AN APPLICATION OF ROLE IDENTITY THEORY TO FOSTER ACADEMICS CREATIVITY IN A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

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─Abstract ─

This study tests a model of creative role identity for a sample of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) social sciences fields' academic staffs. Participants included 140 academic staffs from four different faculties in social sciences whereas questionnaires were distributed via drop and collect through designated contact person. The response rate was 54 percent. The descriptive statistics found that self-views of creative behaviour is the dominant factor that influence creative

role identity. The correlation test revealed that there was a significant low positive relationship between creative role identity and creativity practices. Limitation of this study and implications for practice and future research in creativity are also discussed.

Key Words: *Creative Role Identity, Creativity, Perceived Coworker Creativity Expectations, Self-Views Of Creative Behavior.*
JEL Classification: I230 - Higher Education and Research Institutions

1. INTRODUCTION

Research in creativity has started since the baby-boom generation when Joy Paul Guilford has been seriously taken directing the American Psychological Association seriously and focusing on this important area that was neglected then (Petrowski, 2000). According to Sternberg (1999), Guilford had found out that researches in creativity had been ignored based on the facts that only 0.2 percent research has been conducted in Psychological Abstracts within the year 1920-1950. Later, research on creativity has developed and therefore researchers started taking an initiative to explore creativity aspect as an additional knowledge (Oldham & Cummings, 1996), such as studies on factors that lead people to become creative (Paper *et* al., 2000).

It is assumed that creativity is related to one's self concept for example role identity in which touches on how a person sees and perceives oneself and how that could influence one's reaction. Such strong self-concept is important on creative individual in order for them to have the self-image of being creative. This further implies the important demand in investigating and understanding how identity relates to creative action (Farmer *et* al., 2003). There might be various factors that influence the development of one's role identity towards creativity. Farmer *et* al. (2003) in their study proposed a model of creative role identity which indicated that role identity result is based on factors such as coworkers expectation or perceptions, self-views towards creative behavior and also exposure to external culture i.e. United States (US). A good development of role identity creative gives impact on current creativity when an individual is carrying a task. According to Burke (1991), if job that is at hand is not consistent with one's creative identity, the person's identity will be threaten and he/she will avoid from doing related creativity action. Another research conducted by Oldham and

Cummings (1996) also found that employees will perform creative work if they are suitable to their creativity characteristics.

In Malaysia creativity and innovation aspects have been emphasized at the national level in order to encourage competitiveness. This seriousness is shown when Malaysia had declared 2010 as the Year of Innovation and Creativity with the theme of "Celebrating Creativity" (Laupa, 2010). Nevertheless, if compared to other developed countries in producing creativity and innovation products, Malaysia is still in its baby steps in developing its creativity and innovation workforce. In reality, creativity and innovation has really been practiced (Mohd Azhar *et* al., 2003). To be affective, creativity and innovation should be practiced first and only by doing so they will become a culture in our daily life and accepted by all level of Malaysian community (Laupa, 2010).

In comparison individual creativity in science could be seen through tangible products like robots and new medical technology but in social science individual creativity is shown through new ideas in the form of theories application. Lecturers' creative identity in pure sciences might be developed from the experiments, interests and imaginations towards physical things such as robot creation and solar car. On the other hand, social sciences lecturers might have different interests. A research conducted by Aznizah (2004) among Science and Mathematics teachers found that this group of teacher is more creative compared to non-Science and mathematics teachers. It can be said that their creativity are different and tailored to their own field (i.e., pure science versus social sciences) and reflected through their teaching and learning activity.

As mentioned by Farmer *et* al. (2003), although studies on creativity are very important there are little attempt to relate self-identity into creativity by previous researchers. Indeed, such study in the context of Malaysian academic environment is believed to be still lacking. This study investigates the application of role identity into creative action among Research University (RU) academics in UTM. To become RU, UTM continuously strives to develop and enhance international standard and globally recognized quality academic and professional programmes. Its mission which is to lead in the development of creative and innovative human capital with the innovation culture is permeated across all dimensions of the university including teaching and learning, research and development, and also writing and publication. As a RU, UTM has an important role in providing good quality of academic staff especially in terms of creativity. As such, the main

purpose of this study is to understand how academics self-identity relates to creativity. The objective of this study has two folds:

- To identify the dominant factor that contributes into creative role identity among academics
- To examine the relationship between role identity and creativity among academics.

2. METHODOLOGY

This is cross-sectional study using questionnaires for data collection.

2.1. Participants and setting

Respondents of this study were lecturers from social sciences in UTM, Johor Bahru. Faculties involved in this study are Faculty of Management and Human Resource Development (FPPSM), Faculty of Education (FP), Faculty of Islamic Civilisation (FTI) and Language Academy (AB). The total population of this study is 228. Since the population distribution among academic staff in the four faculties is not equal, stratified sampling was adopted in this study.

A total number of 140 questionnaires had been sent to each faculty's representative to be distributed to the respondents. They were given two weeks to complete the survey. After two weeks, a total of 74 questionnaires had been successfully collected.

2.2. Instruments

The construct on factors that influence creative role identity is adapted from Farmer *et* al. (2003). They introduce three elements that influence creative role identity which includes perceived coworker creativity expectations, self-views of creative behaviors, and exposure to U.S culture.

However, based on the suitability of this study context, item 3 on exposure to U.S culture was excluded. Also, previous research (Callero (1985); Goldsmith and Matherly (1987); and Amabile *et* al. (1996) had found that the two remained elements had acceptable realibility, i.e; perceived coworker creativity expectations ($\alpha = 0.74$) and self-views of creative behaviors ($\alpha = 0.91$). For the creativity practices measurement, the study adapts Wongtada and Rice (2008) to suit this context of study. The examples of the items are as follows:

I often think about being creative (Creative Role Identity)

My coworkers in the department think of me as a creative lecturer (Perceived Coworker Creativity Expectations)

Helps other people develop new ideas (Self-views of Creative Behaviors)

When new trends develop in my workplace, I am usually the first to get on board (Creativity Practices)

Respondents selected from a four point scale that was coded as binary variable; Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Agree=3 and Strongly Agree=4. The questionnaire is pretested to assess the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach's alpha values were 0.80 for creative role identity, 0.70 for factor on perceived co-worker creativity expectations and 0.85 for factor on self-views of creative behaviors. For creativity practices, the alpha value was 0.75.

2.3. Data Analysis

The finalized questionnaire survey was then distributed which consist of the original questionnaire used in pilot study due to the reason that all scales had accepted Cronbach's Alpha. Of the study sample (140 academic staffs), only 74 questionnaires were returned to the researchers (f=70, 54 percent). Descriptive statistics such as percentage, frequency and mean score was used to identify factors that influence creative role identity (perceived coworkers creativity expectations and self-views of creative behaviours). Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was employed to analyse the relationship between role identity and creativity practices among academics.

3. FINDINGS

The response rate was 54%. The largest age group was the 40- 49 years old, followed by the 30–39 years old and more than 50 years old. More than half of the respondents were female (66.2 %) and mainly the respondents the respondents were mainly senior lecturers (45.9%) and lecturers (36.5%).

Objective 1: Dominant Factors That Contribute Into Creative Role Identity among Academics

The first objective of this study is to identify dominant factors that contribute into creative role identity among academics. In order to answer this objective, descriptive statistics on the factors that contribute towards creative role identity among academics staff will be explained first. This descriptive statistics are divided into two factors, as follows:

3.1. Perceived coworker creativity expectations

Table 1 presents level of perceived co-worker creativity expectations towards academic staffs' creativity. A total of 13 academic staffs (17.6%) stated that their co-workers influenced their creative identity at a high level. Majority of the respondents, 71 percent assumed that their coworkers perceptions influenced their creative identity at a medium level. Meanwhile, 10 percent (8 academics) mentioned that their co-workers perceptions are not influencing their creative identity. Overall, coworkers perceptions/expectations had influenced the majority of academics staff's identity creative development at UTM, Johor Bahru.

Table 1 Level of Perceived Co-Worker Creativity Expectations

Co-worker Perceptions	*Mean*	*f*	*%*
High	3.01-4.00	13	17.6
Medium	2.01-3.00	53	71.7
Low	1.00-2.00	8	10.9

Table 2 Level of Self-Views of Creative Behaviours

Self-views of Creative Behaviours	*Mean*	*f*	*%*
High	3.01-4.00	33	44.6
Medium	2.01-3.00	40	54.0
Low	1.00-2.00	1	1.4

3.2. Self-Views of Creative Behaviours

Table 2 demonstrates level of self-views of creative behaviours in which a total of 33 social sciences academic staffs (44.6 percent) had shown that a high level of high level of creative behaviours' self-views had influenced their creative role identity. More than half (40 academics staffs, 54.0 percent) of the respondents demonstrate a medium level of creative behaviours' self-views had influenced their creative role identity. Meanwhile, only one academic staff (1.4 percent) shows a low level of creative behaviours' self-views had influenced their creative role identity.

Having explained the descriptive statistics on factors that contribute into creative role identity among academics, Table 3 summarised the overall mean score and standard deviation for each factors. It is apparent that from this table the mean score of self-views of creative behaviors was at a higher level (μ=3.01) compared to the perceived coworker creativity expectations. It can be said that the dominant/main factor contributing academic staff creative role identity is the factor of creative behaviors towards creativity.

Table 3 Mean Score and Standard Deviation for Factors that contribute into Creative Role Identity among Academics

Dimension	*Mean*	*SD*
Perceived co-worker creativity expectations	2.74	0.42
Creative behaviours' self-views	3.01	0.34

Table 4 Correlation between Creative Role Identity and Creativity Practices among Social Sciences Academics

Item	*r*	*p*
Creative Role Identity	.318*	.006

Note: * Significant at the p <0.01 level (2-tailed)

Objective 2: To examine the relationship between role identity and creativity among academics

The second objective of this study was to examine the relationship between role identity and creativity practices among academics. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was employed to analyse the relationship between these two variables. As presented in Table 4 the correlation between role identity and creativity practices occurred at r=0.32, n=70, p<0.0. According to Hair *et* al. (2007) this relationship is considered as positive significant but has low and small strength.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The result of the study demonstrates that social sciences academic staff at UTM, Johor Bahru had a high self-views of creative behaviours especially in performing their task. Apparently, the respondents always utilize creative and critical thinking in performing their task when they tend think of another ways to solve their problems which is related to teaching and learning. It is assumed that professionally as academic staff, they need to have consistent and strong role identity especially when it comes to demonstrating their creativity. In relation to RU status of the university, these academica are expected to be competent, creative and versatile professionals since the university also aims to produce good and versatile students in every aspect. This postulates that as compared to work peer creativity expectation, individuals sense-making perspective or anticipation is rather important to influence them behave creatively. This result of the present study supported a claim by Farmer *et* al. (2003) that "individuals with strong creative identities tend to personalize contextual feedback regarding the value of creativity, they are highly sensitive to the perceived reception of their creativity". In other words, if ones possess weak creative role identities, they will be less concerned about the fact that their organizations value creativity.

Although this present study attempted to adapt Farmer and his colleague's study to prove on what is the dominant factor that influence creative role identity, this study has its limitations and must be taken into account. While their study used regression analysis and found that perceived co-worker expectations was the strongest study predictor of creative role identity, this present study could only be explained through descriptive analysis. Since the number of dimensions used in this study was selected and reduced, the present results fail to regress which one of the tested factors explain creative role identity the most. With minimum number of sample and predictor variables used, the data is less sufficient to meet the assumption criteria in regression analysis.

Results of the second objective of this study suggest that there was a significantly low positive relationship between creative role identity and creativity practices among social sciences academics staffs in UTM, Johor Bahru. Though the relationship is not high, this finding contributes to a growing literature on individual creativity and provides support for future research. While many researchers continued to discuss the correlation between personal factors and creativity (Kim *et* al., 2010; Sousa & Coelho, 2009; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; and Paper *et* al., 2000), this study further enhance theory and practice on self-concept i.e. role identity, for future research. Bandura's social cognitive theory views that people's actions are based on the perspective of "anticipative, purposive and self-evaluating", and that is why one's role identity is central to human agency (Bandura & Locke, 2003) and is influenced by personal or individual source and component. Since creativity is defined as something embedded into individual's life style (Mohd Azhar *et* al., 2004), it is important to further investigate the influence of a person's role identity towards behaving creatively.

In conclusion, despite the limitations described in the paragraphs above, these findings also have some practical implications for organizations. For example, RU universities in Malaysia that has the aspiration of fostering creative and innovative organizational culture may be more successful if they emphasized on motivating and developing creative role identity among members of organizations. Creativity is not a natural act and thus creative role identity needs to be nurtured and motivated. This study recommends that future study also should include student's self-views of creative behaviors since many RU universities have invested a lot particularly in learning, publication and research approach to produce versatile and creative students towards achieving university's mission of RU. Future

practice and research need to further unravel the complex issues of understanding self-concept implication on creativity. On top of that, it would be more meaningful to appreciate the individual or demographic differences such as age, gender, study mainstreams etc. as these would provide interesting and useful contributions.

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