carried out at work that reflected that self-descriptor. The aim of this activity was for participants to create a sense of authenticity and ownership related to the descriptor by grounding it in their daily experience and activities.
- c. Validating the characteristic. Participants were then instructed to notice the identity descriptors other participants identified for themselves. Participants were asked to note at least one workplace observation for every other participant that reflected their chosen descriptor. For example, if Participant A selected “I am kind,” Participant B would record an example of when he or she experienced Participant A as kind in the workplace. If Participant B has not experienced Participant A as kind, then Participant B would provide an example of how Participant A could demonstrate kindness in the workplace. The aim of this step was for participants to receive feedback, validation, and guidance from others regarding their chosen identity descriptor.

- d. Validating the characteristic. Participants were asked to note at least 2 workplace observations that reflected their chosen descriptor. For example, if a participant selected “I am kind,” they would record a few examples of when he or she were kind in the workplace. Equally, the participant was encouraged to capture where he or she would want to demonstrate kindness in the workplace. The aim of this step was for participants to validate and think of additional ways to further exercise their identity descriptor.
 - e. Debriefing. The researcher facilitated a group discussion of the identity exercise to surface participants’ questions, concerns, insights, and experiences related to exploring their own and others’ identities.
4. Wrap up. Three activities were used to wrap up the first workshop:
- a. Creating an identity artifact. Participants created a rich representation of their selected, grounded, and validated identity descriptor. The representation was either a drawing, a letter, a song, a dance or movement, or any other type of depiction of their selected identity descriptor. The aim of this step was to deeply cement a multisensory understanding of their selected identity characteristic.
 - b. Action planning. Participants were instructed to identify their behavioral intentions related to enacting their selected identity characteristic and the outcomes they anticipated from doing so. They were provided with the action planning worksheet to capture their plans (see Appendix C).
 - c. Debriefing. Participants were invited to share their identity artifacts and intentions with each other. The researcher facilitated a discussion about the takeaways from the workshop and the support they would receive from him over the 1-week period until the follow-up workshop. The researcher provided his contact

information and notified them that he was available if needed. Participants also were encouraged to reach out to and support each other, if they so chose.

Practicum. In the 1-week practicum period, participants carried out their action plans. The researcher made himself available by telephone and email to offer support as needed.

Follow-up focus group interview. In the 1-hour follow-up focus group interview, participants were guided through exercises and discussion to reflect on the results of their practicum and contemplated how their experience informed their identities, identity statuses, and relationships inside and outside of work. The interview utilized the Liberating Structure format of “What, So What, What Now,” supporting them in identifying the facts of the experience, making sense of it, and deciding what to do next as a result (Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2014). The interview unfolded in five modules:

1. Introduction. The researcher greeted participants and set the stage for the Liberating Structure activity. Desired workshop outcomes were also outlined.
2. “What.” The researcher solicited positive stories, feedback, and insights from participants about their experiences over the previous week using the question: “What has been the highlight of your 1-week experience?” Participants were asked to sum up in one statement the turning point or highest point in their experience.
3. “What” and “So What.” The researcher facilitated a discussion to understand each individual’s journey and identify their key learnings about the experience and themselves. The aim of this discussion was to gain a sense of participants’ progress in identity exploration and to summarize the experience and what it meant at an individual level.
4. “What now.” Participants sat in a circle and completed the sentence “Now that I know ... it means for me ... and I will” The intent of this exercise was to guide participants in deliberate sensemaking regarding their identity exploration and setting intentions moving

forward. Participants recorded their meanings and intentions on a Post-It note after they completed each sentence.

5. Wrap up. The researcher facilitated a discussion to capture any additional comments and evaluation of the intervention. It was anticipated that participants' feedback would produce additional data regarding the usefulness of the intervention and potential for future practice and research.

Table 1 presents a comparison of the intervention used in this study to literature.

Table 1

Comparison of Intervention Design to Literature

Element	Supporting Literature
Workshop 1	
Introduction	Not applicable
Identity concepts: identity, work identity, identity work, and identity work at work	Adams & Crafford, 2012; Ameen & Nosheen, 2011; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashmore et al., 2004; Alvesson, 2001; Bennett et al., 1999; Blumenthal et al., 2016; Brown, 2004; Buche, 2006; Gresalfi & Hand, 2019; Hettich, 2010; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Jørgensen et al., 2019; Kirpal, 2004; Kreiner et al., 2006; Levesque et al., 2019; O'Conner, 2007; Pastore, 2019; Pool & Sewell, 2007; Schoon & Bynner, 2019; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Svenningson & Alvesson, 2003, 2004; Standing, 2011; Swann et al., 2009; Verkuyten, 2005; Watson, 2008; Yorke & Knight, 2004
Identity exercise: isolating a characteristic, grounding in experience, validating, debriefing	Adams & Crafford, 2012; Hettich, 2010; Ibarra, 1999
Wrap up: Creating an identity artifact, action planning, debriefing	Adams & Crafford, 2012; Gergen, 2009, 2015; Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Kreiner et al., 2006
Practicum	Adams & Crafford, 2012; Hettich, 2010; Ibarra, 1999
Follow up workshop: Liberating Structure Dialogue	Adams & Crafford, 2012; Hettich, 2010; Ibarra, 1999; Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2014

Data Collection

A qualitative survey (see Appendix D) was created to evaluate the workshop used in this study, based on Kirkpatrick's (1979) framework. The survey gathered participants' views related to (a) their level of enjoyment, (b) what they learned, (c) what behaviors they intended to change, and (d) what results they anticipated as a result of the workshop. In addition, the survey solicited participants' open-ended comments and feedback. The survey was administered in hard copy and all attendees were asked to complete it following the workshop.

Data Analysis

Participants' responses from the surveys, intervention, and interview were carefully reviewed. Themes for their reactions, knowledge gained, behavioral effects, and results achieved were identified. Themes were also generated for the open-ended feedback participants provided. The analysis was reviewed and validated by a second coder trained in qualitative analysis. The findings reported in chapter 4 reflect the finalized analysis.

Summary

This action research study recruited 12 full-time working adults aged 24-30 for the purpose of designing and evaluating a work identity intervention for young professionals. The intervention consisted of three phases: (a) an introductory 3-hour workshop that taught concepts of identity and identity work and guided participants through an identity exercise, (b) a 1-week practicum to further experiment with a selected identity characteristic, and (c) a 1-hour follow-up focus group interview workshop to deepen, debrief, and gather feedback about the intervention. Data were collected through a post-workshop survey that gathered participants' reactions, knowledge learned, behaviors changed, results achieved, and feedback and suggestions. The next chapter reports the study results.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to design and evaluate a work identity intervention for young professionals. Four research questions were examined:

1. What are young professionals' reactions to a work identity intervention?
2. What learnings, if any, do young professionals report as a result of the work identity intervention?
3. What behavior changes, if any, do young professionals report as a result of the work identity intervention?
4. What results, if any, do young professionals associate with the work identity intervention?

This chapter describes the results of the study.

Intervention

The 3-hour workshop took place in a setting that allowed for privacy and comfort. In addition, discussion took place in a circle, while a dedicated space was available for creating the artifact. The workshop provided a forum for participants to apply divergent thinking on the topic of work identity and converge on an area of focus (see Table 2). Eight participants reported a focus on improving their relationships and understanding of others. For example, one participant shared she wanted to “find ways to incorporate fun language in otherwise humdrum correspondences to enrich my interactions with others.” Seven reported focusing on achieving a specific task or improving their efficiency and effectiveness, such as a participant who endeavored to “be more chatty and easygoing with my editor so my editor is happier and more invested in our edits. Take more breaks during the day for myself. This to help decrease stress, clear my head and improve creativity.” Six participants indicated they were going to focus on understanding their career alternatives and clarifying their focus. One such participant explained that he wanted to:

look for job opportunities where the work will give me value and purpose to have more focus/clarity and road map how to achieve that. I want to evaluate with myself what I want from my career in the next 5 years.

Table 2

Participants' Selected Focus

Focus	n
Improving relationships and understanding of others	8
Achieving a task or improving efficiency and effectiveness	7
Understanding career alternatives and clarifying focus	6
Increasing sense of enjoyment at work	2

N = 12; Some participants reported more than one focus

After selecting a focus area, action planning was conducted to help participants guide their efforts during the practicum. Participants reacted well to the action planning and displayed increased levels of clarity, confidence and commitment as plans were shared.

Participant Reactions to Intervention

On a scale of 1 (I did not enjoy it at all) to 5 (I thoroughly enjoyed it), the mean score across the 12 participants was 4.67 (SD = .49), indicating they enjoyed it or thoroughly enjoyed it. Table 3 presents the reactions participants reported regarding the intervention. Eleven stated that reflecting on themselves at work and their work identities, as facilitated in the workshop, was beneficial, interesting, and enjoyable. One participant shared, "I greatly enjoyed the workshop, as it allowed me to dwell into an aspect of my identity which I cherish." Another elaborated:

Being okay to ask questions and get ideas/inquiries out there was rewarding. Even if the other person doesn't notice, just being able to discuss it was helpful. . . . There were elements I wanted to discuss further but I didn't. I was more selective, but I learned more by challenging myself to ask what I was curious about, instead of holding back. The more I asked the more answers I got and the more interested and amused.

Table 3*Participants' Reactions*

Reaction	n
Reflecting on self at work and work identity was beneficial, interesting, and enjoyable	11
Workshop and practicum were enjoyable	6
Enjoyed interaction with others	5
Workshop provided a safe space	3

N = 12

Six participants stated that the workshop and practicum were enjoyable. One participant commented on the workshop “I reserve fives for very rare occasions but I was surprised at how well executed the session was in a short time. I am definitely coming away with new thoughts.” Another, stated he was “encouraged, satisfied and energized from the overall experience.” Five participants enjoyed interacting with others and one commented “I enjoyed the open and honest conversation in a group setting.” Another participant noted “It was helpful to learn more about the experiences of others through the workshop.”

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to evaluate the workshop. Participants' views of the most valuable aspect, least valuable aspect, and key take-aways are presented in Table 4. Seven participants believed the most valuable aspect of the workshop was the opportunity for self-reflection. For example, one participant pointed to the “I am...” exercise and stated it “...Pushed me out of my comfort zone,” whilst another confirmed, “Learning more about myself and have my identity, known or unknown to myself, affects my work.”

Although five participants stated everything in the workshop was valuable, three wanted more conversation during some of the activities. One participant stated, “The action planning worksheet – I would have rather talked it out.” Another participant made reference to “The artifact project – would have liked more large/small group discussions.” Two participants reported that the introductions were too long.

Table 4

Participant Evaluation of Workshop

	n
Most Valuable Aspect	
Opportunity for self-reflection	7
Naming one word for my work identity	2
Creating the artifact	2
Connecting with others	1
Creating an action plan	1
Least Valuable Aspect	
Everything was valuable	5
Lack of conversation during some activities	3
Participant introductions were too long	2
Action planning was too rushed	1
Key Take-away	
Deepened my awareness regarding my work identity	9
It was eye-opening	1
No response	2

N = 12

Nine participants confirmed the workshop helped them deepen their awareness regarding their work identity. One participant explained the workshop “Help to simplify and highlight how you see yourself as a worker and what you can do to create a better experience as a result.” whilst another “Was able to identify a part of my identity to harness and be proud of in the workplace.”

Participants also were asked for suggestions to improve the workshop (see Table 5). Five participants suggested additional opportunities for group sharing, including “...more sharing about work identity/experience,” and “More group discussion and reacting to each other.” Three participants provided logistical suggestions including using outdoor space, more time to allow deeper sharing and having an icebreaker upfront.

Table 5***Participants' Suggestions for Improvement***

Suggestion	n
Provide additional opportunities for group sharing	5
Logistical suggestions	3
Focus more on application	1
Customize to mid-career professionals	1
None	2

N = 12

Participant Learning

Participants evaluated their pre- and post-workshop knowledge of work identity (see Table 6). Three participants reported having had a strong sense of their work identity before the workshop. Examples included: “I was pretty in tune with who I am and my identity and have done multiple personal growth and development courses but it’s always fun to explore;” and “I had a very strong sense of my identity before this workshop.” Four participants confirmed having some knowledge of their work identity. One participant noted, “I had a sense of identity, but the workshop helped me gain a better understanding on and how to utilize it in a work environment.” Another added, “it was more related to personal identity versus work identity.” Three participants reported having little knowledge, while the remaining two viewed work identity as how others perceived them.

Table 6***Participants' Knowledge of Work Identity***

	n
Pre-Workshop	
Strong sense of work identity	3
Some knowledge	4
Little knowledge	3
Identity is based on others' perceptions of me	2
Post-Workshop Definitions	
My unique qualities as applied to the workplace	6
My perception of who I am	6
Identity is based on others' perceptions of me	2

N = 12

After the workshop, six participants defined work identity as their unique qualities as applied to the workplace, such as, “The qualities I bring to the workplace,” and “I would define my identity as rooted in certain principles (growth, kindness, playfulness) but also as being ever changing as I discover more about who I am.” Six participants described work identity as their perception of self. One participant noted “Work identity is the perception of self and others’ perception of me.” Another participant viewed work identity as “The composition of traits (or a specific trait) that define how we perceive ourselves and our behavior,” and one other believed “identity is about who you want to be: A deeper aspect of who and how you are or want to be in your work.”

Participant Behaviors

Participants were asked about the behavior changes developed during the training as well as the behavior changes they wished to transfer to the workplace during the practicum (see Table 7). Seven participants intended to continue thinking about their work identity to foster professional improvement. One participant intended to “think more critically about my identity and how I can use this knowledge to be better at my work,” while another proposed “To make a greater effort to project aspects of myself that I like.” Five participants identified a specific area to focus on and improve at work. Examples including self-care, developing better working relationships, harnessing curiosity in others and developing simple strategies for complex problem solving.

Table 7

Participant Behavior Changes

Behavior	n
Anticipated Changes Reported at End of Workshop	
Intend to continue thinking about my work identity to foster professional improvement	7
Identified a specific area to focus on and improve at work	5
Reported Post-Intervention Changes	
Worked with more confidence and intention	6
Used tools to remind me of my goals	3
Not answered	1

N = 12

At the completion of the practicum, participants were asked about the behavior changes transferred to the workplace during the practicum. Six reported to have worked with greater confidence and intention. One participant shared that “In the conversation I felt more comfortable to be curious and being inquisitive. It felt more playful. I’m doing what feels right. I was able to inquire for curiosity sake.” Another participant realized “I more confidently took the reins in my areas of strength and performed at a high level with demanding clients. . . Maybe I showed up differently to myself.” The same participant also mentioned that for him it was “only a week, so a short period.”

One additional participant shared that “By embracing my work identity as a care-taker, I felt more empowered and was able to be more pro-active. I think my positive attitude and way of being was a noticeable shift for my co-workers and helped them to feel like they could come to me with any issue.”

Four participants used the tools gained at the workshop, to remind them of their goals. One participant stressed that “my intention/experience helped me to remind myself that I am here to learn, and by doing so I’m gaining.” Another participant noted:

Sometimes when I got overwhelmed I looked at my artifact and it helped me place things into perspective. It helped me navigate moments of overwhelm. Hard to focus on intentions when busy: It was hard to keep track and remember my intentions when things got busy.

Participant Results

During the workshop, participants were asked to capture the results they anticipated to achieve from their focused work during the practicum (see Table 8). Seven participants expected their efforts would create a more positive work environment. One participant hoped for their efforts to help “make it a more positive workplace for me to look forward to.” Another, anticipated increased effectiveness: “I think my mindfulness will make me more effective in the workplace interactions.” One participant stated she “Hopefully inspire more thoughtfulness and appreciation to what others bring in order to create a better work.” Three participants hoped to make progress

toward their defined goals. Examples of this included increased confidence and exploration: “More confidence, trust in me and trust in the process of exploration.” A second participant focused on better task delegation, time management and staying grounded: “I will be able to delegate tasks, manage time better, and focus on staying grounded with myself to handle a heavy work load.” And a third participant predicted he would “have more passion when working and using my natural traits.”

Table 8

Anticipated Results Reported at End of Workshop

Anticipated Result	n
Create a more positive work environment	7
Make progress toward my defined goals	3
No response or uncertain	2

N = 12

Following the practicum, participants were asked to report on their perceived results (see Table 9). Overall, participants reported gaining greater insights about their work identity (n=11), greater work-related insights (n=10), insights about oneself at work (n=8) and insights about and connection with others (n=8).

Table 9

Results Reported Post-Intervention

Result	n
Gained Insights About Work Identity Realized importance of my work identity for career success (10) Gained specific new insights about my work identity (7) Actively reflected on work identity (4)	11
Gained Work-Related Insights Clarified work-related goals (9) Gained clarity and visibility of other jobs and opportunities (4) Had more enjoyment or fulfillment at work (3)	10
Gained Insights About Oneself at Work Realized the importance of integrating personal and professional identities (6) Realized the importance of self-acceptance and ownership of my strengths (4)	8
Gained Insights About and Connection with Others	8

N = 12

Regarding insights about work identity, 10 participants echoed the importance of their work identity for career success. One of them reflected:

Before the workshop I didn't think about work identity and its meaning. Usually I see myself as one of a whole. During the practicum, I realized it's important to be aware of how you see yourself in the workplace and how others see you as well. To take time to work on our different identities.

Seven participants said they gained specific new insights about their work identity. One individual stated, "It ... allowed me to focus on my work identity in a smarter way. I was able to pinpoint things to work on that I might not have been able to before."

Regarding work-related insights, nine participants reported having clarified work-related goals, such as this participant, who noted: "Executing my intentions from that workshop helped me to really hone in on my goals and how I can work to propel myself forward career wise." Four gained clarity and visibility of other jobs and opportunities. One participant explained, "Finally understanding what path to take that will fulfill me and make me happy has been very insightful and now affords me the time to strategize and pave a way for myself to explore this new career path."

Regarding gained insights about oneself at work, six participants realized the importance of integrating personal and professional identities. One shared:

I realized how important it is to talk about our personality and feelings, versus only thinking about work. It helped merged personal and professional life. ... Society tells people they should just focus on work, leaving personal life behind. Bringing the personal side of yourself at work is important, and it's important to bring your best self to work and life. By focusing on these aspects we can become a better employee at the workplace while also thinking about ourselves;

Regarding connection to others, one participant noted his realization that, "different members of the team function in different manners. Just because they do things differently does not mean they are wrong."

Workshop participants were asked whether their experience in the work and/or the practicum affect their results and/or perceived effectiveness at work (see Table 10). Seven participants reported to have perceived improved efficiency or effectiveness. One shared:

I guess it did change my ,work in that I felt like I was approaching things in a smarter way. This practicum seems to help an approach or mindset of effectiveness which will result in more effective actions, but I think the actions will come out slower. Growing into effectiveness as it were.

Five participants reported sustaining more positive emotions at work. One noted, “It's helped to ease the stress and demands of work and has given me a calmness to working.” Four reported no change in their efficacy, ass stated by this participant: “I don’t think it changed too much. Perhaps I was trying to be more organized as a result. I feel my effectiveness was the same as before.” One participant speculated, “I would imagine it would have an impact with more time.”

Table 10

Impact on Work-Related Outcomes and Efficacy

Impact	n
Improved efficiency or effectiveness	7
Sustained more positive emotions at work	5
No change in efficiency or effectiveness	4
Made progress toward my defined goal	2

N = 12

Summary

This chapter reported the results of the study. Findings were reported related to participants’ reactions to the intervention and their self-reported learning, behaviors, and results. The next chapter provides a discussion of these results.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to design and evaluate a work identity intervention for young professionals. Four research questions were examined:

1. What are young professionals' reactions to a work identity intervention?
2. What learnings, if any, do young professionals report as a result of the work identity intervention?
3. What behavior changes, if any, do young professionals report as a result of the work identity intervention?
4. What results, if any, do young professionals associate with the work identity intervention?

This chapter describes the results of the study. Conclusions are presented first, followed by practical recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for research.

Conclusions

Reactions to the work identity intervention. Participants described the intervention as enjoyable, specifically noting that reflecting on their self-at-work and work identity was valuable and interesting and that interacting with others also was a highlight. Moreover, when asked to identify the least valuable aspect of the workshop, 5 of the 12 stated that everything was valuable. These results encouraging, as Kirkpatrick (1979) predicted that learners who like the training they complete are more likely to apply what they learned.

At the same time, three participants opined that too much time was spent during the introduction exercise, while five participants expressed the desire for more group sharing. Two participants wanted more time and focus on action planning and application. Examining these results as a whole, it appears that the workshop was well-received by this group of young professionals. Their suggestions for improvement offer sound advice for future deliveries of the workshop. Any

changes to the design should similarly be examined and feedback sought until the design appears to be complete.

Reported learnings resulting work identity intervention. Whereas seven participants reported they had some or little knowledge of their work identity before the workshop, 9 of the 12 participants reported that their key take-away from the workshop was a deeper awareness of their work identity. Moreover, when asked to explain the concept of work identity after the intervention, participants offered definitions consistent with past literature. Whereas six described work identity as “my unique qualities as applied to the workplace” and another six described it as “my perception of who I am,” past authors have identified work identity as who a person is at work and how he or she is defined within the context of work (Alvesson, 2001; Brown, 2004; Buche, 2006; Kirpal, 2004; O’Conner, 2007; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Svenningson & Alvesson, 2003; Swann, Johnson & Bosson, 2009; Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Although the sample size does not permit generalizable findings to be drawn, it may be tentatively concluded that the aims of helping participants learn about the concept of work identity and gain insight about some aspects of their work identity may be possible through this intervention.

It is important to note, however, that two participants did not experience dramatic shifts: one engaged in little sharing, did not complete the practicum tasks, and did not provide post-practicum data and the other adopted a deficit-based approach where he focused on his development needs rather than his strengths. In both cases, the participants experienced fewer results in terms of perceived workplace effectiveness and work identity. While these results are insufficient to make any specific suggestions, an area to consider in the future is advising participants to take an appreciative approach and to screen participants for their readiness and openness to fully engage in the intervention.

Furthermore, participants' descriptions of their learnings did not reflect the concept of identity work, which involves regulating, negotiating, and modifying their work identity based on actively forming, repairing, maintaining, and strengthening or revisiting the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). It would be beneficial in future studies to examine whether the focus on work identity discovery versus identity work was the result of the intervention design, the age of the participants, or some other variable.

Reported behavior changes resulting from work identity intervention. At the close of the workshop, 7 of the 12 participants reported their intentions to continue thinking about their work identity for the purpose of fostering professional improvement. Moreover, 5 of the 12 had identified a specific area to focus on and improve at work, such as self-care, developing better working relationships, harnessing curiosity in others and developing simple strategies for complex problem solving. After the practicum, 6 of the 12 participants reported working with more confidence and intention, while 3 reported continuing to use the tools they had learned in the workshop to continue working toward their defined goals. Given the designed intention of the workshop to motivate participants to actively select a focus and work on it afterwards using what they gained from the workshop, these findings suggest that the intended behavioral effects did occur.

This approach of measuring behavior change immediately at the end of training and at least at one point following the training was consistent with Kirkpatrick's (1979) approach, although the overall length and nature of the study was far less robust than the curriculum evaluations conducted by Kirkpatrick himself. Doing so was critical to gauging the effectiveness of the workshop, as transfer of the training to the workplace is often the point at which a disconnect occurs. Although the design of the present study precluded the evaluation of lasting behavior change, Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016) explained that learners' ability to change behavior in the work setting is an important measure of curriculum effectiveness.

Reported results associated with the work identity intervention. Participants reported achieving a number of results as it pertained to the workshop. Immediately after the workshop, 7 of the 12 participants anticipated being able to create a more positive work environment based on what they learned in the workshop, and 3 anticipated continuing to make progress toward their defined goals.

Furthermore, 11 of the 12 participants reported gaining insights about their work identity, such as having realized the importance of their work identity for career success ($n = 10$), gaining specific new insights about their work identity ($n = 7$), and actively reflecting on work identity ($n = 4$). These results indicate that the workshop's intended effect of helping participants discover their actual work identity was achieved.

Ten of the 12 participants additionally reported work-related insights they gained as a result of the intervention, such as clarifying their work-related goals ($n = 9$), gaining clarity and visibility of other jobs and opportunities ($n = 4$), and experiencing more enjoyment and fulfillment at work ($n = 3$). These effects were associated with the practicum focuses they defined for themselves, indicating that in addition to deepening participants' awareness of their work identities, the workshop also may be helpful for facilitate self-guided learning.

Additional results participants associated with the intervention included realizing the importance of integrating their personal and professional identities ($n = 6$) and accepting and owning their strengths ($n = 4$), as well as improving their efficiency or effectiveness ($n = 7$) and sustaining more positive emotions at work ($n = 5$). It is important to keep in mind the small sample size and reliance on self-reported data when considering these results. However, it would be beneficial to further examine these potential intervention outcomes in future studies using larger samples and additional data collection methods in order to gain further insights about these potential effects. Assessing the results learners achieve after a training is the most powerful indicator of learning

having been achieved (Kirkpatrick, 1979), as it outlines the organizational payoffs and business results achieved as a result of the learners' new knowledge and behaviors (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). According to Kirkpatrick's approach, this step requires data collection to move beyond self-report to comparing actual against expected achievements using objective data to the extent possible. Thus, the findings reported for this research question may comprise the weakest findings of the present study.

Recommendations

Based upon examination and reflection on the study data, three recommendations are offered to young professionals:

1. Consider this intervention as a means to gain awareness of yourself and to better leverage your strengths. The majority of participants stated the workshop and practicum allowed them to use traits they already felt strong at. Others stated how the process gave them clarity of self, to the point where they appreciated themselves more. Some stated the intervention helped them explore what gave them worth and value at work, and in doing so, they made their strengths known to others through improved behaviors. Many gained further clarity on what they want to focus on in their career and/or the workplace they want to help shape or become a part of. As a young professional, you may therefore consider pursuing continued and deeper self-knowledge to help you make better and more focused workplace and career choices. This will also help them get a better idea of what roles and which organization fit and which don't.
2. Be ready to explore who you are and trust the process. Participants demonstrated an increased level of ability and commitment to their goals because they required them to apply existing strengths. The workshop provided a diverse range of tools and thought-provoking activities that catered to different learning styles and communication preferences. Some participants were surprised at elements of the workshop that they thought might not be of interest (an example of this was the creation of the artifact). Others were surprised at the power placing their artifact at their desk when it had served as a reminder during the practicum. Many participants reported it was easy for them to enter the practicum and trust the process because of the level of confidence and energy around doing what they enjoy most. Therefore, be prepared to enter this type of intervention with the willingness to explore oneself and trust the process and its intended purpose.
3. Consider this intervention as a means to clarify focus, leading to improved job and organization fit. Study findings suggested that participants were better able to clarify their desires relative to their careers or workplace, based on discovering elements of who they are. Some realized they wanted to invest more energy on team building while others stated that perhaps they needed a shift. Some commented on being happier at their work

just from a slight shift in perspective of self. Therefore, it would be helpful to keep finding ways to clarify your focus and work identity. This might be done through engaging in activities that highlight and provide further insights on who you uniquely are.

Relevant to organizational stakeholders, it is noteworthy that the intervention gained a generally positive response from participants, along with minor suggestions around expanding the timeframe for the practicum period. At the same time, although the findings of this study suggest the intervention was successful, the small sample size and reliance on self-reported data mean that the findings should be considered with great caution. It is possible that, given further research, the intervention might merit continued use. However, extensive research with representative and diverse samples is necessary. This might be achieved through further research into this area and testing and/or enhancing the existing intervention with diverse audiences. In future practice, OD practitioners and others who are administering the workshop may experiment with the intervention length. Participants expressed they would have benefited from a longer practicum, and some wanted further discussion during the workshop to hear others' input.

Limitations

One limitation of the study is the small sample size. A larger sample may have provided a more representative group so that results may be generalized or transferred to the larger population of the young professionals. Even though sample size is generally less relevant in qualitative research when explained in the context of the research problem, the results are limited to the subjects researched versus a significant representation of young professionals. A larger sampling would provide greater insights on the response to the workshop over time as well as the level of usefulness of the technique(s) applied to support knowledge transfer.

Another limitation was the lack of prior research studies found on the topic of onboarding young professionals into the workplace, to lay a better foundation for understanding the research problem investigated. The impact to the research was the use of unrefined or untested tools with the

sample size. This may be either due to the currency or scope of this research, or due to reliance on existing research of workers in transition, cited in the literature review. This serves as an important opportunity to identify further gaps in the literature and conduct research on onboarding young professionals in service of helping them develop their work identity and achieve personal and organizational results. This is also why this research used an exploratory rather than an explanatory research design. Whilst there is no way to avoid the lack of research, there is an opportunity to use general research on organizational onboarding techniques to inform potential approaches to onboarding young professionals. This may have been a gap in this research.

Another limitation was the time allocated to the practicum. The practicum was conducted for 1 week and did not include checkpoints due to the duration of the practicum. The last workshop was a data gathering exercise, which uncovered some opportunities for subjects to further transfer knowledge to the workplace. Limited time allocated to the practicum meant the results may have not fully reflected the potential they had. This could potentially mean a lack of data or not having reliable data to identify a trend and meaningful relationship. Two participants mentioned that the 1-week practicum was too short for them to achieve the results they had anticipated. Future research would benefit from a method or designs that allows more time for the practicum. It could also explore splitting the practicum into one that includes checkpoints to monitor progress and one that doesn't in order to assess whether results differ.

A final limitation was the study's reliance on self-reported data. This precluded a 360-degree evaluation of the impact of the workshop on participants' knowledge, behaviors, and results. In future research, it would be beneficial to include 360-degree and unobtrusive measures to provide a more comprehensive, valid, and reliable assessment of the workshop's impacts. This may also allow external validation for the subjects, greater perspective for the researcher, and greater involvement by the organization they belong to.

Suggestions for Research

One suggestion for future research is to examine the impact of an appreciative intervention versus a deficit-focused intervention. The workshop examined in this study adopted an appreciative focus; accordingly, several participants noted that the experience led to greater self-appreciation and clarity about their strengths and how these might be leveraged in the workplace. Future research could administer the two types of interventions with similar populations and gauge the effects.

Another suggestion for research is to administer the intervention again and assess the results, while controlling for the limitations that affected this study. Namely, it is advised to conduct a study on a sample of at least 25 (Kvale's [1996] upper limit for qualitative interview research), to use psychometrically valid instruments and 360-degree data gathering procedures to assess impacts, and to allow a longer time frame for results to be registered, such as a minimum of 4 weeks and up to 1 year, if possible. Interim data gathering (e.g., 3 months, 6 months, and 9 months) would additionally be beneficial for understanding the nature and trajectories of change that occur.

A third and final suggestion is to examine whether the reported intervention result of discovering work identity versus engaging in identity work (revisiting, negotiating, and creating identity) was the result of the intervention design or the age of the participants. That is, due to their relative lack of self-awareness (Iordanoglou, 2018) and professional experience (Hettich, 2010; National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2008), young participants may only be discovering their work identities, while older employees may have a more established identity that they end up revising via identity work through this intervention. Gaining clarity about this effect would require stratified samples with participants across the career span. The results of this kind of study would generate valuable insights about the applicability and outcomes of this intervention for different employee groups.

Summary

By virtue of their age and relative inexperience, young employees tend to lack the professional competencies their organizations need such as communication skills, suitable workplace conduct (Hettich, 2010; National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2008), and, relevant to this study, self-awareness (Iordanoglou, 2018). These deficits can significantly affect how these employees select, engage, and perform in the workplace (Hettich, 2010; Iordanoglou, 2018). This study explored the effects of a work identity intervention within a sample of young professionals. Twelve full-time working adults aged 24-30 were recruited to participate in the intervention designed to deepen their understanding of their work identity, defined as who a person is at work and how he or she is defined within the context of work. Data were collected through a post-intervention survey that gathered participants' reactions, knowledge learned, behaviors changed, results achieved, and feedback and suggestions. Although the study findings indicated the intervention had a positive effect on participants' understanding of their work identity, extensive research and development is needed to validate and deepen these findings.

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Appendix A: Study Invitation

Hi _____:

As part of my master's in organizational development at Pepperdine University, I am conducting a free 3-hour onboarding workshop designed to help participants explore their identities at work. I am writing because I would like to invite you to participate!

The workshop will be conducted in late June or early July in a private conference room located at 633 West 5th Street, Los Angeles, CA 90071. In addition to the workshop, participation also will involve completing a 5- to 10-minute online survey regarding your experience and a 1-hour focus group interview 2 weeks after the workshop to discuss your experiences and any reflections you have about your identity at work. The total duration of participation will be 4.17 hours per participant.

To participate, you need to be currently working full time and be between the ages of 18 and 30 years old.

Participation is voluntary and anonymous. You would not be identified in the study and any answers you provide would be pooled with others' responses and reported in aggregate.

Please respond by email or call me at (213) 712-3776 if you would like to learn more or sign up for the workshop.

I sincerely thank you for your help!

Samuel Liberant

Appendix B: Informed Consent Statement

IRB #: 19-05-1060

Participant Study Title: Onboarding Workshop to Improve Effectiveness

Formal Study Title: Organizational Onboarding Interventions to Enhance Young Professionals' Perceived Effectiveness

Authorized Study Personnel

Principal Investigator: Samuel Liberant, MS Candidate Office: (213) 712-3776

Faculty Advisor: Gary Mangiofico, Ph.D. Office (310) 568-5598

Key Information:

If you agree to participate in this study, the project will involve:

- Males and Females between the ages of 19-30
- Procedures will include a 3-hour onboarding workshop, a 1-hour focus group interview, and a 5-minute online survey. During the workshop and interview, you will be asked to reflect on and share ideas about your best traits. The online survey will ask you to provide feedback about the workshop.
- These procedures will take a total of 4 hours and 5 minutes of participation.
- The potential but highly unlikely risk associated with participation in this study include possible emotional discomfort as you think about your best traits.
- You will be provided a copy of this consent form

Invitation

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you work full time and are between the ages of 19 and 30 years of age.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

Organizations hire many young professionals and there is a lack of models helping them achieve stronger effectiveness—particularly related to self-awareness and work identity. This research project is designed to help young professionals explore their work identity.

What will be done during this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a 3-hour onboarding workshop, a 1-hour focus group interview, and a 5-minute online survey, for a total of 4 hours and 5 minutes of participation. During the workshop and interview, you will be asked to reflect on and share ideas about your best traits. The online survey will ask you to provide feedback about the workshop.

How will my data be used?

The researcher will record your answers in a password-protected document and a unique identifier (such as “Participant 1”) will be assigned to your information. Any information you share that could uniquely identify you (such names, places, or events unique to you) will be given a fake name and anonymized during the interview process.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

This research presents risk of loss of confidentiality and possible emotional and/or psychological distress as you think about your best traits.

What are the possible benefits to you?

You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?

Benefits to society include guiding future research or creating services to help individuals aged 19-30 explore their personal and work-related identities. The results of the program also may help improve future iterations of the workshop.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or only completing the items for which you feel comfortable.

What will being in this research study cost you?

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study?

You will receive no compensation for your participation in this study.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?

Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

How will information about you be protected?

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for 3 years after the study is complete.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

What are your rights as a research subject?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

- Phone: 1(402)472-6965
- Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University (list others as applicable).

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of informed consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4)

you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Participant Name:

(Name of Participant: Please print)

Participant Signature:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Appendix C: Action Planning Worksheet

My Selected Identity Characteristic:

What this means to me:

Things I have done to related to this identity characteristic:

Things others have seen me do related to this identity characteristic:

Over the next 2 weeks, I will...	When I do this, I expect...

Appendix D: Post-Workshop Survey

1. What was your experience of the workshop?

1	2	3	4	5
I did not enjoy it at all	I mostly did not enjoy it	I slightly enjoyed it	I enjoyed it	I thoroughly enjoyed it

2. Please explain your answer:

3. What was your knowledge of identity before this workshop?

4. How would you define identity based on this workshop?

5. What, if anything, did you learn from this workshop?

6. What, if anything, do you intend to do differently as a result of this workshop?

7. What impact, if any, do you think this will have on your work, your coworkers, or your workplace?

8. What was the most valuable aspect of this workshop?

9. What was the least valuable aspect of this workshop?

10. What suggestions would you offer related to this workshop?