

# Identitet i arbete(t)

## Chefers reflektioner om arbetets dimensioner

Katarina Zambrell

Akademisk Avhandling

för avläggande av ekonomie doktorsexamen i företagsekonomi som med tillstånd av Handelshögskolans fakultetsstyrelse vid Göteborgs universitet framlägges för offentlig granskning fredagen den 9 september 2016, kl. 13 i CG-salen, Handelshögskolan, Vasagatan 1, Göteborg.

Avhandlingen baseras på följande delarbeten:

1. Katarina Zambrell  
”Mitt arbete – det är jag”: om identitetsrelaterade dimensioner och föreställningars diskurser i arbetskontexten  
Licentiatuppsats examinerad vid Handelshögskolan, Göteborgs universitet 2004-05-17.
2. Katarina Zambrell  
Kulturarbetaren i en tillväxtfokuserad samhällsdiskurs
3. Katarina Zambrell  
Managers in artistic interventions and their leadership approach
4. Katarina Zambrell  
Managers' identity construction at work: Artistic interventions as triggers for identity work



**GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET**  
**HANDELSHÖGSKOLAN**

## Abstract

University of Gothenburg  
School of Business Economics and Law  
Dept. of Business Administration  
Box 610  
SE-405 30 Göteborg, Sweden

Author: Katarina Zambrell  
Language: Swedish  
134 pages  
ISBN: 978-91-7246-346-2  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/44778>  
Doctoral thesis 2016

### Identity at work

#### Managers' reflections about dimensions at work

The purpose of this thesis is to identify, describe and develop the understanding of what aspects at work are important for individuals' identity construction. In this understanding-oriented study the empirical data consists of three different groups: middle managers, cultural workers and "Airis-managers". I have interpreted and analysed the 75 respondents' stories, and in their experiences found similar patterns. My conclusion is that there are different dimensions at work that may affect the identity construction. My research question: *What is it about work that is experienced as important for individuals' identity construction?* can be answered with the five different identity-related dimensions that I have identified: the enabling dimension, the legitimating dimension, the strengthening dimension, the touching dimension and the constraining dimension. All these dimensions, except the constraining dimension, contribute positively to identity construction. The constraining dimension can be compensated if the other positively confirming dimensions dominate. The identity construction for each individual appears different depending on what dimensions he/she experiences. That is why work's impacts on the individual's identity construction vary. In order to illustrate the developed typology of identity-related dimensions, I created a model that aims to facilitate understanding of what aspects at work that may be important for the personal identity. When raising awareness of these dimensions, efforts to strengthen the most important dimensions can be made. Through their leadership and ways of organizing work, managers may influence their employees' opportunities to construct and strengthen their identity.

Much of the identity research discusses the more conscious identity work. In my third study my empirical data consists of managers' who have brought artists into their organizations, i.e. conducted an artistic intervention called Airis. My interpretation is that implementing an artistic intervention can be considered as a way to challenge and develop the managers' identity and be a part of their identity work.

This thesis deals with "identity at work" (to reconnect to the title). People seldom discuss "identity construction" but that does not mean that identity issues are unimportant. On the contrary, people often talk about their jobs and their work experiences. What this "talk" really means is what this thesis highlights: Identity is constructed and confirmed at work, especially when others are told about the work-related experiences.

**Key words:** Managers' identity construction, identity-related dimensions, work-related identity, triggers for identity work, artistic interventions.