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The Fragile Tension Between the Perceived Self and the Authentic Self: A Neuromanagement Perspective on Identity Erosion in Organizations.

Auteur 1 : Hajar NAJI.
Auteur 2 : Pr. Souad RAFIQ.

HAJAR NAJI[1], (PhD Candidate in Economics and Management Sciences, ORCID: 0009-0009-1808-3688)
[1] National School of Commerce and Management (ENCG Settat),
Hassan First University of Settat, Morocco

SOUAD RAFIQ[2], (Professor of Higher Education)
[2] National School of Commerce and Management (ENCG Settat),
Hassan First University of Settat, Morocco

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Abstract

Organizational environments can often create a significant gap between how employees perceive themselves and the values, strengths, and professional identity they endorse. This conceptual article examines the relationship between the perceived self and the authentic self by introducing the Authentic Self Disconnect (ASD) as a subjective workplace perception. ASD is conceptualized as a perceived mismatch between these two dimensions of the self rather than as a hidden psychological reality, a clinical disorder, or a mental health diagnosis.

This study investigates how workplace demands and social appraisals may contribute to identity erosion while organizational resources may help reduce this process. It integrates several theoretical perspectives, including authenticity and work identity research, the impostor phenomenon, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework, psychological safety, trust in leadership, and a neuromanagement perspective through the SCARF model. Drawing on neuromanagement research, SCARF is used as an interpretive framework for understanding how employees cognitively and affectively appraise workplace signals through the domains of status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness. It is not presented as evidence of a specific neural mechanism.

The model identifies workplace demands such as evaluative pressure, excessive performance expectations, and social comparison as potential threats to authenticity. It further suggests that repeated SCARF-informed threat appraisals may generate feelings of misalignment, while psychological safety, recognition, developmental feedback, autonomy, and trust in leadership may function as organizational resources. Four theoretical propositions connect workplace demands to social appraisals, social appraisals to ASD, organizational resources to a buffering role, and ASD to lower work engagement and employee voice.

This article is purely conceptual and intended to support future empirical research. No primary data is collected. Therefore, the proposed construct, suggested causal relationships, and anticipated outcomes should be regarded as theoretical propositions rather than empirically validated findings. Future research should establish the validity of the Authentic Self Disconnect construct, develop context-sensitive measurement instruments, and test the hypothesized relationships through longitudinal studies conducted across different organizational settings.

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Keywords: neuromanagement, Authentic Self Disconnect (ASD), identity erosion, work identity, SCARF model, psychological safety, job demands-resources (JD-R).

Résumé

Les environnements organisationnels créent souvent un écart important entre la manière dont les employés se perçoivent et les valeurs, les forces ainsi que l'identité professionnelle auxquelles ils adhèrent. Cet article conceptuel examine la relation entre le soi perçu et le soi authentique en introduisant le concept d'Authentic Self Disconnect (ASD) comme une perception subjective liée au travail. L'ASD est conceptualisé comme un décalage perçu entre ces deux dimensions du soi, et non comme une réalité psychologique cachée, un trouble clinique ou un diagnostic de santé mentale.

Cette étude cherche à comprendre comment les exigences professionnelles et les évaluations sociales peuvent contribuer à l'érosion de l'identité, tandis que certaines ressources organisationnelles sont susceptibles d'en atténuer les effets. Elle mobilise plusieurs perspectives théoriques complémentaires, notamment les recherches sur l'authenticité et l'identité au travail, le phénomène de l'imposteur, le modèle des Exigences-Ressources au Travail (JD-R), la sécurité psychologique, la confiance dans le leadership ainsi qu'une perspective de neuromanagement fondée sur le modèle SCARF. Issu des travaux en neuromanagement, le modèle SCARF est utilisé comme un cadre interprétatif permettant de comprendre la manière dont les employés évaluent cognitivement et affectivement les signaux organisationnels à travers cinq dimensions : le statut, la certitude, l'autonomie, l'appartenance relationnelle et l'équité. Il n'est toutefois pas présenté comme la preuve d'un mécanisme neuronal spécifique.

Le modèle identifie plusieurs exigences professionnelles susceptibles de menacer l'authenticité, telles que la pression évaluative, les attentes excessives en matière de performance et la comparaison sociale. Il suggère que la répétition d'évaluations perçues comme menaçantes au regard des dimensions du modèle SCARF peut engendrer un sentiment de désalignement, tandis que la sécurité psychologique, la reconnaissance, le feedback de développement, l'autonomie et la confiance dans le leadership peuvent agir comme des ressources organisationnelles. Quatre propositions théoriques relient les exigences professionnelles aux évaluations sociales, les évaluations à l'ASD, les ressources à un rôle d'atténuation, et l'ASD à une diminution de l'engagement au travail et de la prise de parole des employés.

Cet article est exclusivement conceptuel. Aucune donnée primaire n'ayant été collectée, le construit proposé, les relations causales avancées et les résultats envisagés doivent être considérés comme des propositions théoriques. Les recherches futures devront établir la validité de l'ASD, développer des instruments de mesure adaptés au contexte et tester les relations proposées au moyen d'études longitudinales menées dans différents environnements organisationnels.

Mots-clés : neuromanagement, Authentic Self Disconnect (ASD), érosion de l'identité, identité au travail, modèle SCARF, sécurité psychologique, exigences et ressources au travail (JD-R).

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Introduction

Although organizations invest in training, performance evaluation, and career development plans, some employees, if not many of them, still question the real value of their professional accomplishments and the legitimacy of their competencies. This tension is well known in the literature as the impostor phenomenon. It typically involves recurrent self-doubt, questioning of one's own abilities, and the minimization of personal achievements despite evidence of success and goal attainment (Clance & Imes, 1978; Bravata et al., 2020).

In the workplace, such experiences may be influenced not only by individual tendencies but also by the organizational context. A recent systematic review of the impostor phenomenon at work highlighted conceptual imprecision and called for a clearer distinction between relatively enduring tendencies and context-elicited state experiences (Gullifor et al., 2024).

The present article addresses a related but broader issue concerning the potential erosion of an employee's connection to a self-understanding that they personally endorse, notably their valued strengths and professional identity. Professional identity develops through ongoing interactions between work experiences and self-understanding (Pratt et al., 2006). The distinction between the perceived self and the authentic self is preserved yet requires rigorous conceptual framing. Research on authenticity at work distinguishes experienced, expressed, and perceived forms of authenticity and demonstrates that organizational standards influence which forms of self-expression are accepted or rewarded (Cha et al., 2019). Accordingly, the authentic self is used here to refer to the values, strengths, and identity commitments endorsed by employees themselves. The perceived self refers to the employee's current self-appraisal shaped by role expectations, social comparison, and feedback. The gap between the two is conceptualized as a subjective work-related perception rather than an objective competence deficit.

The main purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between organizational conditions and employees' perceived self-alignment at work. The central question guiding this article is the following: How may workplace demands and social appraisals contribute to identity erosion, and how may organizational resources protect against it?

Drawing on a neuromanagement perspective, this article uses the SCARF model to better understand how employees interpret social experiences in organizational settings. The objective is to develop a theoretical model combining the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) perspective with

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SCARF-informed social appraisals. The JD-R model offers a structure for distinguishing demands from resources (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), while the SCARF model provides an interpretive vocabulary for understanding social appraisals (Rock, 2008). The model positions Authentic Self Disconnect (ASD) as a proposed construct requiring future empirical validation.

The article makes three contributions. First, it defines ASD in subjective and work-related terms, thereby limiting the risk of treating a metaphor as an established measure. Second, it connects demands and resources to the identity process through social appraisals rather than asserting a direct neural cause. Third, it proposes four testable propositions and outlines a research agenda. The remainder of the article reviews the theoretical foundations of the model, develops the conceptual framework, discusses its implications and limitations, and concludes with directions for future research.

1. Theoretical Foundations

1.1. Perceived Self, Authenticity, and Work Identity.

The perceived self refers to an individual's current self-appraisal at work. It can be described as the image a person forms of their competence, worth, and professional standing. It is a conscious construct shaped by personal interpretations of experience, internalized role expectations, social comparison with colleagues, and feedback from managers, peers, and evaluation systems (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In other words, two employees can hold the same record without having the same experience and thus develop different self-appraisals depending on how they interpret these experiences and the signals they receive over time. This understanding of who they are professionally can be shaped by various experiences, including promotions, critical remarks during meetings, the visible success of colleagues, or the absence of acknowledgment following sustained effort. Professional identity develops through ongoing interactions between work experiences and self-understanding (Pratt et al., 2006). When these interactions repeatedly challenge valued aspects of identity, employees may progressively experience a weakening of their perceived sense of alignment. Repeated experiences of this kind may therefore make the perceived self particularly sensitive to organizational signals concerning competence, value, and professional standing.

It is important to note that the authentic self mobilized in this article requires careful boundaries. It does not refer to a hidden, objectively fixed essence that researchers or managers could discover.

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Nor does it refer to a verified inventory of latent abilities. Instead, it refers to a set of values, strengths, and identity commitments that an individual recognizes as personally meaningful and endorses as their own (Cha et al., 2019). This definition keeps the construct within the space of perception and meaning, where it can be studied without claiming that organizations are capable of quantifying employees' "true potential." It also prevents authenticity from being treated as a resource to be extracted from employees rather than as a perspective individuals hold about themselves.

Research on authenticity supports this bounded interpretation. It is not a simple construct on which all researchers agree. An integrative review distinguishes multiple forms, including experienced authenticity, expressed authenticity, and perceived authenticity, and shows that organizational standards shape which forms of self-expression are accepted or rewarded (Cha et al., 2019). This suggests that a mismatch may arise between the perceived self and the authentic self. Such a discrepancy may mainly arise from two sources. First, it may reflect inaccurate self-evaluation, as in chronic self-doubt despite evidence of competence. Second, it may reflect the conditions under which individuals can express valued aspects of their identity, as organizations that privilege a narrow performance style may push employees to suppress parts of themselves that they consider core to who they are (Cha et al., 2019; Pratt et al., 2006). The model treats this mismatch as a subjective, potentially recurrent state that can vary across roles and situations rather than as a stable trait or objective competence deficit.

1.2. Impostor Feelings and Identity Erosion

The impostor phenomenon, first described among high-achieving women in academic settings, refers to an internal experience of intellectual phoniness. Individuals tend to attribute their achievements and accomplishments to luck, timing, or error rather than to their own abilities, while simultaneously experiencing a persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud because their success is perceived as undeserved (Clance & Imes, 1978).

A systematic review of 62 studies found prevalence estimates varying widely according to screening tools and thresholds and reported associations with job performance, job satisfaction, and burnout, while also highlighting heterogeneous study designs and a lack of published evidence regarding effective interventions (Bravata et al., 2020).

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A more recent review of the phenomenon in the workplace, covering 188 scholarly works, highlighted conceptual imprecision and proposed a distinction between trait-like and state-like impostor experiences while identifying the organizational context as an important area requiring further theoretical development (Gullifor et al., 2024). The review also emphasizes that impostor feelings may emerge when individuals perceive a discrepancy between how others see them and how they see themselves. It is therefore important to note that this discrepancy stems from subjective perception rather than objective measurement.

This article adopts this state-based and perception-oriented interpretation without equating impostor feelings with identity erosion. Impostor feelings are viewed as one possible manifestation of self-evaluative doubt within the broader framework proposed here. Identity erosion is conceptualized as a progressive and cumulative weakening of the perceived alignment between employees' self-appraisals and their self-endorsed values, strengths, and professional identity. This definition provides the conceptual foundation for the proposed ASD construct developed later in the model.

It should also be recognized that an individual may doubt their competence when facing a new challenge or unfamiliar task without experiencing broader identity erosion. Conversely, repeated experiences of exclusion, unfairness, or devaluation may significantly affect an individual's identity even when their competence is not being questioned.

While impostor feelings primarily involve competence-related doubts and the persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud, identity erosion, as conceptualized in this article, also encompasses a perceived loss of connection with values and strengths that individuals continue to recognize as their own. This distinction allows the proposed model to remain theoretically broader while avoiding the conflation of two distinct phenomena.

1.3. Neuromanagement, Promises and Boundaries

Neuromanagement and organizational neuroscience seek to establish links between brain-related knowledge and theories of organizational behavior. Organizational neuroscience can provide an additional level of analysis to workplace theories, enhance existing explanations, and open new research avenues (Becker, Cropanzano, & Sanfey, 2011). At the same time, any conceptual work drawing on these perspectives must acknowledge their limitations in order to provide a balanced understanding of their contributions.

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A systematic review of 93 empirical and theoretical studies found the neuroleadership field to be dispersed, with key constructs and boundaries still requiring conceptual clarification (Guarnier & Chimenti, 2023). A more recent review of research in HRM also describes the field as fragmented and conceptually underdeveloped and identifies uneven empirical attention across neurocognitive themes (Kavousi, Ewing, & Brunetto, 2026). These limitations influence how neuroscientific concepts are used in the present article. Rather than being treated as proof of specific neural mechanisms, they are used as an interpretive lens for understanding social processes at work.

It is therefore important to emphasize that this article does not claim that identity erosion can be located in a particular brain region or that organizational events produce measurable neural signatures of disconnection. From a neuromanagement perspective, employees' self-appraisals may be shaped by rapid, affective, and sometimes nonconscious responses to social signals. Consequently, ordinary managerial practices may carry substantial psychological meaning.

Within the present article, the neuromanagement perspective is operationalized through the SCARF framework. Drawing on social neuroscience, the SCARF model provides a structured way of understanding how employees interpret workplace experiences through appraisals of status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness. It therefore serves as the principal mechanism through which neuromanagement concepts are incorporated into the proposed model (Rock, 2008; Rock & Cox, 2012).

This framing remains modest but adequate for the present model and is consistent with calls for conceptual discipline before stronger empirical claims are made.

1.4. The SCARF Framework as an Interpretive Lens

Consistent with the neuromanagement perspective adopted in this article, the SCARF model provides a structured approach for understanding social appraisals through a vocabulary that helps explain how employees interpret organizational conditions and workplace experiences. Proposed by Rock (2008), the model organizes social experience around five domains. Status refers to an individual's relative importance to others. Certainty reflects the ability to predict future events. Autonomy relates to the sense of control over one's environment. Relatedness concerns the sense of safety experienced in interactions with others. Fairness refers to the perception of fair exchanges and treatment. These domains are viewed as potential sources of social reward or social threat. The descriptive value of the model for organizational analysis lies in its capacity to make visible

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ordinary workplace signals, including feedback practices, clarity of expectations, decision latitude, inclusion, and transparency.

These domains are reflected in familiar managerial practices. Comparisons with colleagues may signal status. Unclear or constantly changing criteria may threaten certainty. Excessive control may constrain autonomy. Exclusionary behaviors toward individuals may threaten relatedness. Unclear or opaque decisions regarding promotion and career development may be perceived as unfair. Conversely, specific feedback, clear expectations, meaningful choices, inclusive interactions, and transparent procedures may support these domains (Rock, 2008).

In the proposed model, SCARF is used strictly as a tool for interpreting social appraisals rather than as evidence that a particular brain circuit causes identity erosion. This qualification preserves the neuromanagement perspective while avoiding unsupported neurobiological assertions.

1.5. Psychological Safety and Trust as Contextual Resources

Psychological safety plays a central role in the proposed process and provides an established construct for its interpersonal dimension. Edmondson (1999) defines team psychological safety as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. Her research also demonstrated that psychological safety is associated with learning behaviors within work teams.

To extend this perspective, a meta-analysis of 136 independent samples examined the antecedents and outcomes of psychological safety at both the individual and group levels. The findings highlighted the importance of supportive leadership and favorable work conditions while emphasizing that the level of analysis must be handled carefully (Frazier et al., 2017).

In the present model, psychological safety is considered a potential resource, particularly as a team climate in which asking questions, admitting mistakes, and expressing disagreement involve limited interpersonal risk. Its specific buffering effect on ASD remains an untested proposition and constitutes one of the central assumptions of the proposed model.

Trust represents another important relational resource within the proposed model, although it remains distinct from psychological safety. Dirks and Ferrin's (2002) meta-analysis found that trust in direct leaders is associated with important workplace outcomes, including performance, organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, and intention to quit.

Building on this perspective, Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) proposed an integrative model identifying perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity as distinct foundations of trustworthiness.

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These three dimensions contribute to employees' evaluations of whether a leader can be considered trustworthy. These evaluations may in turn influence how employees interpret workplace feedback and evaluative situations.

These frameworks help explain why feedback from a leader may be interpreted differently depending on whether employees perceive that leader as competent, well-intentioned, and principled, or merely as a formal authority figure within the organization. Trust is therefore included in the proposed model as a contextual condition that may shape social appraisals rather than as a simple synonym for psychological safety.

1.6. Job Demands and Resources

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework is built around two broad categories of work characteristics, namely job demands and job resources. Job demands require sustained physical, cognitive, or emotional effort and are therefore associated with strain, whereas job resources support goal attainment, learning, and motivation while also buffering the negative effects of job demands. The original model suggested that job demands were primarily associated with exhaustion, whereas a lack of resources was mainly associated with disengagement across different occupational groups (Demerouti et al., 2001). Since then, the theory has evolved considerably to incorporate motivational and strain processes, resource-buffering mechanisms, and reciprocal effects (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

For the purposes of this article, potential job demands include evaluative pressure, excessive performance demands, and persistent social comparison. Potential resources include recognition, autonomy, developmental feedback, psychological safety, and trust in the direct leader. Within the proposed model, the JD-R framework provides the overall structure through which demands and resources can be organized. Consistent with the neuromanagement perspective adopted in this article, the SCARF framework specifies the social appraisal mechanisms through which employees may interpret workplace experiences. Similarly, impostor feelings inform one possible manifestation of self-doubt, while psychological safety and trust represent distinct contextual resources.

This division of theoretical roles prevents conceptual overlap between the different frameworks and helps maintain the conceptual and empirical specificity of each construct.

2. Conceptual Approach

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This article develops the proposed Authentic Self Disconnect (ASD) construct through a focused and integrative synthesis of five complementary bodies of literature. The synthesis draws on research on authenticity and work identity, the impostor phenomenon, psychological safety and trust in leadership, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, and neuromanagement.

To develop this framework, foundational studies were used to define established constructs, while more recent reviews were mobilized to identify current conceptual boundaries and research gaps. The selection criterion was theoretical relevance to the proposed relationships rather than an exhaustive review of every study within each field.

From an epistemological perspective, this article adopts an interpretivist and theory-building orientation. The proposed model does not seek to establish causal relationships empirically but rather to develop theoretically grounded propositions capable of guiding future empirical investigation. The reasoning process is primarily abductive, combining insights from several complementary streams of literature to generate a new conceptual interpretation of identity erosion in organizational settings.

The synthesis proceeded in two main stages. First, the central constructs and their boundaries were specified in order to distinguish the proposed Authentic Self Disconnect (ASD) from related concepts such as impostor feelings, self-efficacy, perceived authenticity, and disengagement. Second, a distinct role was assigned to each theoretical framework. The JD-R framework organizes job demands and resources. The SCARF framework operationalizes the neuromanagement perspective by explaining social appraisals. Psychological safety and trust represent contextual resources within the proposed model.

This article is not a PRISMA-based systematic review, does not rely on a predefined corpus of studies, and does not involve the collection of primary data. The propositions developed throughout the paper should therefore be understood as theoretical expectations intended for future empirical testing rather than as validated findings.

3. Proposed Theoretical Research Model

3.1. Construct Definition and Scope

Authentic Self Disconnect (ASD) can be provisionally defined as a subjective and potentially recurrent work-related perception according to which one's self-appraisal and work-role expression do not adequately reflect one's self-endorsed values, strengths, or professional identity. ASD is

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subjective and mainly concerns the misalignment perceived by the employee rather than an objectively established judgment made by an external observer. In addition, it is work-related and therefore concerns the professional domain rather than broader aspects of self-esteem or identity outside the workplace. Finally, ASD is only a proposed construct and not a validated measure in this article. It is therefore important to emphasize that it is neither a clinical condition nor an objective measure of latent ability.

These three characteristics constitute the foundation of the theoretical reasoning developed in this study. The cognitive dimension concerns self-appraisal and the interpretation of feedback, particularly the extent to which success is either internalized or discounted. The emotional dimension relates to self-doubt and the fear of being devalued or exposed. Finally, the relational-organizational dimension concerns recognition, belonging, and perceived safety in expressing valued aspects of identity within the workplace. Together, these dimensions provide conceptual directions for future measurement development. These dimensions may nevertheless overlap with established constructs, making the demonstration of their distinctiveness a primary objective for future research.

ASD is not equivalent to impostor feelings, which center on competence-related doubts and the fear of exposure. Nor is it equivalent to low self-efficacy, which refers to beliefs regarding one's capacity to perform specific tasks. It is also not limited to perceived inauthenticity, as ASD additionally concerns the perceived connection to one's endorsed values and professional identity. Finally, ASD should not be equated with disengagement, which the model considers a potential outcome rather than the construct itself. These distinctions should be regarded as theoretical propositions to be tested rather than established assumptions. They provide the conceptual basis for the theoretical propositions developed in the following sections.

3.2. Model Architecture

The model links four families of constructs in a theoretical sequence while organizational resources are expected to moderate some of these relationships.

The first family comprises organizational demands, notably evaluative pressure, excessive performance demands, and persistent social comparison. These represent work conditions that the JD-R literature associates with strain.

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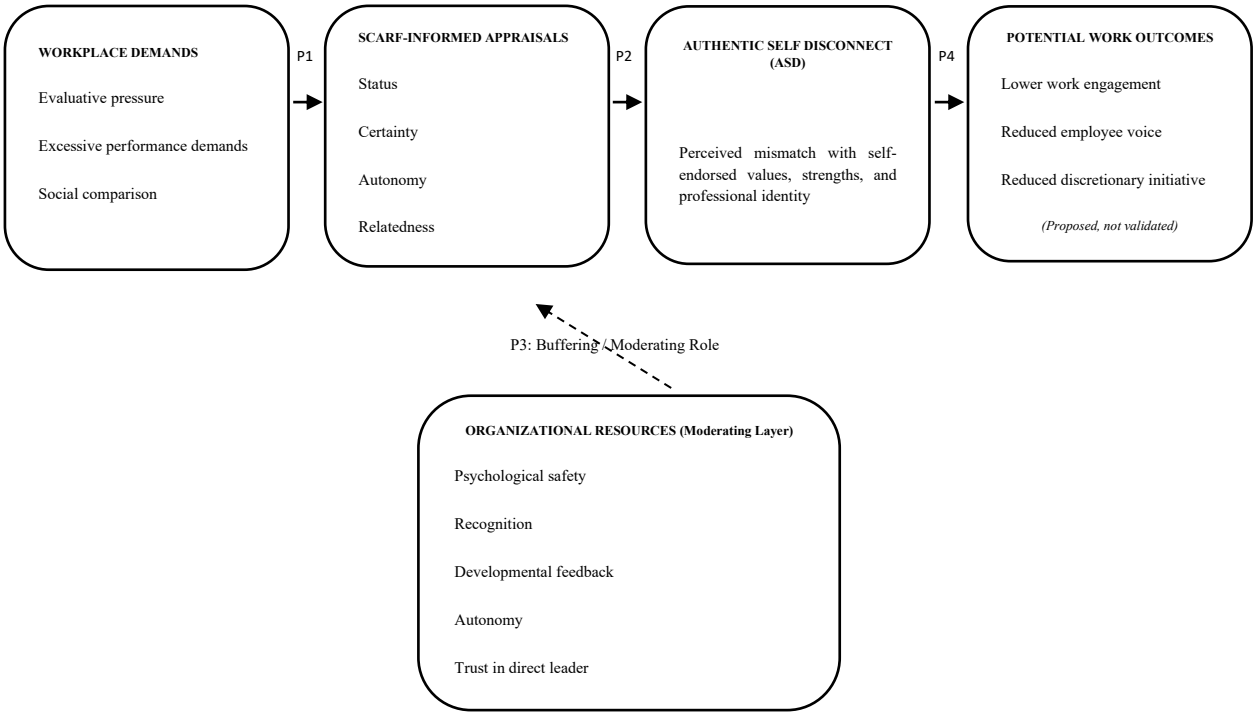
The second concerns social appraisals specified through the five SCARF domains of status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness (Rock, 2008). Consistent with the neuromanagement perspective adopted in this article, these appraisals represent the primary mechanism through which employees interpret workplace experiences. In the proposed model, job demands do not affect identity directly. Rather, they operate through the way employees appraise them. An evaluation system does not constitute a threat to identity in itself, yet it may be appraised as one if it signals diminished status, unpredictable judgment, or unfair treatment.

The third corresponds to ASD, which is positioned as a potential accumulation mechanism. Appraisals that recur across situations and over time may consolidate into a persistent perception of misalignment.

The fourth includes work-related outcomes, with work engagement (Kahn, 1990) and employee voice (Morrison, 2011) as the focal outcomes. The overall architecture of the model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Proposed JD-R and SCARF-Informed Model of Identity Erosion



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Note. Author's conceptualization. SCARF is used as an interpretive framework for social appraisals derived from a neuromanagement perspective. The proposed paths represent theoretical relationships and have not yet been empirically tested.

3.3. Theoretical Propositions

Proposition 1. Workplace Demands and Social Appraisals

Evaluative pressure, social comparison, and lack of recognition can signal a threat to one or more SCARF domains. Comparison with visible colleagues may threaten status, unclear or shifting expectations may threaten certainty, excessive control may threaten autonomy, exclusionary dynamics may threaten relatedness, and opaque reward or promotion decisions may threaten fairness (Rock, 2008). The JD-R framework treats these conditions as potential job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). The strength of such appraisals may depend on the employee, role, tenure, prior experience, and relational context. Therefore, this proposition predicts an association rather than a deterministic causal relationship.

P1. Workplace demands related to evaluation, social comparison, and lack of recognition are positively associated with SCARF-informed threat appraisals.

Proposition 2. Appraisals and Perceived Disconnect

Repeated appraisals may influence how employees interpret success, failure, and their place within the organization. The impostor literature documents self-doubt and difficulties internalizing success, while workplace-oriented research emphasizes contextual antecedents (Bravata et al., 2020; Gullifor et al., 2024). The proposed transition from these appraisals to ASD constitutes a theoretical extension. Recurrent threat interpretations may progressively accumulate and generate a perceived misalignment between the professional self individuals experience and the values and strengths they endorse. Isolated episodes are common and may be absorbed. The model therefore focuses on the potential cumulative effect of repeated experiences.

P2. SCARF-informed threat appraisals are positively associated with employees' perceived Authentic Self Disconnect.

Proposition 3. Resources as Buffers

Resources may influence how workplace demands are experienced, consistent with the buffering logic of the JD-R framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Clear expectations support certainty, meaningful choice supports autonomy, specific recognition supports status, inclusive interactions

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support relatedness, and transparent procedures support fairness. Psychological safety reduces interpersonal risk associated with asking questions, admitting mistakes, and expressing disagreement and may therefore reduce the likelihood that evaluative situations are appraised as threatening (Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017). Trust in the direct leader may also influence how feedback is received, particularly when employees perceive ability, benevolence, and integrity in that leader (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer et al., 1995). The specific moderating effect of these resources on ASD remains to be empirically tested.

P3. Psychological safety, recognition, developmental feedback, autonomy, and trust in the direct leader weaken the positive association between SCARF-informed threat appraisals and ASD.

Proposition 4. ASD and Work Outcomes

Employees who perceive a persistent mismatch between their self-endorsed identity and their work experience may be less willing to invest attention, energy, and voice in their work. Kahn (1990) demonstrated that employees differ in the degree to which they bring their physical, cognitive, and emotional selves into work-role performance. The JD-R literature distinguishes motivational outcomes, such as work engagement, from strain-related processes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The relationship between ASD, work engagement, and employee voice is proposed as a theoretical expectation requiring empirical testing rather than as an established finding.

P4. Higher levels of perceived ASD are negatively associated with work engagement and employee voice.

3.4. Construct Distinctiveness and Falsifiability

A conceptual model gains scientific value through its ability to be challenged and empirically tested. Following this premise, it is useful to develop meaningful tests to determine whether ASD adds explanatory value beyond adjacent constructs.

First, ASD should explain variance among employees who do not doubt their competence but nevertheless feel misaligned with their work-related values. If ASD is found to overlap entirely with impostor feelings, the established construct should be preferred.

Second, ASD should predict outcomes beyond task-specific self-efficacy, since confidence in one's ability to perform a task can coexist with a perceived misalignment with personal values.

Third, the relational-organizational dimension of ASD should provide explanatory value beyond perceived authenticity by capturing aspects of recognition, belonging, and identity expression.

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Fourth, ASD should temporally precede disengagement in longitudinal studies, as a construct that merely mirrors its outcome offers little explanatory value.

A measurement pathway follows from these tests. Qualitative interviews should first be conducted to establish content validity, followed by expert reviews of candidate items and quantitative evaluations of factor structure and discriminant validity against impostor feelings, self-efficacy, perceived authenticity, psychological safety, engagement, and employee voice.

The cognitive, emotional, and relational-organizational dimensions should remain provisional until this validation process is completed.

3.5. Summary of the Model

In summary, organizational demands may contribute to identity erosion when they are appraised as threats to status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, or fairness. Recurrent appraisals may gradually consolidate into a perceived Authentic Self Disconnect (ASD). Organizational resources, including psychological safety, recognition, developmental feedback, autonomy, and trust in the direct leader, are expected to buffer this process. ASD is expected to be associated with lower work engagement and reduced employee voice.

The contribution of the model is not to demonstrate that identity erosion occurs, but rather to identify where it can be examined, through which proposed mechanisms it may develop, and how it can be distinguished from related constructs.

4. Discussion

4.1. Theoretical Contribution

The proposed contribution of this article is an integrative model of identity erosion in organizations. It preserves the central tension between the perceived self and the authentic self while defining the latter through self-endorsed values, strengths, and identity rather than as an objectively measurable hidden essence. The proposed ASD construct is positioned between organizationally shaped appraisals and potential work outcomes, with recurrent threat appraisals considered the underlying mechanism through which identity erosion may develop.

The model relies on several complementary theoretical perspectives. The JD-R framework provides the general structure through which demands and resources are organized. The neuromanagement perspective is operationalized through the SCARF framework, which offers an interpretive lens for understanding social appraisals associated with status, certainty, autonomy,

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relatedness, and fairness. Impostor feelings are considered one possible manifestation of self-doubt, whereas psychological safety and trust are viewed as distinct contextual resources that may influence how employees experience workplace demands and interpret organizational situations.

The value of the model ultimately depends on the clarity of the construct boundaries rather than on terminological novelty. ASD should demonstrate explanatory value beyond impostor feelings, self-efficacy, perceived authenticity, and disengagement. For this reason, the proposed propositions are intentionally formulated in a way that makes the construct empirically testable. If future research shows that ASD cannot be distinguished from already established constructs, the more parsimonious explanation should be retained. Rather than weakening the model, this condition reinforces its scientific value by clearly identifying the evidence that could support or challenge its relevance.

4.2. Managerial Implications

The model suggests managerial practices that can be examined rather than interventions whose effectiveness for ASD has already been established. Managers may provide specific feedback tied to observable work, clarify expectations, offer appropriate autonomy, recognize contributions transparently, and encourage questions or disagreement without creating interpersonal risk. These practices are consistent with the resources identified in the model and with the social domains described by the SCARF framework (Rock, 2008).

The relational dimension deserves particular attention. Meta-analytic evidence associates trust in direct leaders with important workplace outcomes, including performance, organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, and intention to quit (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). The integrative model of organizational trust proposes that perceptions of a leader's ability, benevolence, and integrity form distinct foundations of trustworthiness (Mayer et al., 1995). Within the present model, a leader perceived as competent, well-intentioned, and principled may make evaluative feedback easier to interpret as useful developmental information rather than as a signal of rejection. This represents a reasoned implication of the proposed appraisal process rather than an empirically tested intervention effect.

Organizations should avoid turning SCARF into an employee-screening tool or a brain-based diagnostic instrument. It is used here to encourage reflection on workplace conditions rather than to classify individuals according to presumed neural responses. Organizational practices should be

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evaluated on the basis of employees' experiences and workplace outcomes and should not be presented as guaranteed methods for restoring employees' perceived sense of alignment.

4.3. Limitations and Future Research

This article is conceptual and does not report any empirical test of the proposed model. ASD currently has no validated measure, and its proposed dimensions may overlap with established constructs. The direction and strength of the proposed relationships remain unknown. SCARF is used as a heuristic and interpretive framework. It is not presented as evidence of a specific neural mechanism. Furthermore, the focused synthesis developed in this article is not exhaustive and should not be interpreted as a systematic review.

Future research should establish the content validity of the construct through employee interviews and expert review and subsequently test its discriminant validity against impostor feelings, self-efficacy, perceived authenticity, and disengagement. Longitudinal and multi-source designs could examine whether workplace demands precede perceived misalignment and whether organizational resources moderate this relationship. Psychological safety should be measured at the team level, and its cross-level relationship with individual appraisals should be explicitly tested.

Cross-cultural research, including future studies conducted in Moroccan organizational settings, could examine whether appraisals and resources vary across institutional and cultural contexts. No Moroccan empirical findings are claimed in this article.

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Conclusion

This article set out to explore a tension that may emerge in organizational settings when employees perceive a growing distance between who they believe they are and the values, strengths, and professional identity they continue to endorse. Building on this issue, the article introduced the concept of Authentic Self Disconnect (ASD) as a subjective and work-related perception of misalignment rather than as a clinical condition, a hidden psychological reality, or an objective measure of ability.

To examine this process, the article developed an integrative conceptual model combining insights from work identity and authenticity research, the impostor phenomenon, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, psychological safety, trust in leadership, and a neuromanagement perspective operationalized through the SCARF framework. The model proposes that workplace demands may contribute to SCARF-informed threat appraisals, which may progressively consolidate into ASD. Organizational resources are expected to buffer this process, while higher levels of ASD may be associated with lower work engagement and employee voice.

The contribution of the article does not lie in demonstrating that identity erosion occurs, but in offering a structured framework through which it can be examined. Particular attention was given to construct boundaries, and ASD was deliberately distinguished from impostor feelings, self-efficacy, perceived authenticity, and disengagement. The model therefore provides a set of propositions that can be empirically challenged rather than a series of validated conclusions.

Future research should establish the content validity and discriminant validity of ASD, develop appropriate measurement instruments, and test the proposed relationships through longitudinal and multi-level research designs. Cross-cultural studies may also contribute to understanding how organizational conditions, social appraisals, and contextual resources interact across different environments.

Ultimately, the central argument of this article is that organizational conditions may influence not only what employees do, but also how they interpret who they are in their professional lives. Whether ASD represents a distinct and measurable construct remains an empirical question. The present model seeks to make that question explicit and to provide a structured starting point for future investigation.

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