

Identity of Organizations: An Analytical Model

Alan Robertson* and Bhadra J H Arachchige**

Identity is generally regarded as an unstructured and amorphous concept, although intensely discussed in a range of academic disciplines. This study draws together established and relevant ideas and research in order to provide a conceptual model for identity, which can be applied to the organizational environment. Understanding identity in relation to organizations is of growing importance in an increasingly competitive and changing business environment, and for its role in underpinning critical organizational perceptual forms such as reputation, image and brand. The conceptual model incorporates three facets of identity—its core elements, the key components of the organizational context which interrelate with the core, and the factors which mediate these relationships. The model is relevant and useful for researchers and practicing managers through the linkage with relevant managerial issues presented in the form of questions to provide a foundation for analyzing the nature and function of identity within an organization using appropriate methodologies.

Introduction

While the academic focus on identity in organizations has gained momentum, it has also increased in complexity. On the one hand, there are in-depth discussions as to:

- What is identity, viewed from a range of academic disciplines (Hirsch, 1982; Albert and Whetten, 1985; Fearon, 1999; Stryker and Burke, 2000; and Weinreich and Saunderson, 2003);
- Who needs identity (Hall, 2000);
- How identity relates to constructs such as brand reputation and image (Abimbola, 2009; and Kenny *et al.*, 2011);
- The differing paradigmatic assumptions underlying the study of identity (Gioia, 1998); and
- Whether identity is a construct, question or metaphor (Albert, 1998; and Puusa, 2006).

The other major approach has been to determine which identities characterize an organization, with an ever-increasing number being identified. At the same time, the breadth of some identities has been expanded to encompass a wider range of roles and images.

* Dean of Studies, Nawaloka College of Higher Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka; and is the corresponding author. E-mail: alan.robertson@nchs.edu.lk

** Senior Lecturer, Human Resource Management, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka. E-mail: bhadra_arachchige@yahoo.com