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Vocational Identity Development and the Role of Human Resources Management. A Systematic Literature Review

Abstract

Objectives. The development and strengthening of employees' vocational identity are critical issues in organizations. The absence of professional self-awareness could negatively affect the emotional status of individuals. Moreover, such a condition can lead to a worsening of organizational performance. For this reason, studying the connections between human resources management and identity development is essential. **Data and method.** This exploratory study performs a systematic literature review starting from SCOPUS and EBSCO Host databases to understand how literature debates these connections. **Results.** The majority of extracted articles belong to the following fields: human resources management, psychology, and organizational studies. The connections between these three fields represent a clear theoretical framework for understanding how literature debates professional identity development in organizations. The theories considered in the extracted articles are numerous, but the social identity theory and the social categorization theory are the most cited by the authors. Four main themes emerge from the content analysis: motivation, satisfaction, and well-being of employees; the "crisis" status of human resource management; professional identity development in the workplace; the career adaptation of individuals. **Conclusions.** This study allows confirming how the development of professional identity is critical in organizations. Although the literature shows a considerable interest in vocational identity and human resources management, this study reflects on the possibility of producing further in-depth examinations concerning the connections

between these topics. Further studies should explore vocational identity development through a renovated strategic role of human resources management, no

more limited to a bureaucratic partner.

Keywords: HR; human resources; crisis; vocational identity; career adaptation

1. Introduction

Identity is a structure that defines the self-consciousness of an individual in the world (Erikson, 1963; 1968; 1982). Such structure depends on many domains, e.g., religious, social, or family (Grotevant, 1987). The vocational domain is the most important in the identity development process (Marcia, 1966; 1967; 1980; Porfeli et al., 2011). The development of individuals' vocational identity is firmly connected to their professional contexts. Moreover, it is related to every other identity domain. Satisfaction, motivation, and well-being are influenced by the degree of self-awareness achieved by a person (Guan et al., 2015). Although self-consciousness has many different origins, the most critical one is individuals' perception of how they identify with their professions (Horton et al., 2014).

Building individuals' identity in their organizations, workgroups, and careers is a fundamental element of their professional development. The lack of self-awareness could bring complex pathologies, e.g., anxiety, depression, and burnout, which could generate extremely negative impacts on organizational performances (Steffens et al., 2017). For this reason, understanding the individuals' reactions to their duties and working environments is fundamental. People's perception about their vocational identity could depend on the quality and the variety of their duties (Katz, 1978; Mooney et al., 2016), their hierarchical position (Horton et al., 2014), and their moral and religious values (Hèliot et al., 2020). The achievement of self-awareness has a strong impact on the organizational identification of individuals.

In particular, the literature underlines that reaching vocational identity is critical for creating value in organizations (Armishaw, 2007; Brown, 2015; Klotz et al., 2014). In this sense, human resources (HR) management has a fundamental role in promoting (or limiting) the achievement of vocational self-awareness (Roberts et al., 2005).

An obstacle to this direction can be represented by the particular historical moment that Human Resources (HR) management is experimenting. The professional identity of HR is suffering from the complexities of the labor market. These conditions, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the contemporary concepts of professions and labor, convert HR management's nature, highlighting a moment of "crisis" in this function (Mackay, 2017; Wright, 2008). The conservative idea that associates HR management with an administrative and technical corporate function only linked to personnel supervision and development is outdated and risks transforming HR

management into a semi-profession (Mackay, 2017; Wright, 2008). Therefore, the HR function's identity is trying to evolve from an administrative and bureaucratic department to a strategic partner for the firm (Hallier & Summers, 2011; Pritchard & Fear, 2015; Roche & Teague, 2012; Wright, 2008). In this regard, the literature observed that the HR function has to consider both the employees and the top management's needs. Therefore, it experiments a contradictory position (Mackay, 2017). "The HR function's status and impact are often subjected to the whims of senior and line management and the vagaries of the economic climate" (Hallier & Summers, 2011).

The identity "crisis" experimented by HR function could find a solution in employees' professional identity formation. As previously observed, the HR function could assume a renewed strategic role in organizations, focusing on developing employees' professional identity. In this sense, this article analyzes the research on identity topic, both from a professional viewpoint and for the HR function. Simultaneously, the paper proposes a reflection on the possible connections between professional identity development and the HR function role.

In this regard, following Denyer and Tranfield (2009), this study performs a systematic literature review (SLR) to create a general intersection framework between the professional identity and the HR management role.

In particular, the article is organized as follows. The first section performs a detailed explanation of methodology, research questions, algorithm for articles extraction, and analysis process. In the second section, this study performs a descriptive analysis of the extracted articles. In the third section, the articles' contents are analyzed, with specific attention to the papers' theories and the emerging themes. The paper finds its conclusions with critical reflections on the research questions and opportunities for further research development in this field.

2. Methodology

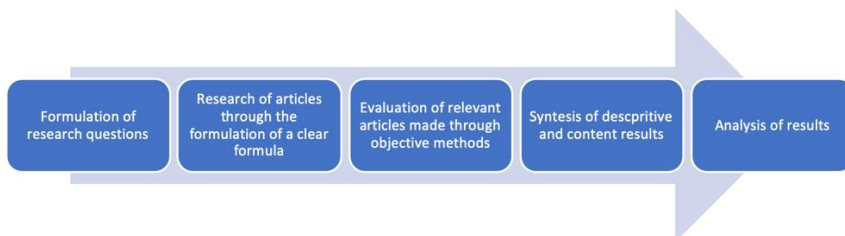
This article aims to achieve a better knowledge of the connections between identity and HR management. This paper is not referring only to employees' identity but also HR departments' professional identity. Identity development is one of the most important topics in the philosophical and psychological sciences. Therefore, the research involved both conceptual and empirical articles.

2.1 – Choice of methodology: the systematic literature review

The methodology chosen to perform this study is the systematic literature review (SLR). This methodology aims to identify the higher-quality papers related to a specific topic, laying the foundation for further research (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006), through a detailed description of the employed

procedure from data extraction to contents analysis (de Zubieta, Fryges, & Jones, 2019). This process has several advantages concerning reliability issues and compared to other literature review processes, e.g., narrative (Fink, 2013). This study performs the SLR through the procedure designed by Grant and Booth (2009), with the initial formulation of research questions (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Phases of SLR employed in this study



Source: Grant and Booth (2009) with the addition of research questions formulation

2.2 – **Research questions**

Identity development is firmly connected to organizations, especially in the light of critical changes in advanced Countries' economies experimented during the last 50 years. In fact, moving from physical production to service provision, the attention to the professional development of employees, talent research, and focus on performance are fundamental topics in any scientific and practical discussion.

To reach a complete comprehension of the existing debate on identity ascribed to organizations, to identify the existence or absence of a solid fundamental theory on the subject, to identify gaps in the literature, and to propose new points of scientific reflection, this article proposes the following three research questions:

RQ1: How literature debates the vocational identity topic in organizations?

RQ2: How literature debates the identity of the HR function?

RQ3: What intersections exist between the development of employees' professional identity and the HR function's identity?

2.3 – **Data extraction and results filtering**

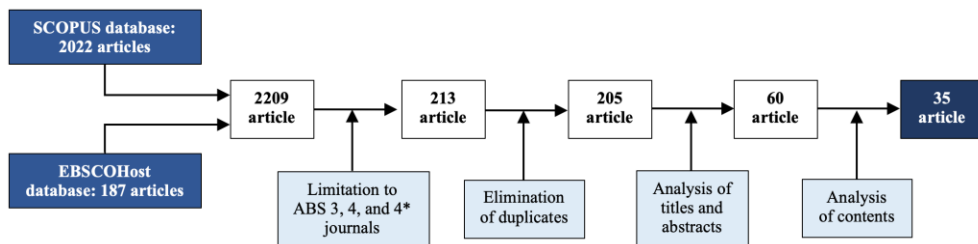
Databases employed for the articles extraction were SCOPUS and EBSCO Host. The first extraction was performed by considering the title, the abstract, and the articles' keywords. The formulas employed in SCOPUS and EBSCOHost is shown in Table 1. The terms "vocational identity", "professional identity", and "occupational identity" are used as synonyms in literature and are often associated with "career identity" (Henry, 1993; Smitina, 2010).

Table 1 – Formula used for articles research in SCOPUS and EBSCOHost

SCOPUS	EBSCOHost
TITLE-ABS-KEY (“human resourc*” OR “personnel”) AND (“vocation*” OR “occupation*” OR “profession*” OR “career”) AND “identity”).	((“human resourc*” OR “personnel”) AND (“vocation*” OR “occupation*” OR “profession*” OR “career”) AND “identity”)

The research was performed in September 2020, without time restrictions. The graphic representation of this process, from the initial extraction to the final group of selected articles, is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Extraction process and results limitation



3. Descriptive analysis of extracted articles

3.1 – Publication year and papers typology

Following Vrontis and Christofi (2019) and Danese et al. (2018), a graph was drawn – Figure 3 – for the time distribution of the publications analyzed in this study, with the distinction between theoretical and empirical papers. The 35 articles were divided into 29 empirical papers (82.86%) and 6 theoretical papers (17.14%). The interest in this topic increased over time. In particular, recent literature seems more concentrated on empirical contributions. One possible reason is that overall identity, professional identity, and social identity have been broadly debated in the literature. Nevertheless, this study calls for additional theoretical contributions.

3.2 – Journals, field, and citations

The journals extracted for this study showed an interesting combination of scientific fields (Table 1; Figure 4). The larger number of articles was identified in the HR management and employment studies field (14 articles; 40%). The following fields are organizational psychology (7 articles; 20%), organizational studies (5 articles; 14.29%), general management, ethics, and corporate social responsibility (3 articles; 8.57%). Combining these fields showed an effective framework for the debate about

vocational identity in organizations and conferred a considerable level of validity to this analysis.

The most cited articles belonged to the organizational psychology field, with 421 citations (Alvesson, 2001), 392 citations (Blader & Tyler, 2009) and 334 citations (Chan & Drasgow, 2001), general management, ethics, and corporate social responsibility field, with 180 citations (Morgan et al., 2005) and human resource management and employment studies field, with 178 citations (Dries, 2013).

3.3 – Number and origins of authors per article

This study referred to the SCOPUS database to analyze authors' provenience per extracted article, depending on the year of publication. UK had the greater number of authors (23; 27.71%), followed by the USA (18 authors; 21.69%), Australia and Finland (both with 6 authors, 7.23%), Taiwan (5 authors; 6.02%), and Canada (4 authors, 4.82%). China, Germany, and New Zealand contributed with 3 authors for each Country (3.61%). Hong Kong, Netherlands, Ireland, and Spain contributed with 2 authors for each Country (2.41%). Finally, Belgium, Ireland (UK), Singapore, and Sweden contributed with 1 author for each Country (1.20%). To be specific, 5 of the 6 authors from Finland were publishing the same article (Björkman et al., 2013).

The number of authors per extracted article was also checked through the SCOPUS database. Before the year 2000, the average number of authors for the extracted articles was 1.50. For the first decade after 2000, this average increase to 1.92. From 2011 to 2020, the average number of authors of extracted articles was 2.86. Therefore, the number of authors has been increasing during the period considered.

Table 1 – Journals, fields and ranking of extracted articles

Journal	Number of articles	Field (ABS)*	Ran king	Citations
Journal of Applied Psychology	2	PSYCH (WOP-OB)	4*	726
Human Relations	5	ORG STUD	4	548
Human Resource Management Review	2	HRM&EMP	3	262
Academy of management review	1	ETHICS-CSR-MAN	4*	180
Journal of Management Studies	1	ETHICS-CSR-MAN	4	174
Administrative science quarterly	1	ETHICS-CSR-MAN	4*	158
Human Resource Management	4	HRM&EMP	4	133
Journal of Vocational Behavior	2	PSYCH (WOP-OB)	4	120
Human Resource Management Journal	4	HRM&EMP	4	66
Journal of Organizational Behavior	1	PSYCH (WOP-OB)	4	60
Computers in Human Behavior	1	INFO MAN	3	55
Journal of marketing	1	MKT	4*	38

Economic and Industrial Democracy	1	HRM&EMP	3	26
International journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	1	SECTOR	3	21
Work, Employment and Society	1	HRM&EMP	4	15
International Journal of Human Resource Management	1	HRM&EMP	3	14
Journal of Occupational Health Psychology	1	PSYCH (WOP-OB)	4	11
New Technology, Work and Employment	1	HRM&EMP	3	9
Technological Forecasting and Social Change	1	SOC SCI	3	6
Studies in Higher Education	1	MDEV&EDU	3	4
Journal of Managerial Psychology	1	PSYCH (WOP-OB)	3	1
Strategic Management Journal	1	STRAT	4*	0

*
 HRM&EMP: Human Resource Management and Employment Studies
 PSYCH (WOP-OB): Psychology (Organizational)
 ETHICS-CSR-MAN: General Management, Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility
 INFO MAN: Information System and Management
 MDEV&EDU: Management Development and Education
 MKT: Marketing
 SECTOR: Sectoral Studies
 SOC SCI: Social Sciences
 ORG STUD: Organization Studies
 STRAT: Strategic Management

Figure 3 – Publication years and papers typology

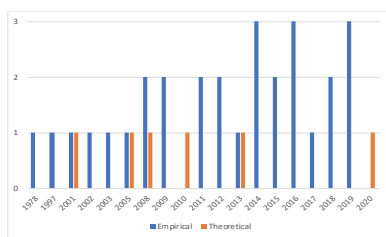


Figure 5 – Provenience of authors of extracted articles

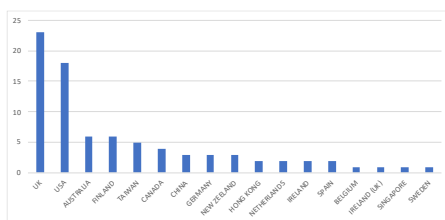


Figure 4 – Percentage distribution of extracted articles based on scientific field

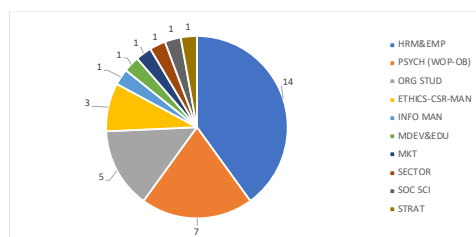
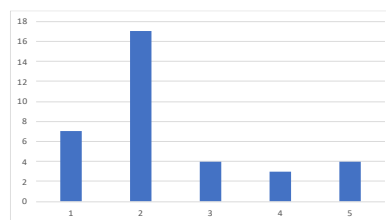


Figure 6 – Number of authors per extracted article



4 – Content analysis

4.1 – *Theories, methods, and statistical units*

In this paragraph, the main theories cited in the extracted articles, the methods used for data gathering, their main findings, and the typologies of statistical units are considered.

The most cited theories in the extracted articles were the social identity theory (12 articles, 34.28%), the social categorization and the self-categorization theory (7 articles, 20%), the cognitive dissonance theory, and the social exchange theory were cited in 2 articles (5.51%). The other 24 cited theories were identified (Table 2).

Table 3 – Articles types, methods, samples and Countries considered in the samples

Authors	Title	Year	Journal	Type	Method	Sample	State
Katz R.	Job longevity as a situational factor in job satisfaction.	1978	Administrative science quarterly	E	Survey	Four distinct governmental organizations	USA
Honeycutt T.L., Rosen B.	Family friendly human resource policies, salary levels, and salient identity as predictors of organizational attraction	1997	Journal of Vocational Behavior	E	Survey	120 EMBA students	USA
Alvesson, M.	Knowledge work. Ambiguity, image and identity	2001	Human Relations	T	Theory formation on existing literature		
Chan K.-Y., Drasgow F.	Toward a theory of individual differences and leadership: Understanding the motivation to lead	2001	Journal of Applied Psychology	E	27-item Lykert-type self-report	1594 male military recruits, 274 junior college students, and 293 undergraduated students	Singapore, USA
Darr A., Scarselletta M.	Technicians, clients, and professional authority: Structured interactions and identity formation in technical work	2002	New Technology, Work and Employment	E	Cross-site analysis of ethnographic studies	External database	
Caldwell, R.	The Changing Roles of Personnel Managers: Old Ambiguities, New Uncertainties	2003	Journal of Management Studies	E	Survey, semi-structured interviews	98 HR managers to the survey, 34 respondents were interviewed.	UK
Farndale E.; Brewster, C.	In search of legitimacy: personnel management associations worldwide	2005	Human Resource Management Journal	E	Focus group and worldwide survey	Personnel management association specialists coming from 22 different countries	Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, UK, USA, Venezuela
Roberts, M. L.; Dutton, J. E.; Spreitzer, G. M.; Heaphy, E. D.; Quinn, R. E.	Composing the Reflected Best-Self Portrait: Building Pathways for Becoming Extraordinary in Work Organizations	2005	Academy of management review	T	Theory formation on existing literature		
Chen, L.-H.	Job satisfaction among information system (IS) personnel	2008	Computers in Human Behavior	E	Questionnaires	210 usable questionnaires from employees belonged to 136 enterprises	Taiwan

Authors	Title	Year	Journal	Type	Method	Sample	State
Wright C.	Reinventing human resource management: Business partners, internal consultants and the limits to professionalization	2008	Human Relations	E	Semi-structured interviews	33 managers employed in 27 large Australian and global organizations during 2004–2008	Australia, Europa, USA, Asia
Walsh K., Gordon J.R.	Creating an individual work identity	2008	Human Resource Management Review	T	Analysis of the literature		
Blader, S. L.; Tyler, T. R.	Testing and Extending the Group Engagement Model: Linkages Between Social Identity, Procedural Justice, Economic Outcomes, and Extrarole Behavior	2009	Journal of Applied Psychology	E	Survey	112 employees of an international financial services organization	USA
Ng, T. W. H.; Feldman, D. C.	Occupational embeddedness and job performance	2009	Journal of Organizational Behavior	E	Survey	175 employees	Hong Kong
Baldry, C.; Hallier, J.	Welcome to the House of Fun: Work Space and Social Identity	2010	Economic and Industrial Democracy	T	Analysis of recent literature; analysis of media reports of contemporary developments, particularly in office interiors, predominantly in the UK and US.		
Hallier J., Summers J.	Dilemmas and outcomes of professional identity construction among students of human resource management	2011	Human Resource Management Journal	E	Semi-structured interviews	24 final-year, full-time students of HRM and joint HRM degrees	UK
Pritchard, K.; Symon, G.	Identity on the line: constructing professional identity in a HR call centre	2011	Work, Employment and Society	E	Observation and participation in meetings, frequent informal discussion, documents, interviews (generic)	10 staff (all) of call center	UK
Roche W.K., Teague P.	Business partners and working the pumps: Human resource managers in the recession	2012	Human Relations	E	Focus groups. Questionnaires. Case-studies.	Focus group (4): 30 senior human resource managers. Questionnaires: managers of firms with more than 50 employees (444 useable responses). Case-studies (20): extracted by multiple sources	Ireland
Wieseke, J.; Kraus, F.; Ahearne, M.; Mikolon, S.	Multiple Identification Foci and Their Countervailing Effects on Salespeople's Negative Headquarters Stereotypes	2012	Journal of marketing	E	Questionnaires	2290 salespeople	USA

Authors	Title	Year	Journal	Type	Method	Sample	State
Björkman, I.; Ehrnrooth, M.; Mäkelä, K.; Snaile, A.; Sumelius, J.	Talent or not? Employee reactions to talent identification	2013	Human Resource Management	E	Web-based survey	930 managers and professionals in 106 subsidiaries of 11 corporations	Finland
Dries N.	The psychology of talent management: A review and research agenda	2013	Human Resource Management Review	T	Literature review (comparative)		
Horton K.E., McClelland C.R., Griffin M.A.	Defined by our hierarchy? How hierarchical positions shape our identifications and well-being at work	2014	Human Relations	E	Survey	10 ships and 789 personnel	UK
Pohler, D.; Willness, C.	Balancing interests in the search for occupational legitimacy: The HR professionalization project in Canada	2014	Human Resource Management	E	Gathering data from public sources	9 website of provincial association, 1 website of national association, 35 universities which have HR programs, 769 job posts	Canada
Wylie, N.; Sturdy, A.; Wright, C.	Change agency in occupational context: Lessons for HRM	2014	Human Resource Management Journal	E	Semi-structured interviews	93 change agents belonged to 24 organizations	UK
Pritchard, K.; Fear, W. J.	Credibility lost: Attempting to reclaim an expert identity in an HR professional context.	2015	Human Resource Management Journal	E	Semi-structured interviews, participation to 70 events (meetings, training session, etc.)	12 training & development team members	UK
Tsai Y.-H., Lin C.-P., Ma H.-C., Wang R.-I.	Modeling corporate social performance and job pursuit intention: Forecasting the job change of professionals in technology industry	2015	Technological Forecasting and Social Change	E	Survey	808 professionals from high-tech firms	Taiwan
Guan Y., Yang W., Zhou X., Tian Z., Eves A.	Predicting Chinese human resource managers' strategic competence: Roles of identity, career variety, organizational support and career adaptability	2016	Journal of Vocational Behavior	E	Survey	220 human resource management professionals	China
Mooney, S. K.; Harris, C.; Ryan, I.	Long hospitality careers – a contradiction in terms?	2016	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality	E	Memory-work, semi-structured interviews, intersectional analysis	31 hospitality professionals with an average of 25 year of hospitality career	New Zealand
Topa, G.; Perez-Larrazabal, J.	Newcomers' learning and co-worker undermining: moderated mediation analysis	2016	Journal of Managerial Psychology	E	Questionnaires	303 full-time employees from different sectors	Spain

Authors	Title	Year	Journal	Type	Method	Sample	State
Mackay M.	Identity formation: professional development in practice strengthens a sense of self	2017	Studies in Higher Education	E	Semi-structured interviews; Survey	Interviews: 18 human resource academics; Survey: 42 HR managers, advisors and business partners	UK
Hu X., Jiang Z.	Employee-oriented HRM and voice behavior: a moderated mediation model of moral identity and trust in management	2018	International Journal of Human Resource Management	E	Survey	251 workers	China
Steffens, N.K.; Yang J., Jetten J., Haslam S.A., Lippman J.	The unfolding impact of leader identity entrepreneurship on burnout, work engagement, and turnover intentions	2018	Journal of Occupational Health Psychology	E	Survey	338 workers	China
Currie G., Spyridonidis D., Oborn E.	The influence of HR practices upon knowledge brokering in professional organizations for service improvement: Addressing professional legitimacy and identity in health care	2019	Human Resource Management	E	Semi-structured interviews; observation	139 people from a R&D unit leadership team and doctors	UK
O'Brien, E.; Linehan C.	Problematising the authentic self in conceptualizations of emotional dissonance	2019	Human Relations	E	Semi-structured interviews; diary study	15 HR managers, directors and generalist	Ireland
Pettit, K.; Crossan M. M.	Strategic renewal: Beyond the functional resource role of occupational members	2019	Strategic Management Journal	E	Semi-structured interviews; items of archival data	50 employees	Canada
Héliot Y., Gleibs I.H., Coyle A., Rousseau D.M., Rejon C.	Religious identity in the workplace: A systematic review, research agenda, and practical implications	2020	Human Resource Management	T	Literature review (systematic)		

In Table 3, methods, numerosity of samples, and Countries considered for sampling in the selected articles are shown. In particular, 19 different gathering data methods were detected during the content analysis of the extracted articles. The most popular method was the survey, used by 13 articles (37.14%), followed by semi-structured interviews (10 articles, 28.57%), literature analysis (5 articles, 14.28%), questionnaires (3 articles, 8.57%), and focus groups (2 articles, 5.71%). All other methods were used in 1 article. Several papers used combined methods for gathering data. Often, semi-structured interviews were combined with other methods (Mooney et al., 2016; O'Brien & Linehan, 2019; Pettit & Crossan 2019) (Figure 7).

During the content analysis, 31 typologies of statistical units were identified (29 articles). Employees were the most popular statistical units, used by 9 articles (31.03%), followed by managers and directors, used by 7 articles (24.14%) and specialists, used by 5 articles (17.24%). Students, organizational institutions, and professional associations were used by 3 articles (10.34%). Workers were used by 2 articles (6.7%). Finally, academics and external sources of information were used by 1 article. In Figure 8, a graph was drawn to summarize the typology of statistical units identified in the extracted articles.

Most of the statistical units used in the 19 empirical papers came from the UK (8 articles, 42.11%), from the USA (7 articles, 36.84%). China followed with 3 papers (15.79%). Statistical units from Ireland, Taiwan, and Canada were used by 2 articles (10.53%). Other provenience of statistical units used in the extracted articles were Australia, Singapore, Finland, Hong Kong, Spain, and New Zealand. In particular, Farndale and Brewster (2005) performed remarkable research used a worldwide sample for its survey. In Figure 9, the provenience of statistical units is shown. Finally, in Table 4, the summary of the extracted articles' main findings is shown.

Table 2 – Cited theories in the extracted articles

Theories	Extracted articles	References cited in extracted papers
Broaden-and-build theory	Roberts et al. (2005)	Fredrickson (2000)
Career construction theory	Guan et al. (2016)	Savickas (2005; 2013)
Career Theory	Mooney, Harris & Ryan (2016)	Sullivan and Baruch's (2009)
Cognitive dissonance theory	Björkman et al. (2013)	Festinger (1957)
	O'Brien & Linehan (2019)	Aronson et al. (1999)
Construal-level theory	Wieseke et al. (2012)	Trope & Liberman (2003); Henderrson (2009)
Contemporary interpretivist identity theory	O'Brien & Linehan (2019)	Alvesson et al. (2008); Alvesson (2010); Ramarajan (2014)

Corporate professionalization	Wylie, Sturdy & Wright (2014)	Muzio et al. (2011)
Emotional contagion theory	Wieseke et al. (2012)	Barsade (2002)
Entity theory & Incremental theory	Dries (2013)	Heslin et al. (2005)
Equity theory and social comparison	Björkman et al. (2013)	Carrell & Dittrich (1978)
Exchange and equity theory	Blader & Tyler (2009)	Thibaut & Kelley (1959); Homans (1961); Blau (1964); Adams (1965)
Grounded theory	O'Brien & Linehan (2019)	Glaser and Strauss (1967); Strauss and Corbin (1990)
Identification theory	Horton et al. (2014)	Kreiner & Ashforth (2004)
Job embeddedness	Ng & Feldman (2009)	Mitchell et al. (2001)
Leader identity entrepreneurship	Steffens et al. (2018)	Reicher & Hopkins (2003); Reicher et al. (2005); Steffens et al. (2014)
Moral identity theory	Hu & Jiang (2018)	Aquino & Reed (2002); Weaver (2006)
Organizational identity theory	Walsh & Gordon (2008)	Dutton et al. (1994)
Organizational support theory	Björkman et al. (2013)	Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro (1990)
Signaling theory	Tsai et al. (2015)	
Social categorization & Self-categorization theory	Baldry & Hallier (2010)	Turner (1985); Turner and Oakes (1997)
	Blader & Tyler (2009)	Turner (1985)
	Hallier & Summers (2011)	Turner (1985)
	Héliot et al. (2020)	Turner et al. (1987)
	Horton et al. (2014)	Corley (2004); Magee & Galinsky (2008)
	Steffens et al. (2018)	Hogg & Terry (2000); Haslam (2001); van Dick (2001); Ashfort, Harrison, & Corley (2008); Blader & Tyler (2009)
	Wieseke et al. (2012)	Turner et al. (1987)
Social exchange theory	Björkman et al. (2013)	Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005)
	Hu & Jiang (2018)	Blau (1964)
Social identity theory	Baldry & Hallier (2010)	Mackie et al. (1990); Oakes et al. (1991); McGarty et al. (1993, 1994); Balaam and Haslam (1998)
	Blader & Tyler (2009)	Tajfel & Turner (1979); Tyler & Blader (2002; 2003)
	Guan et al. (2016)	Tajfel & Turner (1986)
	Hallier & Summers (2011)	Tajfel & Turner (1979)
	Héliot et al. (2020)	Tajfel & Turner (1979; 1985)

	Honeycutt & Rosen B. (1997)	Tajfel & Turner (1985)
	Horton et al. (2014)	Tajfel & Turner (1979)
	Steffens et al. (2018)	Tajfel & Turner (1979); Turner et al. (1987); Ashforth & Mael (1989); Ellemers (2012)
	Topa & Perez-Larrazabal (2016)	Hogg (2005); Goldman (2006)
	Tsai et al. (2015)	Ashforth & Mael (1989); Turban et al. (2001)
	Walsh & Gordon (2008)	Turner (1982)
	Wieseke et al. (2012)	Tajfel & Turner (1979); Hogg & Abrams (1988)
Social learning theory	Topa & Perez-Larrazabal (2016)	Bandura (1977)
Theory of leader development	Chan & Drasgow (2001)	
Trait and control models	Pohler & Willness (2014)	Legge & Exley (1975); Preece & Nicol (1980)
Trait-activation theory	Guan et al. (2016)	Tett & Burnett (2003)
Trichotomy of Needs Theory	Chen (2008)	Harrell & Stahl (1984)
Uncertain identity theory	Wieseke et al. (2012)	Hogg (2000)

4.2 - Main findings of extracted articles and further research suggestions

Performing the content analysis, this study gathers in Tables 4 and 5 the main findings of each article and the suggestions for further research proposed by the authors.

Figure 7 – Methods of data gathering employed in extracted articles

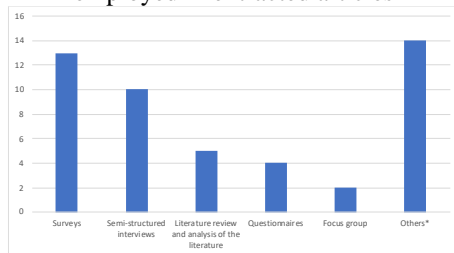
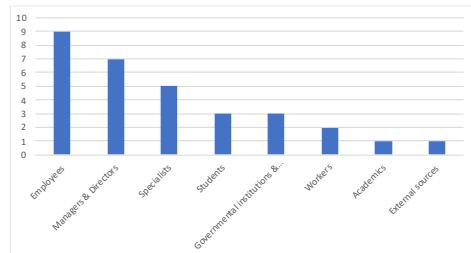


Figure 8 – Types statistical units considered in selected articles



* Direct observation, Self-report, Cross-site analysis, Case-study, Items from archival data, Diary study, Public sources of data, Analysis of media reports of contemporary developments, Memory-work, Intersectional analysis, Observation and participation in meetings, Frequent informal discussion, Documents, Interviews (generic).

Figure 9 – Statistical units provenience

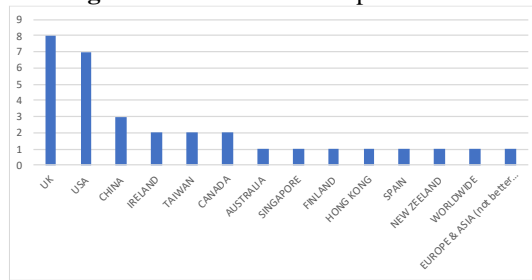


Table 4 – Main findings of extracted articles

Article’s authors	Main findings
Katz (1978)	Job and organizational longevity affect the relationship between job satisfaction and the five tasks dimension: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback-from-job.
Honeycutt & Rosen (1997)	Salient identity influences the individual career decision. Flexible career policies attract all identity categories, but they diverge in the level of attraction for traditional or dual career paths.
Alvesson (2001)	The role of knowledge in knowledge-intensive organizations is ambiguous. Knowledge-intensive workers and organizations could experiment with instability, arbitrariness, and vulnerability.
Chan & Drasgow (2001)	Personality, values, and past leadership experience are related to the motivation to lead through leadership self-efficacy. The general cognitive ability is unrelated to motivation to lead. Motivation to lead assessed at the point of organizational entry is at least predictive of subsequent behavioral ratings of leadership potential.
Darr & Scarselletta (2002)	The professional identity of technicians depends on their interactions with clients and professional collaborators.
Caldwell (2003)	The HR function is rarely able to - and/or the HR specialists are rarely willing to - reinvent its position in the organizations.
Fardale & Brewster (2005)	Professional associations support the legitimization of HR identity, but they cannot be considered the occupation controller. The enrollments to HR management studies are diffused, showing a substantial legitimization of the HR profession, but the certification is not compulsory to work in an HR function.
Roberts et al. (2005)	The paper adds a means for human resource management: “creating contexts that maximize the possibility for employees to envision and enact their best-self.”
Chen (2008)	IS personnel’s job satisfaction is (1) independent from motivation achievement; (2) positively related to job characteristics, feedback, professionalism, and autonomy.
Walsh & Gordon (2008)	Individuals’ professional identity can be created through organizational identification based on the improvement of distinction and status obtained by individuals from the membership in professional groups.

Wright (2008)	Human resources management's professional identity is not directly affected by the achievement of greater self-awareness and status originated by acquiring a role as a business partner / internal consultant.
Blader & Tyler (2009)	(1) Employees' social identity has strong relations with their extra-role behaviors. (2) Social identity explains the impact of experimented procedural justice and economic outcomes resulting from group membership. (3) The motivational power contributes to the employees' social identity development.
Ng & Feldman (2009)	Job embeddedness contributes to greater performance, greater creativity, and less counterproductive behaviors at work.
Baldry & Halier (2010)	Reducing the emotional autonomy of personnel can divide employees' identity and the identity of the organization. The employees show the identity the management expects to see, hiding their creative identity.
Hallier & Summers (2011)	Human resources management students rarely change their professional goals concerning participation in the human resources profession. Nevertheless, they reach a greater awareness of what "doing HRM" means adapting their idea to professional expectations and learning experiences.
Pritchard & Symon (2011)	The re-orientation of the strategic role of HR has consequences that challenge the results in the literature. In fact, after this re-orientation, HR managers tried to restore their professional identity, underlining their previous role in welfare, perceived as vacant after this change.
Roche & Teague (2012)	HR managers are acquiring new strategic competencies. Therefore, their participation in the definition of firms' strategy has to go beyond the simple reaction to retrenchment measures.
Wieseke et al. (2012)	The results show that the corporate headquarters' physical distance enhances sales representatives' work team identification and diminishes their organizational identification.
Björkman et al. (2013)	People who have been identified as talented have more probability of developing positive attitudes and competencies at work. Therefore, informing talent individuals to have been identified as talent improve their motivation.
Dries (2013)	The authors found discrepancies, theoretical perspectives, tensions, and assumptions in talent management literature.
Horton, McClelland, Griffin (2014)	Organizational identification is connected to the different hierarchical levels fulfilled by employees. Operational, middle-level, and strategic level personnel identify with career and professional groups, careers, and organizations.
Pohler & Willness (2014)	The philosophy of HR strategy has to be clarified. A more strategic role of HR management could result in a decrease in stakeholders' recognition. It could hinder professionalization by reducing external legitimacy.
Wylie, Sturdy, Wright (2014)	(1) Credibility is directly connected to perceived expertise, which is relative and domain-oriented. It can be affected by the occupational background. (2) The expert status is fragile, and the changing nature of management functions influences it. (3) HR has to convince others about the value of its activities that are

	performed in the bottom line. (4) Credibility is fundamental for facing the ambiguity problem in the HR function.
Guan et al. (2015)	Professional identity, career variety, and organizational support are predictors for the strategic competence of HR managers. This relation is mediated by career adaptation.
Pritchard & Fear (2015)	The resignation of experts belonging to T&D groups can compromise the credibility of that group, threatening its identity.
Tsai et al. (2015)	Perceived corporate ability, positive publicity, and CSR are directly related to pursuit intention and indirectly related to word-of-mouth. Career expectations mediate these relationships.
Topa & Perez-Larrazabal (2016)	Negative and inadequate mentoring may increase co-workers' undermining and negatively influence newcomers' learning, reducing their embeddedness. If the level of group identity is high, this effect declines.
Mooney, Harris & Ryan (2016)	(1) A necessary condition for gaining the respect of other peers is the devotion to the job and hospitality passion. (2) Professional identity is directly connected to co-workers and customer esteem. This moderates the negative view of hospitality careers. (3) The perception of control and variety enhance the longevity of careers. (4) The longevity of a career is directly connected to a positive workplace and the well-being of workers. (5) Four career enablers that help career progression: gaining qualifications; undergoing training and development; receiving the backing from influential mentors; demonstrating flexibility. (6) Social competencies facilitate access to developmental opportunities.
Mackay (2017)	Knowledge capabilities are expanded by continuous development, maintaining the coherence of vocational identity.
Steffens et al. (2017)	Employees' perception of leaders' identity entrepreneurship increases work engagement and decrease burnout and turnover intentions.
Hu & Jiang (2018)	Employees' morale identity and personal and familiar needs should be integrated into HR policies to promote employees' voices.
Currie, Spyridonidis & Oborn (2019)	Knowledge sharing of employees depends on their perception of HR policies' effect on their identity and legitimacy.
Héliot et al. (2019)	Professional and religious identity are connected through the following variables: personal preferences, the fit between religious identity and job-related concerns, and the organization's policies, practices, and expectations.
Pettit & Crossan (2019)	(1) There is a symbiotic relationship between the organization, occupational members, and product created. (2) Occupational members both facilitate and disrupt strategic renewal in organizations. (3) Non-managerial actors are fundamental in doing strategies. (4) Affirming is critical during collaborative work.
O'Brien & Linehan (2019)	People that are experimenting with emotional dissonance face conflict emotions because of the competition between selves and values. Their success is not to be themselves, but to identify what self needs to be salient in a certain situation.

Table 5 – Opportunities for further research

Article	Proposals for further researches
Katz (1978)	(1) Longitudinal studies for understanding if an inverse relationship between professional satisfaction and job position exists. (2) Understanding the meaning of “new job”. (3) Understanding individual and occupational differences in job longevity context: role of possible moderators (e.g. higher-order need strength, tolerance for uncertainty, and need for achievement and affiliation).
Honeycutt & Rosen (1997)	(1) Is there a minimum salary limit below which it becomes important? (2) Do men with salient family identities take more time to fulfill their family obligations?
Chan & Drasgow (2001)	(1) Are extroversion and sociability general antecedents for self-efficacy leadership? (2) Do people who are open to experience and more extroverted have more leadership experiences in the past? (3) Verify that general cognitive ability is not an antecedent of motivation to lead with large samples. (4) Study of the empirical relationships between individual-differences constructs and ultimate performance criteria to find theoretical explanations for connections. (5) Call for more empirical papers on motivation to lead.
Farndale & Brewster (2005)	(1) Empirical works about the difference between certified and non-certified HR managers’ effects in their respective workplaces. (2) Meaning of professionalism in HR.
Roberts et al. (2005)	(1) Study of mechanism that enhances or reduces the probability of positive change in Reflected Best-Self Portrait. (2) Examining the quality of the relationship between employees and feedback givers. (3) Study the discrepancy between employees’ own image and others’ reflections. (4) Examining the influence of macro-social context on Reflected Best-Self Portrait.
Chen (2008)	(1) Integrating more variable for studying job satisfaction: job performance, job behavior, job attitude. (2) Organizational factors should be included in a job satisfaction study.
Walsh & Gordon (2008)	Call for more empirical papers on the creation of the individual work identity.
Blader & Tyler (2009)	(1) Alternative research methods to understand causal relations between social identity and employees’ extra-role behaviors. (2) Explore respect as an important element of social identity and (intragroup) relational identity. (3) Study the relations between social identity and other variables (e.g., affective commitment).
Ng & Feldman (2009)	(1) Examination of relations between embeddedness, performance, and turnover. (2) Relations between embeddedness and the dimensions of performance. (3) Investigating overlapping conditions of leaving an organization and leaving an occupation.
Hallier & Summers (2011)	Study the outcomes of vocational identity in other nascent professions [other than human resources].
Pritchard & Symon (2011)	The re-orientation of the strategic role of HR has consequences that challenge the results in the literature. In fact, after this re-orientation, HR managers tried to restore their professional identity, underlining their previous role in welfare, perceived as vacant after this change.

Wieseke et al. (2012)	(1) Examining the cross-industry stability, decreasing organization identification of salespeople who work far from headquarters. (2) Investigate the effect of positive stereotypes in marketing and management.
Björkman et al. (2013)	(1) Longitudinal studies to understand if the awareness of being identified as talented could encourage better alternatives in the labor market. (2) Examine the effect of cultural and institutional factors on the turnover of employees. (3) Comparative and qualitative analysis for the effect of supervisors' communication on talented people's talent status.
Dries (2013)	The authors have collected several further research suggestions in Table 4 of their paper. Call for more empirical papers.
Horton et al. (2014)	(1) Longitudinal analysis to understand if workplace identification changes may be triggered by key changes in an individual's career. (2) Longitudinal analysis to understand if group norms and values can be expected to be socially constructed, while group members develop an understanding of what is expected and appropriate at different hierarchical levels. (3) How the mechanisms through which identification processes are built and evolve?
Pohler & Willness (2014)	Investigate how the HR function's potentially conflictual role, who has to balance organization and personnel interests, is faced by HR managers.
Wylie, Sturdy & Wright (2014)	(1) Comparison between the role of change agents in how HR functions has a different status. (2) Study the role of change agents in a more consolidated HR field (e.g., centers of excellence).
Tsai et al. (2015)	Concerning the candidate's occupation preferences, verify the role of other factors: candidates' cultural preferences, subjective adaptation, network comfort, neuroticism, extroversion, pleasantness, openness, awareness.
Mooney, Harris & Ryan (2016)	(1) Quantitative test of variables influencing career progressions. (2) Qualitative and quantitative research on the effect of age, gender, and ethnicity on career longevity.
Topa & Perez-Larrazabal (2016)	Evaluate the use of more objective measures for strengthening the relationship between negative mentoring and co-worker undermining (also considering international contexts).
Steffens et al., (2017)	(1) Extension of the work to understand other moderators' position of the leader's identity entrepreneurship. (2) Clarify if there is a dark side of identity entrepreneurship: less beneficial effects on employee health. (3) How does the composition of multiple workgroups relate to burnout, employee engagement, and turnover?
Mackay (2017)	(1) How do other professions look at continuous development? (2) Specific claims of the profession in aspiring to professional status. (3) How do established professions theorize professional learning? (4) Does compulsory CPD limit understanding of professional development?
Hu & Jiang (2018)	(1) Examine differential effects of employee-oriented HR management on the promoting and prohibitive speech behavior. (2) Ask colleagues and supervisors of respondents to evaluate vocal behaviors: use multiple

	raters to have multiple voices. (3) Definition and use of a complete scale of variables to acquire an exhaustive picture of trust and voice.
Currie et al. (2019)	Increase contexts for evaluating the interaction of HR practices and organizations.
Guan et al. (2015)	(1) Examine the specific roles of these dimensions [vocational identity, organizational support, career variety] in developing HR managers' strategic skills. (2) HR experience variables to explain the effect of vocational identity. (3) Experimental and longitudinal designs to understand mutual effects of vocational identity, career variety and organizational support, career adaptability, and strategic skills.
O'Brien & Linehan (2019)	(1) Examination about building multiple selves and the practices that help or hind this process. (2) Analysis of the influence of specific identity domains on dissonance.
Pettit & Crossan (2019)	(1) Examine the distinction between tensions and alert on organizational risks. (2) Analyzing the long-term consequences of strategic renewal for organizations and occupations. (3) Analyzing the role of timing and models of occupational identity for future strategic initiatives.
Hèliot et al. (2020)	(1) Examine the effects of diversity policies on individuals, groups and organizations with different religious identities. (2) Examine the effects of faults in activating religious identity compared to other forms of identity in the workplace. (3) Examine the forms of workplace climate and related HR policies and practices to activate or minimize fault lines derived from religious identity.

4.3 – Analysis of emerging results from extracted articles

In this paragraph, the results emerging from the content analysis of the selected articles are considered. In particular, the paragraph is focused on the research questions RQ1 and RQ2. The study examines the various thematic areas that emerged during the in-depth inspection of the articles' content extracted from the existing literature, highlighting the various authors' considerations, conflicts, and crises.

4.3.1 – Motivation, satisfaction, and well-being of employees

Employees' satisfaction is firmly linked to their experiences in organizations, their professional and private well-being, and the harmony between their internal and external values, which enhance the expression of the authentic self (Hèliot et al., 2020). Their well-being is strongly connected to their organizational identification and leaders' actions. It can limit the onset of complex pathologies as stress, anxiety, and depression (Horton et al., 2014; Steffens et al., 2017) that have physical and psychological consequences.

One of the antecedents of satisfaction is motivation, which is positively related to firms' versatility (Katz, 1978), ability to valorize talents (Björkman et al., 2013), employees' perceived degree of professional and emotional autonomy (Baldry & Hallier, 2010; Chen, 2008), and opportunities to influence their organizations (Katz, 1978). The more these variables are

developed, the more passion beyond commitment will be developed by employees (Dries, 2013), who will achieve professional identification fundamental for productivity and personal growth (Guan et al. 2015). Obviously, job longevity relies on developing such requisites (Katz, 1978; Mooney et al., 2016).

Ensuring the motivation is complex because of the needs connected to organizational identity change according to employees' hierarchical positions (Katz, 1978). Moreover, firms' normative nature impedes the complete support of every employee's specific needs (Dries, 2013).

4.3.2 – The “crisis” of HR management

In the examined literature, there are several pieces of evidence about the status of “crisis” that HR has been experimenting in the last two decades. In particular, the literature asks if HR function has the necessary competencies to achieve a professional legitimation (Farndale & Brewster, 2005; Guan et al., 2015), that is widely desired by HR managers (Mackay, 2017) despite some resistance of other firms' departments, e.g., accountancy and finance (Wright, 2008). HR is sometimes defined as a semi-profession (Mackay, 2017; Wright, 2008), and the strategic renewal of the profession is seen as rather improbable (Caldwell, 2003; Pohler & Willness, 2014; Pritchard & Symon, 2011). Although the professional associations are growing in their number, formal rules for legitimizing the HR profession still do not exist.

A dual perspective characterizes the HR function. On the one hand, there is the idea of HR as an administrative partner devoted to adaptive interventions following organizational and labor market crises (Guan et al., 2015). On the other hand, the HR function is seen as a possible future strategic partner, despite positions that underline this function's weakening due to this new interpretation (Roche & Teague, 2012).

The HR function is experimenting with a contradictory position. In fact, it has to support the employees' needs and, at the same time, coordinate the management processes (Mackay, 2017). For this reason, the legitimation of the HR profession is critical for improving its credibility (Wylie et al., 2014) and to configure HR function as real strategic support for the firms (Guan et al., 2015). To achieve this strategic renewal, the involvement of non-managerial personnel is fundamental (Pettit & Crossan, 2019), as well as the experience of human resources (Al-Raggad, 2014). Therefore, the HR professional legitimation will be achieved throughout the HR function's involvement at the strategic decision table. For this reason, HR managers have to adequate and develop their strategic knowledge.

4.3.3 – Identity in workplace

People build their identity also through their workgroups. The achievement of identity, i.e., self-awareness in their environments (Hèliot et al., 2020), is performed through the participation in inclusive but distinctive groups (Darr & Scarselletta, 2002; Horton et al., 2014) that allow to employees the perception of their identity as unique, special and ameliorative of their status (Hallier & Summers, 2011; Walsh & Gordon, 2008). In these groups, identity is modeled by the sense of belonging (Steffens et al., 2017), dynamically and evolutionarily (Mackay, 2017), to achieve the fundamental objective of organizational identification (Horton et al., 2014).

The foundations of this awareness's development are social identity, which is firmly connected to the motivational power of workgroups (Blader & Tyler, 2009) and to professional identity that, unfortunately, is a precarious identity domain due to its strong dependency on the context (Alvesson, 2001). The maturity of employees' professional and organizational identity is linked to their ability to emerge their different identity domains according to the specific situation (O'Brien & Linehan, 2019).

All this let emerge the fundamental role of the HR function, which has to ensure to employees the possibility to show their best-self (Roberts et al., 2005), to allow them to find congruence between their identity and the identity of their organizations (Walsh & Gordon, 2008), achieving the job embeddedness (Ng & Feldman, 2009). The HR function has to consider that organizational identity is connected to employees' hierarchical positions: the more the personnel is involved in strategic roles, the more their organizational identification (Horton et al., 2014). Given that such a condition is critical for the stability and the improvement of firms' performances, HR management could have a fundamental strategic role.

Organizational identification is difficult to establish and easy to weaken (Dries, 2013). It finds its antecedents in mentors (Topa & Perez-Larrazabal, 2016), colleagues, customers (Mooney et al., 2016), and socio-familiar contexts. It is weakened by factors as, for example, the resignation of important group members (Pritchard & Fear, 2015) or by the simple distance from the firm's headquarters (Wieseke et al., 2012). Moreover, globalization promotes the self-entrepreneurship and distances individuals from organizational identification. Therefore, the career policies, together with the consideration of employees' socio-familiar problems, have a critical role. Furthermore, profound values can moderate or mediate the formation of this identity. The congruence of employees' morale and religious values with their organizational duties influence the individuals' reactions to firms' policies (Currie et al., 2019; Hèliot et al., 2020; Hu & Jiang, 2018).

The labor market is complex, unstable and unable to guarantee long-terms contracts to employees. HR policies have to modify their nature to

attract talents and increasing the probability of their organizational identification. Such strategies ensure employees' motivation, well-being, productivity and performance. Without these foundations, firms will be always more perceived by employees as means to be used for the satisfaction of their extra-professional needs.

4.3.4 – Career adaptation

Changes in the labor market due to globalization modify the nature of HR function that has to adequate to new needs of integrating its traditional competencies with strategic skills. The exploiting of previous professional experiences could represent the key to achieving this objective (Guan et al., 2015) and facilitating the adaptation. HR experiments three different pressures: from employees, organizations (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997), and general market conditions. For this reason, the adaptation of this function depends on professional and organizational identity.

The HR department should operate to achieve the adaptation of employees to their career and the adaptation of organization to employees' careers. The equilibrium between these two tensions is critical for the development of professional and organizational identity.

The adaptation of organizations to employees' careers is achieved by awareness of their priorities and personal conditions. Firms can plan separated career paths to embrace employees' personal needs (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997). At the same time, employees should consider taking paths of continuous learning, showing flexibility, and following important mentors (Mooney et al., 2016). Considering these factors can avoid a high level of dropout.

Therefore, career adaptation should not be imposed but achieved throughout the smoothing of the existing distance between employees' and organizations' identity. Knowledge sharing and transfer (Currie et al., 2019; Ikyanyon & Ode, 2017; Pierotti et al., 2014), performance management systems (Mahapa, Dzimbiri, & Maphosa, 2015), the opportunity for employees to perceive the uniqueness of their identity in organizations (Guan et al., 2015), as well as the perception of working in an organization which considers their personal needs (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997; Walsh & Gordon, 2008), are all antecedents to achieve this process.

Conclusion

The analysis performed allows answering the research questions through the following considerations.

Concerning the RQ1, the literature analysis let emerge that employees' motivation, satisfaction, and well-being are firmly connected with the organizational and professional identification (Horton et al., 2014; Steffens et

al., 2017). The productivity and the personal growth of individuals are strongly linked to professional identity (Guan et al. 2015), which is enhanced by identifying individuals with their organizations. Therefore, the coherence between individuals and their organizations' perceptions is a fundamental antecedent for workers' and firms' performances (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Employees have many different ways to identify with their organization, depending on their values and identity development. Such a condition is delicate and characterized by a precarious equilibrium (Dries, 2013). In fact, it strongly depends on the external conditions and context, being subjected to the influence of elements that could be internal or external to the job place. Mentors (Topa & Perez-Larrazabal, 2016), co-workers, customers (Mooney et al., 2016), family, and social environment produce effects on this equilibrium. For these reasons, firms have to seriously consider employees' vocational identity, integrating their development in their strategies and career paths.

Concerning the RQ2, the emerged results during this study's analysis show a "crisis" of HR identity (Mackay, 2017; Wright, 2008), negatively affecting employees' professional identity development. In particular, with the rapid evolution of information theory, the position of the HR department, often perceived as simple offices devoted to administrative tasks connected to labor, in many cases seems not to find a justification for its existence in the future (Mackay, 2017; Wright, 2008). Therefore, the HR function is experimenting with a "crisis" status that risks involving its identity and workers' professional identity.

In this sense, the flexibility of HR policies, leadership abilities, talent management, and appreciation of qualitative differences between employees' groups should constitute the fundamental principle of motivation and work attraction.

In conclusion, the literature highlights that career adaptation and organizational identification are increasingly dependent on firms' strategy and career-related policies that should always involve more HR functions. Therefore, the critical issues that involve the HR department's role could be overcome by a renovated role that it can assume considering the emerging needs, previously explained, concerning the valorization of qualitative differences between employees' groups.

What emerged from the answers to RQ1 and RQ2 finds its natural outcome in the analysis conducted for responding to RQ3. In particular, a synthesis is provided by the SLR analysis performed to identify the intersection of the identity concept and HR function in the organizations. This study highlighted the importance of this theme and the existence of a profound connection between the concepts of professional identity and HR function, seen as mutually influential elements in a potentially virtuous circle.

These reflections encourage further development of research towards in-depth examinations on connections between these two themes. In particular, analyzing the development of professional identity through a renovated strategic role of the HR function, not restricted to a mere bureaucratic and administrative partner but extended to a promoter and supporter of employees' vocational identity development, appears attractive.

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