



NARRATIVE IDENTITY AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Narrative identity theory is a psychological framework that emphasizes the role of personal narratives happening in one's sense of self-identity. This theoretical paper explores how narrative identity theory can inform leadership development programme by emphasizing the use of storytelling to enhance self-awareness, authenticity, and leadership effectiveness. This paper further explores the relevance of this theory in the information and communication industry, particularly in relation to how individuals use and understand media content. Drawing on recent research and theories in the field, this paper argues that incorporating Narrative identity into leadership development programme can provide leaders with a deeper understanding of their values, motives, and experience, thereby enabling them to lead with greater authenticity and effectiveness.

Key Words: *Narrative Identity Theory, Leadership Development, self-awareness, authenticity, and leadership effectiveness.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Narrative identity theory, also known as narrative psychology or narrative theory, posits that individuals construct their identities and make meaning of their lives through storytelling. This theory suggests that people create narratives to understand and interpret their experiences which ultimately shape their self-concept.

According to Adams (2006), "people construct their identities by integrating various life experiences and events into a coherent narrative structure". He argues that the narratives we create about ourselves create a sense of self-continuity and coherence, helping us makes sense of our experiences and explains our past, present, and future selves.

Alder (2012) opins that "individuals use personal narratives to find meaning and purpose in difficult, traumatic, or challenging life events", Alder suggests that individuals often construct narratives that portray themselves as supervisors or agents of change, creating a sense of redemption and personal growth. Marcia and Josselson (2013) argue that "throughout life, individuals continually revise their narratives to adapt to new life stages and experiences". In later life, people often focus on creating narratives that give their lives a sense of meaning and coherence, as well as transmitting their life lessons to future generations.



This theory has various implications for the information and communication industry, particularly for how individuals use and understand media content. Brands utilize narrative identity theory to establish and maintain the marketplace. According to Holt (2006), "successful brands create compelling brand stories that aim to resonate with consumer's self-identities, aspirations, and desires". Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide individuals with tools to create and curate narratives about their lives, interest and identities. Marwick & Boyd (2011) says "social media allow users to construct coherent and meaningful stories of self that are communicated to others". This process of self-presentation can be seen as individuals using narrative identity theory to shape how they are perceived online.

Narrative identity and leadership development in the information and communication industry requires a thorough review of existing literature and an understanding of the current state of research in this field, unfortunately, there seems to be lack of large-scale research that explores the relationship between narrative identity and leadership development specifically within the context of the information and communication industry. More so the information and communication industry are rapidly evolving, with unique challenges and opportunities. The current research will contribute to knowledge by providing deep understanding of how the specific context of this industry influences narrative identity and leadership development.

The opinion and finding established in this theoretical paper would benefit industry professionals: professionals working in the information and communication industry, including current and aspiring leaders, can benefit from this research. They may gain insights into how narrative identity influences leadership development, helping them make informed decisions about their career paths and leadership strategies.

In organizations in the industry; companies and organizations within the information and communication industry can benefit by understanding how narrative identity impacts leadership within their specific context. This knowledge can inform their leadership development programme and strategies, potentially leading to more effective leadership and organizational growth.

In academic and research community; researchers in the fields of leadership development, psychology, sociology, and communication can benefit from this study by building upon its findings and contributing to the broader academic knowledge base. It can also inspire further research and exploration of this topic in various contexts.

2. NARRATIVE IDENTITY THEORY AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Narrative identity theory explores how individuals form a sense of self by creating personal narratives that integrate various life experiences, events, and beliefs. According to McAdams (2012), "narrative identity theory refers to the process of creating a story that organizes one's past experiences and future aspirations into a meaningful whole.

Leadership development is the process of improving and enhancing the skills, abilities, and competencies of individuals in order to become effective leaders. It involves various activities, programmes, and initiatives aimed at developing leadership qualities, and characteristics such as communication, decision-making, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, and strategic thinking.



Narrative identity theory suggests that the stories individuals tell about themselves play a significant role in creating their self-awareness, sense of authenticity, and leadership effectiveness.

2.1 Self Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to consciously perceive, recognize, and understand one's thoughts feelings, beliefs, and behavior in relation to oneself and others. Ogwu *et al.* (2020) define self-awareness as the Ability to observe and accepts one's thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, without judgment attachment.

Narrative identity theory helps individuals to develop self-awareness by encouraging them to reflect on their past experiences, interpret them, and integrate them into coherent narratives. According to McAdams (2012), constructing meaningful narratives of our life events and understanding how they shape our values, goals, and beliefs enhances our self-understanding and promotes a deeper sense of who we are. It enables individuals to better understand their strengths, weaknesses, and personal motivations, contributing to their personal growth and leadership development (Hurduzeu, 2015).

2.2 Authenticity

This affirms the ability of a leader to be true to themselves, their values, and their beliefs, and to act genuinely and transparently. According to George *et al.* (2007), "authentic leadership is the genre and moral leadership that comes from the depths of their beliefs and values". Metellus, (2015) cited in Brown *et al.* (2010), reveals authentic leadership as "cultivating the courage, to be imperfect, to set boundaries, and to allow ourselves to be vulnerable".

Narrative identity theory facilitates authenticity by helping individuals align their self-narratives with their core values and beliefs. Authentic leaders are those who possess a high level of self-awareness and align their actions and decisions with their values by constructing coherent and authentic self-narratives (Luthan & Avolioc 2003). Individuals can become more effective by communicating their values and commitments, gaining the trust and confidence of others. Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2011) highlight this alignment between one's self-narrative, and how it contributes to a sense of authenticity, enabling individuals to lead with integrity and influence others.

2.3 Leadership Effectiveness

Leadership effectiveness refers to the ability of a leader to achieve desired outcomes and drive overall success, both for themselves and their team or organization. Antonakis and House (2013) argue that "leadership effectiveness is predetermined by the leader's behaviour and ability to influence followers to achieve organizational goals". Effective leaders are able to motivate and inspire their team to perform at their best.

Narrative identity theory contributes to leadership effectiveness by providing leaders with a coherent framework to communicate their vision and inspire others. By compelling narratives of their personal and professional journey, leaders can inspire and motivate followers.

Barker and Gower (2010) avers that this form of story-telling allows leaders to demonstrate their values, beliefs, and experiences, fostering a sense of collective purpose and building trust among



team members. Also, leaders who exhibit mastery on the art of storytelling can greatly influence organizational culture and positively impact employee engagement and performance (Hall *et al.*, 2021; Gabriel, 2005; Bonnet, 2020).

3. APPLICATION OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY THEORY IN THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION INDUSTRY

Narrative identity theory, developed by McAdams (2012), suggests that individuals construct personal narratives to make sense of their lives and create a sense of self. This theory has been widely applied in various fields, including the information and communication industry. Presented below are several examples of how narrative identity theory is relevant to this industry.

- i. Personal Branding on Social Media:** One application of narrative identity theory in the information and communication industry is through personal branding on social media platforms. In their study, Marwick and Boyd (2011) underpin that "Individuals construct narratives about themselves on platforms like Facebook and Twitter, shaping the perception of their identity among peers and potential employers". Establishing a strong personal brand through storytelling helps individuals develop an online presence that aligns with their desired identity.
- ii. User Experience Design:** Narrative identity theory can also inform user experience (UX) design practices. According to Kim and Ko (2020), "designers can create engaging and immersive experiences by considering users' narrative identities". By understanding users' personal narratives and incorporating them into the design process, designers can create digital products and services that resonate on a deeper level and evoke emotional connections with users.
- iii. Digital Story Telling:** The information and communication industry can utilize digital storytelling as a means to convey narratives that shape individuals' identities. In their research, Hartley *et al.* (2018) discuss how digital storytelling can be employed to empower marginalized voices and create collective narratives that challenge dominant discourses. This approach allows for the construction of alternative narratives that promote greater inclusivity and diversity in media representation.
- iv. Personalized Advertising and Personalized Marketing Strategies:** Narrative identity theory can contribute to targeted advertising and personalized marketing strategies. According to Sundar and Limperos (2013), "personalized advertising that aligns with individuals' narrative identities is more effective in capturing attention and enhancing advertising outcomes". By tailoring advertisements to fit individuals' personal narratives, marketers can create a sense of resonance with their target audience, increasing the effectiveness of their messaging.

Overall, narrative identity theory finds application in various aspects of the information and communication industry, including personal branding, UX design, digital storytelling, and personalized advertising. By recognizing the power of narratives in shaping individuals' identities, professionals in this industry can create more meaningful and impactful experiences for their users and consumers.

4. FINDINGS

In course of this theoretical exercise on narrative identity and leadership development in the information and communication industry the researchers found the following:

- a. Individuals construct their sense of self through stories they tell about themselves.



- b. Leaders can gain an understanding of their values, motives, and experiences through the Narrative identity process.
- c. Self-awareness enables leaders to align their behaviors and actions with their core values which results in greater authenticity and integrity in their leadership.
- d. Storytelling allows leaders to reflect on their own experiences and articulate their values in the communication industry.
- e. Sharing personal stories leads to a sense of connection between leaders and followers which foster a positive work environment.
- f. Narrative identity enables leaders to respond to the needs of their followers resulting in improved performance and engagement.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Narrative identity theory enhances self-awareness, authenticity, and leadership effectiveness by helping individuals align with their core values, and communicate their visions. Through the use of Narrative identity, individuals can develop a deeper understanding of themselves, lead authentically, and inspire others.

Narrative identity theory in the communication industry can help individuals present themselves online, assist brands in creating meaningful connections, and enhance user experience. By understanding the power of Narrative in shaping identities, professionals can craft compelling stories that engage and resonate with their target audience.

Furthermore, narrative identity theory suggests that leaders should pay attention to the stories and narratives of their followers, understanding the experiences and perspectives of others can help leaders better empathize, communicate, and motivate team members. By listening to and acknowledging the narratives of others, leaders can create a more inclusive and collaborative environment.

5.1 Practical Implications of the Study

Consequent upon the findings and conclusion the study noted the following as the implications rifting from the study.

- i. Leadership development programme should include reflective exercises that encourage leaders to explore and articulate their narratives, these exercises can include self-reflection questionnaires and storytelling workshops.
- ii. Create a safe and supportive environment for leaders to share their stories with others. This can be achieved through small group discussions, mentorship programme, and storytelling circles.
- iii. Leadership development programme should provide training in active storytelling techniques. This includes instructions on narrative structure, using emotional language, and tailoring stories to resonate with different audiences. By developing storytelling skills, leaders can effectively communicate their values, experiences, and vision to inspire and motivate followers.

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