Identity and Well-being in the Skilled Crafts and Trades

By Martin Binder and Ann-Kathrin Blankenberg

We analyze the extent to which occupational identity is conducive to worker well-being. Using a unique survey data set of individuals working in the German skilled crafts and trades, we extend research that conceives of identity as social (group membership) to comprise personal and relational elements inherent in one’s work. The latter are linked to significant social interactions a worker has in their job (boss, colleagues, public) and the former to specific work characteristics of the work conducted itself. We measure identity with questions about seeing the job as part of one’s personality and being proud and passionate about it, and we find that higher job satisfaction is related to a stronger sense of occupational identity in our sample. This relationship is quite sizable and robust across model specifications. Occupational identity is positively associated with a number of work characteristics, viz. task significance, task and skill variety, as well as social support and autonomy, and our analysis confirms that identity mediates the influence of these characteristics with regard to job satisfaction. We further find that identity also increases in vocational development and is higher for craftsmen and -women not involved in office work (it is also more pronounced for those leading their own firm).