FRAGILITY IN THE ACADEME

by:
Angelito A. Pascual
Teacher II, Luakan National High School

The importance of insecurity in relation to identities at work is very crucial. Drawing upon empirical research with school academics in the context of the proliferation of managerialism controls of accountability, monitoring, and performativity, it exemplified how insecurities in the form of fragile and insecure academic selves are variously manifested.

INSECURITY identifies job insecurity as implicated in the health, wealth, and well-being of employees, pathologist insecurity as a debilitating characteristic of “deviant” individuals suffering from the extremes of insecurity paranoia.

On the other hand, insecurities associated with “doing” the job rather than threats of unemployment or the workplace. It is tied intimately to the notion of identity in the sense that the latter is always precarious and uncertain because it is dependent on others’ judgments, evaluations, and validations of the self, and these can never be fully anticipated, let alone controlled.

IDENTITIES are fragile to the extent that they are routinely subject to the potential of being socially denied or disconfirmed, while simultaneously people are seduced by aspirations of success and threatened by apprehensions of failure. In the sense that insecurity can be seen as a medium and outcome of our preoccupation with identity, we argue that both identity and insecurity are conceptually important to organizations.

People’s sense of identity is tenuous in the extreme organizations are arenas in which subjects assemble and reassemble their identities via organizationally based
discursive regimes, and within these, one must choose from a variety of discourse that intersects and are often antagonistic, contradictory, or ambiguous.

Identity has to be worked at, for it is something which we must achieve if we are to have one at all, and ... must continue to achieve if we are to maintain it. Identity work is also both a medium and outcome of insecurity, self-doubt and addresses the nuances of insecure, critical, or self-depreciative identity talk.

According to Adler, N., & Harzing, A.W. (2009), Fragility (or the vulnerable self) is both a condition and consequence of insecurity and closely intertwined with our sense of who we are, and the sweet promise of which we could become. Insecurity among academics is even more limited than in organization more generally, but the concept is occasionally drawn upon focusing on autoethnographic experiences, critical management, and pedagogy.

Gabriel (2010) argues that there are idealized expectations of what it is to be an academic – original, scholarly, pedagogically skillful, and like other professionals, the academic self is highly exposed 'because the real or imagined demands of others invariably exceed the capacity of ordinary human beings to meet them.

However, these demands subject all academics to close and constant scrutiny. There are many professions whose members are so relentlessly subjected to measurement, criticism, and rejection as academics, exposing them to deep insecurities regarding their worth, their identity, and their standing. The question is, however, does this growing intensification of work in universities result in the negative consequences of these insecurities drowning out the positive impetus?

The imposter phenomenon/syndrome refers to a belief that one is not as capable or adequate as others think, and in a study of high achieving university faculty and students. It is referred to as ‘intellectual phoniness.’ Imposter feelings are associated with self-doubt and low self-esteem and include a belief that any success is due to luck or hard
work rather than ability: a fear of evaluation and failure; and a fear that one’s incompetence will be discovered by others. It is often treated as a pathological condition deriving from a ‘devalued self-image and requiring early remedial action.

On the other hand, people avoid treating the imposter experience as pathological but regard it as a common response to situations where demands and expectations seem difficult if not impossible to meet.

It reflected this sense of being an imposter with activities such as recruitment, promotion, peer review feedback, teaching, funding applications, and conference attendance, and these often rendered them feeling vulnerable and less than adequate. While these various trials can be a source of anxiety and insecurity in them, they are exacerbated by the feeling of not living up to an ideal image of what it means to be an academic.

References:
