

Study on the Influence of Professional Identity on Work Engagement

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Abstract

In the face of the fierce competition in the field of global higher education and the rapid changes in the knowledge economy environment, it is particularly important and urgent to explore effective strategies to improve the enthusiasm and persistence of university teachers' work investment. To this end, this study takes 293 in-service teachers from Sichuan public universities as the research object, and collects detailed data through the Likert scale to deeply explore the influence mechanism of professional identity on university teachers' work investment. Using regression analysis, the results show that professional identity and its four basic dimensions the work engagement of university teachers is significantly and positively affected by multiple factors, including their professional values, role values, sense of professional belonging, and professional behavior tendencies. This finding provides theoretical basis and practical guidance for improving the investment of university teachers.

Keywords: Professional Identity, Work Engagement, Regression Analysis, SPSSAU

Introduction

As an important part of the national innovation system, higher education undertakes important functions such as personnel training, Scientific inquiry and community services can be seamlessly transitioned and refined. As the main body of higher education, the investment degree of university teachers directly affects the quality of running schools and the level of talent training. However, in recent years, with the deepening of higher education reform and the change of social environment, university teachers are faced with more and more work pressure and career challenges, and some teachers have problems such as job burnout and insufficient work engagement, which seriously affect the enduring progress and sustainable advancement of colleges and universities.

Professional identity refers to an individual's positive evaluation of the occupation they are engaged in, and it is an important factor in stimulating work motivation, enhancing job satisfaction and happiness. Research shows that professional identity has a significant impact on employees' work attitudes, behaviors and organizational commitment. For university teachers, a strong sense of professional identity can stimulate their intrinsic work motivation, prompting them to be more proactive in engaging in teaching, research and social services, thereby increasing their work engagement. This study mainly explores the impact of professional identity on work engagement of university teachers. The research results will provide theoretical basis and practical guidance for university administrators to formulate relevant policies and measures to promote their work engagement.

Literature Review

Professional identity is a core concept in psychological and sociological research, which describes the depth of an individual's cognitive understanding, emotional acceptance, and active behavioral commitment to the occupation they are engaged in. This idea is rooted in identity theory, underlining the importance of consistency between cognition and emotion in the development of one's self concept, as a means for individuals to affirm their professional identities. (Fitzgerald, 2020).

Professional identity spans various dimensions. These include attitudinal inclination, which pertains to an individual's favorable disposition towards their work and their eagerness to employ it as a pivotal aspect in defining themselves. Then there is inherent typical intention, which reflects an individual's identity through occupational attributes. And finally, identity intention, which realizes an individual's distinct status within the social group through social comparison.

In recent years, research on teachers' professional identity has shown a trend of diversified structural orientations. While the bulk of current studies have initiated from the overarching concept of professional identity and formulated relevant theoretical architectures according to the features of their research subjects, substantial discrepancies remain in the specific structural aspects of professional identity. Among them, Wei Shuhua (2008) research has made important theoretical contributions in this field.

Via a succession of stringent hypothesis tests and theoretical formulations, she innovatively analyzed and redefined the structural dimensions of teachers' professional identity from three psychological standpoints: cognition, emotion, and behavioral tendency. Her research results ultimately established a four-dimensional scale of teachers' professional identity: professional values (reflecting teachers' internalized cognition of the value of the education profession), role values (indicating the degree to which teachers identify with the importance of their social roles), professional belonging (representing teachers' psychological closeness and sense of belonging to the professional group), and professional behavioral tendency (measuring teachers' behavioral intentions and actual behaviors in professional activities).

This fourdimensional scale has garnered widespread citation and acknowledgment in subsequent research endeavors and has established itself as a pivotal theoretical foundation in the realm of teachers' professional identity studies. The research framework of this paper is

based on this, further exploring the structure of teachers' professional identity and its influencing mechanisms.

The core concept of work engagement was first put forward by Kahn in 1990. He took the lead in defining the state of employees' total involvement in work, which covers the deep involvement at three levels: physical, cognitive and emotional. There is no consensus or unified standard on the dimension division of work engagement research. Different theories and scholars have conducted multiple and in-depth discussions on work involvement from their own perspectives, and put forward different constitutive dimensions. This study adopts three dimensions of physical engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement (Rich et al. ,2010). Physical Engagement refers to the physiological activation state and the degree of physical energy input shown by an individual at work, emphasizing the positive behavior performance shown by an individual at work. Emotional Engagement refers to an individual's emotional attachment and psychological identification with the job and its related roles, focusing on the positive emotional states experienced by the individual at work. Cognitive Engagement refers to an individual's level of concentration and mental resource investment at work, emphasizing the individual's deep thinking and concentration on work.

Methodology

Based on a systematic review and in - dep analysis of the existing literature, this research borrows from the mature scales developed by domestic and international scholars. It takes teachers in public undergraduate institutions in Sichuan Province as the research subjects.

Through questionnaire survey and quantitative research method, the internal relationship and mechanism between teachers' professional identity and job engagement are deeply discussed. In this study, SPSSAU statistical analysis software was used to conduct a comprehensive descriptive statistical analysis on the sample data, in order to reveal the basic characteristics and distribution rules of teachers' job involvement. At the same time, through the regression analysis method, the causal relationship between job involvement and occupational identity is further discussed, and the mechanism of each dimension of occupational identity on job involvement is deeply analyzed. This study provides an important empirical basis for understanding the impact of teachers' professional identity on job engagement and its functional path.

Results

In this paper, an electronic questionnaire survey was conducted by using the questionnaire star platform. The author collected comprehensive data from 300 university teachers within one month. A total of 300 questionnaires were sent out, and 293 questionnaires were effectively collected, with an effective recovery rate of 97.6%. This study employed scales to measure all the core variables. SPSS was used to analyze the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, and it was found that Cronbach's Alpha=0.97 and KMO=0.89, indicating that the internal consistency and validity of the questionnaire were good, and further analysis of the data could be conducted.

Descriptive Statistics

The personal information in the questionnaire was made descriptive statistics in spss, and frequency analysis was carried out on the educational background, professional title and marital status of the surveyors respectively. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Marital Status	Divorced	21	7.2	7.2	7.2
	Single	123	42	42	49.1
	Married	149	50.9	50.9	100
Educational Background	doctor	91	31.1	31.1	31.1
	Master	182	62.1	62.1	93.2
	Undergraduate	20	6.8	6.8	100
Professional Title	Senior	18	6.1	6.1	6.1
	Deputy Senior	90	30.7	30.7	36.9
	Intermediate	177	60.4	60.4	97.3
	Primary	8	2.7	2.7	100

Note : Among the marital status, 149 teachers were married, accounting for the largest proportion (50.9%); Among the educational background, 182 were master students, accounting for the largest proportion (62.1%); Among the titles, 177 were intermediate titles, accounting for the largest proportion (60.4%).

ANOVA

One-Way ANOVA is used to assess whether three or more independent groups have significant differences in the means of a continuous dependent variable. In order to explore whether different individual characteristics have different effects on work engagement, one-way variance test was conducted for education background, professional title, working age and professional identity respectively. The test results are shown in Table 2:

Table 2
ANOVA test of professional identity

		Sum of Squares	df	Sum of Squares	df	Sum of Squares	df	Sum of Squares	df	Sum of Squares	df
Marital Status	Between Groups	39.403	57	0.691	2.175	0					
	Within Groups	74.678	235	0.318							
Educational Background	Between Groups	28.641	57	0.502	1.812	0					
	Within Groups	65.154	235	0.277							
Professional Title	Between Groups	44.35	57	0.778	2.34	0					
	Within Groups	78.128	235	0.332							
Working Age	Between Groups	130.651	57	2.292	2.112	0					

Within Groups 255.041 235 1.085

Note: The first Sig <0.05, It shows that different marital status has significant differences in work engagement ;

The second Sig <0.05, It shows that different educational background has significant differences in work engagement ;

The third Sig <0.05, It shows that different professional title has significant differences in work engagement ;

The fourth Sig >0.05, It shows that different working age has not significant differences in work engagement.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is to determine the extent and direction of the influence of one or more independent variables (independent variables) on the dependent variables (response variables), and to build a mathematical model to describe this relationship. In this study, statistical analysis software SPSSAU was used to conduct regression analysis in order to deeply explore the impact of professional identity on university teachers' job engagement. By combing and summarizing the literature on the variables occupational identity and work involvement, occupational identity, occupational values, role values, occupational belonging, and occupational behavior tendency are each used as independent variables, while work involvement serves as the dependent variable. The regression outcomes for Models 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are presented in Table 3:

Table 3

Regression analysis of professional identity on work engagement

	Dependent variable: work engagement				
	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4	Model5
Professional Identity	0.327**				
Professional Values		0.275**			
Professional Behavior Tendency			0.296**		
Role Values				0.253**	
Professional Sense of Belonging					0.243**
t	3.714	6.793	7.289	5.806	5.334
R ²	0.045	0.137	0.154	0.104	0.089
Adj.R ²	0.042	0.134	0.151	0.101	0.086
F	F (1,291)=13.791,p=0.000	F (1,291)=46.141,p=0.000	F (1,291)=53.123,p=0.000	F (1,291)=33.708,p=0.000	F (1,291)=28.457,p=0.000

Note: As evidenced in Model 1, a linear regression analysis has been conducted, with professional identity serving as the predictor variable and job engagement as the outcome variable,

and the R-square value of the model is 0.045, which means that professional identity can explain 4.5% of the change of job engagement. When the model is tested for F, it is found that the model passes the F test ($F=13.791$, $p=0.000<0.05$), which means that professional identity must have an impact on work engagement. The final concrete analysis shows that the regression coefficient value of professional identity is $0.327(t=3.714, p=0.000<0.01)$, which means that professional identity will have a significant positive impact on work engagement. As can be seen from Model2, the linear regression analysis is carried out with professional values as independent variables and work engagement as dependent variables, and the R - square value of the model is 0.137. This suggests that professional values are capable of explaining 13.7% of the fluctuations in work engagement.

In the course of conducting the F - test on the model, it was determined that the model successfully passed the test ($F = 46.141$, with a p - value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05). This result suggests that professional values exert an influence on job engagement. The final in - depth analysis reveals that the regression coefficient of professional values is 0.275 ($t = 6.793$, $p = 0.000 < 0.01$). This finding indicates that professional values have a significantly positive influence on work engagement. According to Model3, the linear regression analysis is carried out by taking professional behavior tendency as the independent variable and work engagement as the dependent variable, and the R-square value of the model is 0.154, which means that professional behavior tendency can explain 15.4% of the reasons for the change of work engagement. During the F-test of the model, it was found that the model passed the F-test ($F=53.123$, $p=0.000<0.05$), which means that professional behavior tendency will definitely have an impact on work engagement. The final concrete analysis shows that: The regression coefficient value of professional behavior tendency is $0.296(t=7.289, p=0.000<0.01)$, which means that professional behavior tendency will exert a notable positive influence on work engagement.

According to Model4, the linear regression analysis is conducted with role values as independent variables and work engagement as dependent variables, and the R-square value of the model is 0.104, which means that role values can explain 10.4% of the change of work engagement. During the F-test of the model, it was found that the model passed the F-test ($F=33.708$, $p=0.000<0.05$), which means that the role values must have an impact on the work engagement. The final concrete analysis shows that: The regression coefficient of role values is $0.253(t=5.806, p=0.000<0.01)$, which means that role values have a significant positive impact on work engagement.

As can be seen from Model5, the linear regression analysis is carried out with professional belonging as the independent variable and work engagement as the dependent variable, and the model's R - square value is 0.089. This shows that professional belonging can explain 8.9 % of the fluctuations in work engagement. When performing an F - test on the model, it was found that the model successfully passed the F - test ($F = 28.457$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). This finding suggests that a professional sense of belonging does have an impact on work engagement.

The final in - depth analysis shows that the regression coefficient of professional belonging is $0.243 (t = 5.334, p = 0.000 < 0.01)$. This implies that professional belonging has a significant positive impact on work engagement.

Discussion and Conclusion

Regarding marital status, teachers with varying marital situations exhibit significant differences in professional identity and its four dimensions, which aligns with the research findings of Yao Ying (2015). Concerning academic background, teachers of different educational attainments demonstrate notable differences in professional identity and the four dimensions, echoing the research results of Yang Chunyan (2013). When it comes to professional titles, teachers with distinct professional titles show marked differences in professional identity and its four dimensions, paralleling the research outcomes of Lu Xiaoxiao and Zhou Huimei (2016). In the aspect of working years, teachers with different lengths of service also display significant differences in professional identity and the four dimensions. This is consistent with the research results of Chen Xu (2013) as well as Feng Rong and Jiang Haiyan (2024).

There is a significant positive correlation between teachers' professional identity and its four dimensions and job engagement. This conclusion is in line with the research findings of Cheng Li and Chen Shuyi (2021), as well as Chen Qingli (2021). Role values are the basis of teachers' professional identity. When teachers deeply understand the profound Value of education to individual growth and social development, they will have a strong sense of mission and responsibility. Teachers with clear role values are often able to transcend their personal interests and regard education as a noble cause, in order to fully engage in teaching practice with heightened enthusiasm and focus, the tendency towards professional behavior serves as the fundamental impetus for a teacher's professional growth. Teachers with positive professional behavior tendency show continuous professional growth willingness and active teaching innovation spirit. They not only pay attention to the improvement of teaching quality, but also actively participate in educational research and teaching reform, and improve teaching effectiveness by constantly updating educational concepts and improving teaching methods. The value of professional identity reflects the degree of fit between teachers' personal values and professional requirements. When teachers' educational philosophy is highly aligned with their personal values, they will see educational work as an important way to achieve self-worth, maintain a strong belief in the face of professional challenges, and strive for excellence in their work. Professional sense of belonging is an important guarantee for teachers to obtain emotional support and professional development. When teachers feel the care of the school organization and the support of their colleagues, they will build a strong sense of belonging to the educational community, and teachers are more willing to work for the common educational goals, thus improving their work engagement and professional happiness.

Recommendations

In order to give full play to the positive role of professional identity and its four dimensions in promoting teachers' work engagement, Here are the suggestions proposed:

First, strengthen the role value cognition. Teachers' cognition of the social significance of education work directly affects their sense of mission and responsibility. Schools should do more training and publicity to help teachers deeply understand the social value of education and the significance of individual development. Organize teachers to participate in educational forums, academic exchanges and other activities to broaden their horizons and enhance their sense of professional mission. Regular education lectures are held, and education experts are invited to share the impact of education on social progress. Teachers

are encouraged to participate in educational public welfare activities, such as volunteer teaching, community education, etc., to experience the social value of education. Publicize the deeds of excellent teachers in the school, set an example, and stimulate teachers' professional pride.

Second, cultivate positive professional behavior tendencies. Teachers take the initiative to pursue professional growth and teaching innovation, and promote their continuous commitment to work. Schools should provide teachers with continuous professional development opportunities, encourage them to actively participate in teaching innovation and educational research, and create an organizational atmosphere to support the growth of teachers. Like build a teacher professional development platform and provide online courses, workshops and seminars to help teachers improve their teaching skills. A teaching innovation fund will be set up to support teachers in carrying out teaching experiments and research projects. Encourage teachers to participate in interdisciplinary cooperation, and foster the diversification and creative enhancement of teaching methodologies.

Moreover, to enhance the value of professional identity. The compatibility of teachers' personal values to their career goals determines their professional commitment and resilience. Schools should help teachers combine their personal values with their career goals to enhance their professional identity. Through the guidance of career planning, teachers can clarify the direction of career development and find the meeting point between personal value and career value. Such as conducting career planning workshops to help teachers develop their personal career development goals. Establish a mentor system, with senior teachers guiding new teachers to help them quickly integrate into their professional roles. Organize regular teacher reflection activities, encourage teachers to share their educational experience, and strengthen their professional identity.

Finally, to enhance the sense of professional belonging. Teachers' sense of belonging and team support to the school organization can enhance their sense of work security and satisfaction. Schools should create a supportive and inclusive school culture to enhance teachers' sense of belonging to the school and team cohesion. Through team building and emotional support, the teachers can feel the care and recognition of the organization. For example, organize regular team-building activities, such as group travel, group competitions, etc., to enhance the emotional connection between teachers. Establish a teacher care mechanism, pay attention to teachers' physical and mental health, and provide psychological counseling and support services. A teacher commendation system should be set up to regularly select excellent teachers to enhance their sense of achievement and sense of belonging.

By systematically enhancing teachers' professional identity, it can effectively stimulate their enthusiasm for work, enhance their professional commitment, and promote the stable development of teachers. This will not only help to optimize the educational environment, enhance both the quality of education and teaching, as well as foster the sustained development of education.. Therefore, education administrators should take the construction of professional identity as an important focus of teachers' professional development and education management, create a good career development environment for teachers, and finally realize the common growth of teachers, students and schools.

With the continuous expansion of the scale and improvement of the quality of higher education, university teachers are facing increasing work pressure and challenges. How to enhance the work engagement of university teachers has become an important issue for university administrators. Based on theories such as social identity theory and self-determination theory, this study verified the positive impact of professional identity on work engagement, enriched the theoretical research on the relationship between professional identity and work engagement, and provided a theoretical basis for university administrators to enhance teachers' work engagement. It has significant practical significance for enhancing the work engagement of university teachers and promoting the high-quality development of higher education.

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