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Professional Identity Dynamics and Perceived Dysfunctionality Related to the Education Level

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Abstract

The paper discusses the relation between the education level and the perception of the individual’s image of profession (Professional Identity). Also we analyzed the relation between the Professional Identity and the perceived Dysfunctionality. Having in mind the assumption that the level of education contribute to changes at the cognitive level, including the profession representations, we have assessed the Professional Identity in relation to the educational level on a sample of 60 adults, divided in three groups: 20 primary school graduates (8 classes), 20 high-school graduates and 20 university graduates. The level of perceived Dysfunctionality was also evaluated for all the three groups.

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Keywords: professional identity; dysfunctionality; education

1. Introduction

The psychosocial dimension of identity concept (and identification) is directly related to the individual self-concept. As an inner pattern, the self-concept uses self-assessments in order to define an individual’s self-schemas (Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2002). Personality, skills, profession and hobbies, physical characteristics, etc. are assessed and applied to self-schemas, which are ideas of oneself in a particular dimension.

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The individuals tend to identify themselves with objects, situations, roles, people, etc. Also the person intends to preserve the unity of the individual self against environmental pressure. Within natural limitations this produces self-identity preservation. The social self constitutes the major environmental scheme internalized by socialization.

The work environment was and still is a major field of exploration and research in order to obtain a more efficient person at the workplace. Many studies have been carried out on the workplace stress or occupational stress factors and causes. Some characteristics of the work environment have been founded as stress agents and as being at the basis of the low work efficiency in different fields of activity (Vasile & Albu, 2011).

1.1. Professional Identity

The Professional Identity (PI) is strictly related to satisfaction and fulfillment feelings. “The bigger is the matching between one’s personality’ traits/values/attitudes and the job structure, the bigger is the satisfaction feeling” (Vasile & Albu, 2011).

In the context of organizational life some theories address the social fact that how an individual self-defines himself or herself changes. Pratt et al. (2006) have identified three literatures as especially helpful in understanding the identity construction process: careers and role transitions, socialization, and identity work.

The PI seems to be related to the individual dysfunctionality and this relation seems to be a negative one.

2. Study on the level of education and dysfunctionality

2.1. Methods and instruments

The study sample was formed by 60 subjects, adults, 30 women and 30 men. The sample was divided by the level of education as follows: 20 subjects attended only 8 classes (no high-school), 20 subjects attended high-school and 20 subjects graduated university studies.

2.1.1. Instruments used

Professional Identity Scale – is one of the seven subscales from ISI scale (Identity Structures Inventory) developed in 2006. ISI was subject of statistical evaluation of reliability and internal consistency; the statistical analysis indicated a reliable scale with a good internal consistency. As shown above we used only PI scale in order to evaluate the individuals’ dissatisfaction vs. satisfaction and fulfillment in relation to work. The scale is a self-report questionnaire including five items, ranked from 1 to 5 (Vasile & Albu, 2011).

Dysfunctional Attitude Scale (DAS-A) was used in order to assess the dysfunctional patterns and attitudes of the subjects, following Aaron Beck’s theory on cognitive patterns (Beck, Brown, Steer, Weissman, 1991).

2.2. Purpose of the study

The study objective was to evaluate the PI in relation to education for each of the three categories (no high-school, high-school and university graduates). We have emphasized on observing the correlation between the education level and PI perception on the studied sample.

Moreover, we have compared the scores on Professional Identity and Perceived Dysfunctionality (PD).

2.3. Results

According to the preliminary objectives, the PI and PD were assessed for the three groups from our sample (no high-school, high-school and university). Comparison between the three groups was also represented within the present study. The graphic results for each group are represented below.
It can be observed for this group there are only three maximum scores on PI out of twenty. The average score was 3.3 (66%) for the subjects who graduated only eight classes (“gymnasium group”). On the PD scale there are only two maximum results, the average score being 3.25 – a high level of dysfunctionality.

For the “high-school” group there are also only three maximum scores on PI out of twenty. The average score was 3.25 (65%) for the subjects who graduated the high-school. On the PD scale there are three maximum results, the average score being 3.5 – a high level of dysfunctionality and a higher level than the “gymnasium” group.
For the “university” group there are five maximum scores on PI out of twenty. The average score was 3.25 (65%) which is similar to the “high-school” group. On the PD scale there is only one maximum result, the average score being 3.05 – a high level of dysfunctionality, but the score is lower than the others groups scores.

In order to observe better the relation between the PI and PD, we introduced below the average scores on the two dimensions for each group. We can observe there is no big difference between the scores and from this study we have no clear data that there is a strong relation between the PI and PD.

Table 1. Average scores for Professional Identity and the Dysfunctionality.

| Level of study | Prof. Identity | Dysfunctionality |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Gymnasium      | 3.3            | 3.25             |
| High school    | 3.25           | 3.5              |
| University     | 3.25           | 3.05             |

Trying to obtain a clearer picture on these three directions (PI, PD and education) we made some graphical correlations between PI and the education level and the PD and the level of education. The results are shown below and express no significant differences, nor correlation between the education level and PI and PD.
From the above graph we can observe there are no significant differences between the results obtained by the three groups, meaning that the education level make no difference regarding the PI.

Fig. 5 indicates there are no significant differences between the three groups regarding the PD.
4. Conclusions

From the results obtained on the studied sample, we cannot confirm there is a significant correlation between the three factors: Professional Identity, Perceived Dysfunctionality and the education level. Yet it is interesting to observe that the “high-school” group obtained the biggest score on the PD and the “university” group the lowest score on the same dimension. Further studies could confirm or infirm the assertion according to which the university studies make important changes at the cognitive level.

It should be considered also that the professional environment could have a major influence on the PD. The ineffective relations with the colleagues and the manager at work would strongly contribute to a low self-efficacy feeling and a high perceived dysfunctionality.

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