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Psychological ownership: A managerial construct for talent retention and organisational effectiveness

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Many scholars, consultants and practitioners have recently focused their attention on 'ownership' as a psychological, rather than just a business phenomenon. Psychological ownership is defined as a state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of it is 'theirs' (that is 'It is mine!'). It suggests that, the presence of psychological ownership among employees can have a positive effect on organisational effectiveness. The main aim of this paper is to introduce and describe a new kind of ownership, known as 'psychological ownership' that could be a valuable managerial construct for improving talent retention and organisational effectiveness within the South African work environment. The research methodology followed an extensive literature review in order to compile the construct for psychological ownership, which was then validated by a panel of nine scholarly subject-matter experts by applying Lawshe's quantitative approach to content validity. The study resulted in a multi-dimensional construct for psychological ownership with high content validity, consisting of a promotion-orientated and prevention-orientated dimension. Promotion-orientated psychological ownership consists of six theory-driven components: Self-efficacy, sense of belonging, self-identity, accountability, autonomy and responsibility. Territoriality, the seventh dimension, was identified as a preventative form of psychological ownership. The particular relevance of this paper is the introduction of a positively oriented psychological ownership construct that can be utilised by managers and human resource professionals as a potential guideline to facilitating talent retention and productivity in the current work environment.

Key words: Psychological ownership, managerial construct, positive organisational behaviour, talent retention, organisational effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Ownership, as a business concept, has been known for centuries. Recently a shift in the meaning of ownership has occurred in organisations, where 'ownership' has been described as a psychological, rather than just a business phenomenon. Psychological ownership has been defined by Pierce et al. (2003), who link feelings of possession with feelings of ownership and define

psychological ownership as "that state where an individual feels as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is 'theirs'"(that is 'It is mine!')." This means that ownership can also be viewed as an attitudinal state, in which organisational employees attach value to something in the organisation. If management does not recognise and acknowledge the importance of psychological ownership, this can become a concern (Pratt and Dutton, 2000), as employees can more easily detach themselves from the organisation.

According to Kubzansky and Druskat (as cited in Pierce et al., 2001), this psychological sense of ownership may form an integral part of employees' association with the organisation, including their rapport with management. Previous research publications indicated that the psychology of possession can play a major role in the

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Abbreviations: HR, Human resources; SDT, self-determination theory; HPCSA, health professions council of South Africa; SABPP, South African board of people practice; CVR, content validity ratio; OCB, organisation citizenship behaviour.

relationship between individual employees and their organisations. Employees may develop feelings of psychological ownership toward any number of different organisational objects or subjects (referred to as 'targets'), such as organisations themselves, work tasks, jobs, workspace, work tools and equipment, ideas or suggestions, and team members (Rudmin and Berry, 1987; Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004). Pierce et al. (1991) have theorised that psychological ownership has positive consequences regardless of the employee's financial ownership and regardless of the member's legal status as an owner or non-owner.

As noted by O'Reilly (2002): "When managers talk about ownership, what they typically want to in still is not financial ownership but psychological ownership a feeling on the part of employees that they have a responsibility to make decisions that are in the long term interest of the company". This in particular is the interest and contribution of this paper, as it emphasises the need to explore and understand ownership from a different perspective. The need for managers and Human resources (HR) practitioners to comprehend psychological ownership is particularly to be encouraged in a socio-economic environment where organisational effectiveness is challenged by employees' conduct.

The main aim of this paper is to describe psychological ownership from a theoretical and managerial perspective and to introduce a valid multi-dimensional psychological ownership construct within the South African work environment, for specific use by managers and HR practitioners. In order to achieve this aim, the paper is structured to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What are the dimensions and supportive elements that constitute a valid psychological ownership construct in the South African work environment?
- (2) What are the implications of this psychological ownership construct for managers?

First, this paper will clarify and summarise the extant literature describing psychological ownership, identifying and developing the possible dimensions of the psychological ownership construct. In the study, once the construct had been developed, its proposed dimensions and descriptive elements were validated by subject matter experts, by applying Lawshe's (1975) quantitative approach to content validity. This paper will then present the results, with special emphasis on managerial implications, followed by discussions and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological ownership is a broad construct and thus a thorough literature study was conducted to explore and describe it in a comprehensible manner. The starting point was to identify and clarify the underlying concepts and assumptions used by scholars in describing

psychological ownership.

Ownership defined

Grunebaum (as cited in Mattila and Ikävalko, 2003) states that ownership is attached to the relationship between people and their actual environment subjects and objects around them thus revealing that ownership is a much broader concept than a narrow legal regime and the status based on it.

Pierce et al. (1991) suggest that regardless of the type of financial ownership (social ownership, worker/producer cooperatives, direct ownership, or Employee Stock Ownership Plans), psychological ownership will lead to the integration of the employee as owner into the organisation and the ownership experience. The question is, when management says that 'employees must take ownership of their work', does the employee understand or experience this in the correct manner?

The psychological experience of ownership

The core of psychological ownership is the psychology of possession (the feeling that an object, idea, or entity is 'mine' or 'ours') which is deeply rooted in humankind. Based on the literature pertaining to what constitutes possession and ownership, Pierce et al. (2001) conclude that: (1) The feeling of ownership is innately human; (2) people develop feelings of ownership toward both tangible and intangible objects; and (3) ownership has important emotional, behavioural and attitudinal consequences for those that experience ownership. To clarify the meaning of psychological ownership, how can it be described?

Psychological ownership described

Pierce et al. (1991) state that ownership is multidimensional, first, researchers have suggested that the sense of ownership manifests itself in the meaning and emotion usually associated with 'my' or 'mine,' and 'our.' The conceptual core of psychological ownership is a feeling of possessiveness (Wilpert, 1989) and of being psychologically tied to a specific object (target) (for example the products of one's labour, home, land, significant others).

Psychological ownership thus answers the question: "What do I feel is mine?" Secondly, psychological ownership reflects a relationship between an individual and a target (for example objects which are both material, such as work or tools, and immaterial in nature, such as workspace and ideas) in which the object is experienced as having a close connection with the self (Furby, 1978; Litwinski, 1942) and becomes part of the "extended self" (Belk, 1988). Isaacs (1933) reports: "... what is mine

Table 1. Comparison of psychological ownership with commitment, identification, internalisation, psychological empowerment and job involvement.

Dimensions of Distinctiveness	Psychological ownership	Commitment	Identification	Internalisation	Psychological empowerment	Job Involvement
Conceptual core	Possessiveness	Desire to remain affiliated	Use identity to define oneself	Shared goals or values	Achieving orientation to work role	Identification with one's job
Questions answered for individual	What do I feel is mine?	Should I maintain membership?	What am I?	What do I believe?	Can I shape my work role?	How important is my job to me?
Motivational bases	Efficacy / effectance Self-identity Need for place	Security Belongingness Beliefs and values	Attractions Affiliation Self-enhancement	Need to be right Beliefs and values	Self-efficacy Self-esteem Access to info Rewards	Importance of work Satisfying self-esteem
Development	Active imposition of self on organisation	Decision to maintain membership	Affiliation Emulation	Adoption of organisation's goals or values	Believe in competence Autonomy Impact on outcomes	Psychological importance at work
Type of state	Affective / cognitive	Affective	Cognitive / perceptual	Cognitive / objective	Affective / perceptual Cognitive	Affective / attitude
Select consequences	Rights and responsibilities Promotion of / resistance to change Refusal to share	OCB Intent to leave Attendance	Intent to remain Frustration / stress Alienation Performance Wellbeing of individual	OCB Intent to leave In-role behaviour	Effective role performance Concentration Resilience Innovation and behaviour	Intrinsic motivation Intent to remain Low level of absence
Rights	Right to information Right to voice	None	None	None	Meaningful work Access to information Rewards	Meaningful work Adequate supervision
Responsibilities	Burden sharing Active and responsible voice Being informed	None	Maintaining the status of the admired attribute	Goal and value protection	Capability to perform activities with skill	

Source: Pierce et al. (2001) and researchers' own summary, OCB = Organisation citizenship behaviour.

becomes a part of me".

Thirdly, Pierce et al. (2003) noticed that psychological ownership is a multifaceted state containing a cognitive and affective core. Cognitively, it reflects an individual's awareness, beliefs and thoughts regarding the target of ownership. Affectively, feelings of ownership are said to be pleasure producing in them (Beggan, 1992; Furby, 1978; Porteous, 1976) and are accompanied by a

sense of efficacy and com-petence (White, 1959). Psychological ownership can be confused with other constructs and needs to be clarified further.

The distinctiveness of psychological ownership

Morrow (1983), states that it is important to

conceptually differentiate psychological ownership towards the organisation from other work-related attitudes (for example organisational commitment, organisational identification, internalisation, psychological empowerment and job involvement), to avoid construct proliferation. From Table 1 it is clear that psychological ownership is conceptually distinct from each of these, for it describes a unique aspect of the human experience in

in organisations, since it is primarily grounded in psychological theories of possession. Pierce et al. (2001) conclude that it is reasonable to suggest that psychological ownership may predict (1) certain effects unaccounted for by existing theoretical models of other constructs and (2) criterion variance currently unaccounted for by any of the other constructs.

The different forms of psychological ownership

According to Avey et al. (2009), there are two independent forms of psychological ownership: Promotion and prevention, which originate from the work of Higgins' (1997) self-regulatory focus theory. According to Higgins (1997), people have two basic self-regulation systems. The one system regulates the achievements of rewards and focuses individuals on promotion goals, while the other system regulates the avoidance of punishment and focuses individuals on prevention goals. Promotion goals include wishes, hopes and aspirations and represent the 'ideal self', whereas prevention goals include obligations, duties and responsibilities and represent the 'ought self'. Avey et al. (2009) apply the promotion and prevention approaches to examining psychological ownership. According to them, individuals who are more promotion orientated may experience quite different feelings toward targets of ownership from those who are prevention orientated.

Dimensions of psychological ownership

A five-dimensional measure of psychological ownership which distinguished between two distinctive forms of psychological ownership: Promotion-orientated and prevention-orientated, was developed by Avey et al. (2009). Promotion-orientated psychological ownership comprises four theory-driven components: Self-efficacy, sense of belonging, self-identity and accountability, whereas prevention-orientated psychological ownership comprises territoriality. According to Avey et al. (2009) their measure may not be comprehensive enough to represent psychological ownership in all contexts and they suggest further theory-building and research to refine their findings. This was the basis for and premise of this study. After extensive review of the literature, the concepts of responsibility and autonomy were put forward as possible additional dimensions of psychological ownership, resulting in a proposed seven-dimensional theoretical construct of psychological ownership, as displayed in Figure 1. Both responsibility and autonomy are conceived as promotion-orientated forms of psychological ownership. Each of the seven theoretical dimensions of psychological ownership will be discussed, with special emphasis on the possible managerial implications.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy relates to the individual's judgement about his or her capability to perform across a variety of situations (Bandura, 1995). Furby (1978) postulates that the motivation for possession stems from the individual's need for effectance and ability to produce desired outcomes in the environment. According to White (1959), the effective motive reflects the individual's desire to interact effectively with his or her environment. Furby (1978) came to the conclusion that possessions come to be part of the extended self and are therefore important to individuals because they are instrumental in exercising control over the physical environment as well as over people. According to Pierce et al. (2003), the desire to experience causal efficacy in exploring and altering the environment leads to attempts to take possession and to the emergence of ownership feelings. Through this process, "possessions and self become intimately related" (Furby, 1991).

Self-identity

In addition to serving an instrumental function (efficacy/effectance motive), many scholars (Dittmar, 1992; Porteous, 1976) have suggested that possessions also serve as symbolic expressions of the self, since they are closely connected with self-identity and individuality. Porteous defines self-identity in this context as a personal cognitive connection between an individual and an object (for example an organisation) and the individual's perception of oneness with the target (for example the organisation). Pierce et al. (2003) point out that people use ownership for defining themselves, for expressing their self-identity to others (by conveying their personal values, character, attitudes, education, membership and achievements by means of the items they purchase and display) and for maintaining the continuity of the self across time (as the preserving of possessions allows individuals to maintain a sense of continuity through those objects that have become symbolic extensions of their selves).

Belongingness

According to the French political philosopher Simone (1952), to have a place is an important "need of the human soul". Individuals have a need to own a specific space. 'Home' is perceived as 'the territorial core', a desired space and set point of reference around which people organise their everyday lives (Porteous, 1976). The home is an entity of ownership that may serve the human need for having a place my place, states Duncan (1981) in her discussion of home ownership. People become psychologically attached to a variety of objects of

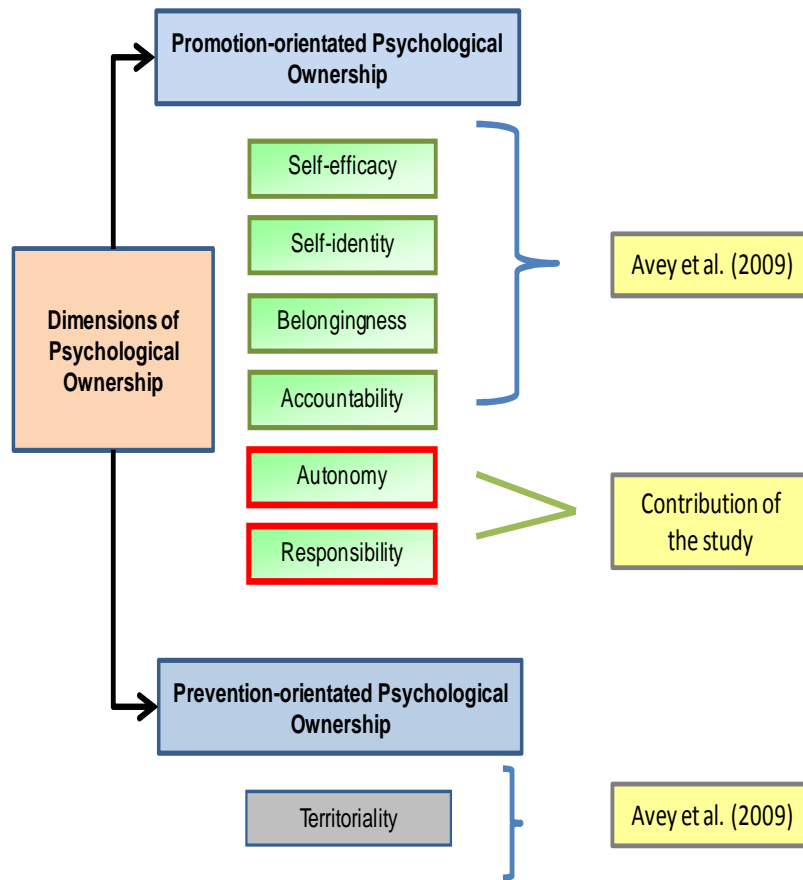


Figure 1. Theoretical dimensions of psychological ownership.

material or immaterial nature as they develop their ‘home base’. According to Heidegger (1967), home is, in part, achieved as a result of an individual’s interaction with his or her environment and the personalisation of this environment, which enhances familiarity, a sense of being one with it, and the discovery of oneself within.

Managerial implications of the above three dimensions - self-efficacy, self-identity and belongingness

Psychological ownership becomes evident in organisations much as it does in other contexts because, as suggested in organisational behaviour research, the motives for efficacy and effectance, self-identity and having a place can be fulfilled in organisations (Pierce et al., 2003).

Empirical evidence has been presented that individuals express feelings of ownership toward their work (Beaglehole, 1932), the products they create (Das, 1993), their jobs (Peters and Austin, 1985), their organisations (Dirks et al., 1996), the practices employed by

organisations (Kostova, 1998), and specific issues in their organisations (Pratt and Dutton, 2000). Managers and HR practitioners can address these aspects through being more promotion orientated in their behaviour and practices within the work environment, thereby enhancing the dimensions of self-efficacy, self-identity and belongingness for themselves and others.

Accountability

Lerner and Tetlock (1999) define accountability as “the implicit or explicit expectation that one may be called on to justify one’s beliefs, feelings and actions to others”. Expectations of the perceived right to hold others accountable and to hold one accountable are consistent with the description by Pierce et al. (2003) of expected rights and responsibilities. According to Wood and Winston (2007), responsibility involves a liability to be called to account as the primary cause, motive, or agent of a relationship or duty, or being the cause or explanation for a given result. Accountability, on the other hand, has to do with acceptance of responsibility,

voluntary transparency and answerability. Wood and Winston state that it is possible for someone to be responsible without being accountable, because responsibility may be assigned, enforced, or even mistakenly applied to an individual or group by external force.

Managerial implications of accountability

According to Pierce et al. (2003), a side benefit that organisations experience from psychological ownership is that a member with high levels of psychological ownership will act as the conscience of others to make the required contribution by all team members so that they achieve their targets of ownership. Thus managers can ensure that accountability becomes an individual team member norm when the team is actively created and individuals are not just randomly placed in a team structure.

Responsibility

Cummings and Anton (1990) define felt responsibility as “the state of cognitive and emotional acceptance of responsibility”. Beaglehole (1932) and Furby (1978) theorise that feelings of possession create a sense of responsibility that influences behaviour. Similarly, Pierce et al. (2001) have posited that feelings of ownership are accompanied by a felt responsibility for the target of ownership. They add that the implicit right to control associated with ownership leads to a sense of responsibility. Hall (1966), states that when individuals have possessive feelings, they proactively enhance, control and protect both tangible and intangible targets of ownership. Feelings of responsibility for the organisation will include a responsibility to invest energy and time to advance the cause of the organisation, therefore, being protective, caring and nurturing.

Managerial implications of responsibility

Numerous organisational effects, including stewardship, citizenship behaviours, personal sacrifice and the assumption of risk on behalf of the target are perceived as responsibilities and as the product of psychological ownership (Pierce et al., 2001). According to Rogers and Freundlich (1998), employees who experience ownership of the organisation believe they have the right to sway the path of the organisation and have a ‘deeper responsibility’ than those who do not feel ownership. Managers can address this dimension by allowing people to take and experience responsibility and at the same time be in control of what they have agreed to. Managers who micro-manage employees will not be able to realise this dimension.

Autonomy

The term autonomy literally refers to “regulation by the self”, as stated by Ryan and Deci (2006). According to self-determination theory (SDT), persons are acting autonomously when they experience their behaviour as willingly performed and when they fully sanction the actions in which they are employed (Deci and Ryan, as cited in Chirkov et al., 2003). People are thus most independent when they act in accordance with their genuine interests or integrated values and desires. Researchers (O’Driscoll and Beehr, 2000; Parker, 1998; Yoon et al., 1996) have found that the degree to which employees believe they have control is a key determinant of effective responses such as job satisfaction, work involvement and organisational commitment. Empirical evidence supports the relationship between autonomy and control, control and psychological ownership and autonomy and psychological ownership. For example, Brass (1985) observed that employees exposed to high job design autonomy experienced more influence (control) than their counterparts working with low autonomy.

Mayhew et al. (2007) found that because autonomy influences all work attitudes and behaviours, it is regarded as a significant factor in job-related psychological ownership. The unique ability of autonomy to predict organisational commitment, job satisfaction, in-role behaviour and extra-role behaviour above any mediation effects accentuates the importance of considering autonomy when investigating employees in organisations.

Managerial implications of autonomy

According to Pierce et al. (2004), employees’ sense of ownership might be improved by creating and maintaining work settings that empower individuals and allow them to exercise control over important aspects of their work arrangements, which might promote the manifestation of work-related attitudes (for example job satisfaction, organisation-based self-esteem) and behaviours (for example nurturing, protecting). Gardner and Pierce (2004) confirm a positive relationship between autonomy at work and positive attitudes and behaviours on the part of employees.

Territorial behaviours

Organisational members can and do become territorial over tangibles such as physical space and possessions; intangibles, such as ideas, roles and responsibilities; and social entities, such as people and groups. Brown et al. (2005) define territoriality as “an individual’s behavioural expression of his or her feelings of ownership toward a physical or social object”. This definition includes behaviours for constructing, communicating, maintaining

and restoring territories around those objects in the organisation toward which individuals feel a proprietary attachment.

Brown et al. (2005) adopt psychological ownership as a key psychological foundation of their model of territoriality. They propose that the concept of territoriality makes a powerful addition to research on psychological ownership by providing a means of exploring the social and behavioural dynamics that sometimes follow from employees' sense of psychological ownership. The greater the individual's psychological attachment to an object, the more it fulfils the basic needs of efficacy, self-identity and having a place. The fulfilment of these needs means that the territory in question has stronger psychological value for the individual, motivating the person to communicate possession to others through marking (for example, placing physical symbols such as a nameplate on the door, pictures of his or her children on a computer screen and using social markers like titles, and social rituals that convey belonging and access). Moreover, the individual will take steps to protect and defend the object through anticipatory defences (such as a 'private' sign, locking a door, having a large security guard with a gun) and reactionary defences (such as glaring, expressing irritation, yelling and slamming doors, writing a letter of protest). Therefore, Brown et al. (2005) suggest that "the stronger an individual's psychological ownership of an object, the greater the likelihood he/she will engage in territorial behaviour toward that object."

Managerial implications of territoriality

Territoriality is an inherent, inevitable and prevalent element of organisational life. Brown et al. (2005) propose that managers should encourage and even embrace territorial behaviour such as marking (by making the boundaries of ownership explicit and clear), which can increase commitment to and identification with the organisation. This can reduce conflict and make sharing of resources more efficient, helping employees to remain task focused. A second implication for managers concerns the design and arrangement of physical space in organisations. Many organisations have changed from private offices to primarily open offices with few dividers, in order to save costs. However, what they have not taken into consideration are costs such as the loss of employee commitment or the potential increase in conflict when employees' territories are threatened, lost or nonexistent. Finally, organisations might reconsider their policies with regard to workspace personalisation. Some organisations fear that granting of personal displays will compete with organisational identity. Organisations must, however, recognise that, according to Hogg and Terry (2000) people will do their best to find a balance between inclusion in the group and individuality. Through marking, employees express themselves in territories and that enables them to participate in and belong to the

organisation while maintaining their individuality. Wells (2000) supports this by stating that employees are generally happier if they are allowed to personalise their work space.

RESEARCH METHODS

A survey method was used to create the conceptual construct and to verify the contents. The literature on psychological ownership, including the five-dimensional psychological ownership model developed by Avey et al. (2009), provided the basis for the seven-dimensional psychological ownership construct, which needed to be verified by South African subject matter experts. The seven-dimensional construct of psychological ownership comprises a set of 54 survey items generated from the literature and previous research. These items were composed to address each of the seven dimensions of psychological ownership; 7 items were designed to assess self-efficacy, 8 items to assess self-identity, 7 items to assess belongingness, 6 items to assess accountability, 10 items to assess autonomy, 7 items to assess responsibility, and 9 items to assess territoriality.

Participants reviewing and validating the survey content

Subject matter experts validated each item as well as the entire proposed survey construct. To improve the rigour of the content review process, experts had to meet a predetermined set of criteria in order to be regarded as suitable (Grant and Davis, 1997). For the purposes of this study, experts had to:

- (1) Have at least a three-year degree in Industrial Psychology or Psychology, Human Resource Management or related field.
- (2) Have at least five years' work experience and expertise in applied psychology or related fields.
- (3) Have had at least one article published in a refereed journal or presented a paper at an international conference.
- (4) Be registered with a professional body such as the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), South African Board of People Practice (SABPP) or equivalent; and
- (5) Be regarded as an expert in the field of applied psychology or related fields by their colleagues and clients.

A total of nine experts met the predetermined criteria that had been set in order to qualify as an expert.

Survey format and review criteria

The conceptual definition of psychological ownership and the relevant dimensions of psychological ownership, namely self-efficacy, self-identity, sense of belongingness, accountability, territoriality, autonomy and responsibility were included in the survey instructions, but the origin of each item and how it was related to the framework domains (for example promotion-orientated or prevention-orientated psychological ownership) were not provided to the expert group. Experts were asked to rate each item as either essential or not essential. Two open-ended questions at the end of the survey requested experts to provide suggestions for clarifying items that were unclear, and to comment about the overall comprehensiveness of the survey construct.

Data analyses

Data analyses were conducted to address the first research

question: What are the dimensions and supportive elements that constitute a valid psychological ownership construct in the South African work environment? This was followed by two guiding questions: (1) How relevant are the identified dimensions and their descriptive elements in assessing psychological ownership? And (2) what modifications are needed to improve the relevance, clarity, and meaningfulness of the proposed elements as survey items? Lawshe's (1975), content validity ratio (CVR) for each item was computed to facilitate the retention or rejection of specific dimensions and items.

RESULTS

According to Lawshe (1975), the minimum CVR values according to the size of the expert panel ($n = 9$) for an item to be retained as part of the content validity testing is 0.78, since a content validity value of 0.78 or higher is considered evidence of good content validity (Polit et al., 2007). Items with CVR values of less than .78 should be rejected. Results indicated that the majority of experts rated each of the 54 items as essential, indicating that they agreed the item was relevant.

According to the results a total of 34 items met the CVR criterion of ≥ 0.78 at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, except for the dimensions of Sense of belonging (where three out of the original six items had to be rejected) and territoriality (where eight out of the original nine items had to be rejected). Rejection of such a large number of the territoriality items could be due to the fact that the experts perceived territoriality as negative and as a potential threat to psychological ownership. The researcher purposely did not disclose to the experts that territoriality is considered a preventative form of psychological ownership. Their response to these items is a confirmation of the researcher's view that territoriality is a preventative form of psychological ownership.

In their study, Brown et al. (2005) focus on the territoriality concept as being behavioural and propose that "the stronger an individual's psychological ownership of an object, the greater the likelihood he or she will engage in territorial behaviors". This study supports the viewpoint of Avey et al. (2009) that territorial psychological ownership, despite its typically negative implications, may have a positive side. The panel of experts commented on the comprehensiveness of the proposed survey construct. They agreed that all seven dimensions of the desired content domain of the psychological ownership concept should be included.

However, in judging the entire construct as a possible measure, the experts suggested that additional items should be added in order to represent the total content domain. The inclusion of additional items in the construct would also help in determining the validity of a final scale instrument, as was suggested by Worthington and Whittaker (2006). Therefore, an additional 24 items were added to better represent the total content domain. This process resulted in 69 items, as indicated in Figure 2. Some of the items retained were slightly modified and

others were modified more substantially, to address the experts' suggestions on wording or editing. Figure 2 summarises the development process in the final psychological ownership construct measure, in a flow diagram. Five of the original nine experts served as a second set of expert judges for content validation of the remaining 69 items and agreed that these items be included in a construct measure of psychological ownership within South Africa.

DISCUSSION

If organisations can create a sense of psychological ownership among employees by addressing the proposed elements in the survey construct, they should be able to enhance employees' experience of their workplace, thus ensuring sustainable performance, especially in uncertain economic times. Therefore, it is important that an instrument should be developed within the South African context to determine the extent of psychological ownership that employees feel towards their organisations. If psychological ownership could be measured, invested in and developed, it could be managed for performance impact and competitive advantage. But why should managers be interested in and bothered with the construct? Psychological ownership could well be important as an enabler of talent retention in the current times of skills scarcity.

The emergence of psychological ownership as an enabler of talent retention

According to Jamrog (2004), "the best people are not motivated by and do not stay for the money alone. They want to work for more than just the pay check". Creating a sense of ownership among employees for the organisation has the potential to increase retention. The retention dilemma how to keep your best, most talented staff who, in turn, will help the organisation fight a downturn is about to create a major challenge for organisations. The feelings of ownership toward both material objects (for example a reward) and immaterial objects (for example recognition) can not only shape identity (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992), but also affect behaviour (for example commitment and job satisfaction (Isaacs, 1933)). In the effort to win this war for talent there are plenty of simple, cost-effective things an organisation can do to keep its talented employees and to avoid the costly recruitment and training expenses associated with hiring new employees. According to Pierce et al. (2001), when employees exercise greater amounts of control, intimately come to know, and invest themselves in the target of ownership, a sense of responsibility takes root and possessive feelings develop.

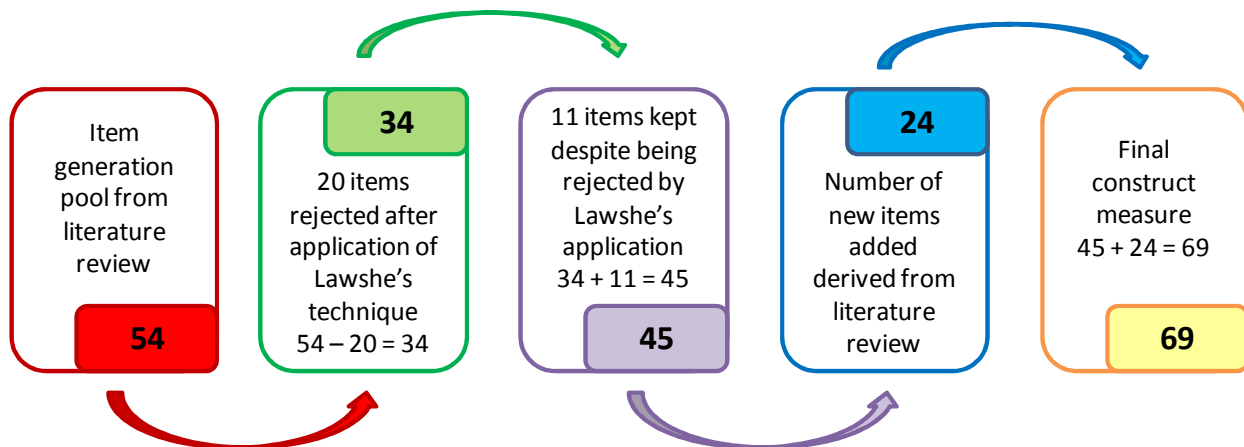


Figure 2. Development process of items.

Controlling the ownership target

Control of an object gives rise to feelings of ownership for that object (Furby, 1978; McClelland, 1951); Rochberg-Halton (1984). Furby (1978) argues that the greater the amount of control individuals can exercise over certain objects, the more they will psychologically experience them as part of the self. McClelland (1951) reasons that material objects that can be controlled become regarded as part of the self; the greater the amount of control, the more the object is experienced as part of the self. According to Pierce et al. (2001), organisations can provide members with numerous opportunities to exercise varying degrees of control over a number of factors, each of which is a potential target of psychological ownership. For example, job design is such a factor (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). More complex jobs and jobs that provide greater autonomy imply higher levels of control and thus increase the likelihood that feelings of ownership toward the target will emerge (Pierce et al., 2009). In contrast, some organisational factors such as centralisation and formalisation decrease the possibility for individuals to exert control and hence may impede the development of psychological ownership. In such a situation, individuals learn that nothing is 'theirs', because power is placed in the structure and people have limited control over the organisation or any part of it (Pierce et al., 2001).

Coming to intimately know the target

James (1890) suggested that individuals come to develop feelings of ownership for certain objects through a living relationship with that objects. Beaglehole (1932) supports this notion by arguing that through intimate knowledge of an object, person, or place, a union of the self with the object takes place. For example, Weil (1952) illustrates

this with an example of a gardener, who, "after a certain time, feels that the garden belongs to him". People thus come to find themselves psychologically tied to things because of their active participation or association with those things. Organisations can create opportunities for employees to get to know potential targets of ownership through the processes of association, such as work, job, projects, and teams (Pierce et al., 2001). For example, when management shares information about potential organisational targets of ownership with employees (for example the mission of the organisation, its goals, and performance), they will feel that they know the organisation better and, consequently, may develop psychological ownership toward it. Information, though, may not be sufficient to create a sense of ownership. The outcome will be influenced by the intensity of the association (for example the number of interactions of the individual with the target). A longer association with a target (for example long tenure) will probably lead to perceptions of knowing the target better and, as a result, to a sense of ownership. Intimate knowledge can also be promoted by making information more accessible and less costly to acquire. Managers, by walking about and sharing information personally with employees, could also promote intensity of information.

Investing the self in the target

Studies done by Sartre (1943) and Rochberg-Halton (1984), among others, provide insight into the relationship between work and psychological ownership. Locke (as cited in Pierce et al., 2001) argues that people own their labour and themselves and, therefore, often feel that they own that which they create, shape, or produce. Marx (1976) supports this by stating that through people's labour they invest psychic energy into the products that they create; consequently, these products become

representations of the self, much like their thoughts, words, and emotions. Therefore, according to Durkheim (1957), individuals own the objects they have created in much the same way as they own themselves. The investment of an individual's energy, effort, time, and attention in objects causes the self to become one with the object and to develop feelings of ownership toward the object (Rochberg-Halton, 1984).

Pierce et al. (2001) note that organisations provide a wealth of opportunities for their members to invest themselves in different aspects such as their job, projects, products, assignments, or work teams, and, therefore, to feel ownership toward those targets. The investment of the self comes in several forms, including investment of one's own time; skills; ideas; and psychological, physical, and intellectual energies. As a result, the individual may well begin to experience that the target of ownership emerges from the self. Several activities in organisations may require different levels of self-investment. Non-routine technologies and jobs that are more complex will allow individuals to use their own good judgment and probably invest more of their own thought, personal style, and distinctive knowledge. Creating objects is one of the most apparent and powerful means by which individuals invest themselves in objects (Pierce et al., 2001). Creation involves investing one's values and identity as well as one's time and energy. Pierce and colleagues (2001) illustrate this by means of the following example:

"Engineers will probably feel ownership towards the manufactured goods they design, politicians towards the bills they write, and entrepreneurs toward the organisations they establish. Academics, for example, may feel strong ownership toward the outcome of their academic pursuits. All these examples illustrate the necessity for HR practitioners to research the way that individuals invest their time and energy in the various targets such as the organisation, the job and the work environment".

Conclusion

"Mine" is a small world...It is deceptive in its power and importance...It controls our behavior, but we rarely notice, as we move about our world restricting ourselves to narrow walkways and to those places for which we have keys (Rudmin, 1994). From the literature study it is clear that the powerful concept of "mine" is not only important in human life, but plays an important role in organisations. To capture this concept, this paper introduced psychological ownership as a concept and presented supportive elements that constitute a valid construct in organisations. Since psychological ownership is rooted in the motives of self-efficacy, self-identity and belongingness, employees may experience feelings of ownership for the organisation or various organisational factors because these motives can be satisfied in

organisations (Pierce et al., 2001). Psychological ownership emerges from certain processes of association by the individual with the target. Through these processes, such as controlling the target, intimately coming to know it and investing themselves in the target of ownership, individuals become psychologically tied to the target, and the target becomes part of their extended self. Each of these processes can manifest itself within the organisational context.

Organisations can benefit from psychological ownership since it leads to the employee feeling responsible toward the target (for example the organisation) and thus showing stewardship, which can play a role in talent retention and the intention not to leave. Although psychological ownership can produce dysfunctional effects, this study focused on the positive aspects of psychological ownership. It is also possible to facilitate the development of psychological ownership in organisations.

Although managers cannot control the "roots" of psychological ownership (self-efficacy, self-identity and sense of belongingness), they could develop the features of the potential target of ownership by making them visible, appealing and reachable, which would increase the potential for psychological ownership. Work should be organised in such a way that it provides employees with ample opportunities to exercise control over various targets, to create intimate knowledge of the targets, to be in regular and close association with the targets, and to be able to make significant investments of themselves in the targets (Pierce et al., 2001). Thus being able to measure this new kind of ownership might give managers and HR practitioners a new leverage for improved performance and talent retention.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the expertise of nine experts was applied, other research methods, such as Delphi techniques, might offer additional insights regarding important aspects of measuring psychological ownership and the refinement of descriptive items.

In terms of future research, the survey instrument needs to be empirically tested. A pilot study needs to be conducted and the psychometric properties need to be determined. It would be necessary to examine the internal reliability and construct validity of the survey instrument.

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