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When Identities Collide: Organizational and Professional Identity Conflict and Employee Outcomes

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Abstract

Purpose – While many workers have both professional and organizational identities, which can have conflicting expectations, little is known about this specific and common form of identity conflict. The purpose of this research is to develop and test a measure of organizational and professional identity conflict (OPIC), which the authors define as a psychological conflict that individuals experience between who they feel they are supposed to be in their organization and who they feel they are supposed to be in their profession. The authors theorize that this identity conflict will lead to emotional exhaustion and psychological distress, further leading to turnover intentions.

Design/methodology/approach – To test the hypothesized model, the authors utilized a two-study constructive replication design (Study 1, n = 225; Study 2, n = 176) and tested the model amongst both academics and health care professionals using structural equation modeling.

Findings – The authors find that identity conflict is associated with both increased levels of emotional exhaustion and psychological distress and, consequently, increased turnover intentions.

Practical implications – Practically, organizations must understand and align themselves with the wider professional expectations, as well as communicate this alignment, in order to avoid OPIC and improve employee well-being.

Originality/value – The authors create and validate a measure to assess and show its detrimental effects on workplace outcomes.

Keywords Identity conflict, Uncertainty-identity theory, Emotional exhaustion, Psychological distress, Turnover intentions

Paper type Original article

Introduction

Organizational identification, "the perception of oneness with or belongness' to the organization" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 21), is linked to numerous important organizational outcomes including employee performance (e.g. Riketta, 2005; van Knippenberg, 2000), employee creativity (Hirst *et al.*, 2009) and overall firm financial performance (Homburg *et al.*, 2009). An organizational identity is a social identity (i.e. group identity) related to an organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Employees also possess other work-related social identities, such as professional identities. An example of a professional identity could be a certified public accountant (CPA). A CPA likely has an organizational identity, such as Ernst and Young employee, as well as their CPA professional identity which is separate and distinct. Individuals often simultaneously identify with multiple groups and these groups can potentially hold competing expectations, such as an organization (e.g. Enron)

asking its CPAs to do something which goes against industry (professional identity) ethics. Groups put strong pressure on individuals to conform to the views and expectations held by the majority of the group (Hackman, 1992). Given the potential for inconsistencies across group identities, researchers need to better understand the consequences of a conflict between organizational and professional identities (e.g. two, non-nested, group identities).

Research on these two similar constructs has occurred separately, with little research conducted on both forms of identification together since Gouldner's (1957) seminal work on cosmopolitans (those who identified with their professions) and locals (those who identified with their organizations). While Gouldner (1957) argued that individuals fall on a continuum in regard to whether they identify with their profession or their organization, we take a dual identification approach suggesting that, rather than "one or the other", individuals frequently identify with both their organization and their profession at the same time. Though work on dual organizational and professional identification is scant, the wider multiple-identity research stream offers evidence to support this view. From a general intersectional perspective to specific studies, such as how career pluralists attempt to synchronize multiple identities (Caza *et al.*, 2018), individuals often work with multiple identities simultaneously (Caprar *et al.*, 2022; Ramarajan, 2014; Ladge *et al.*, 2012).

Identification with both an organization and a profession can create uncertainty for the individual, as the identities may provide different guidelines regarding appropriate behavior at work. In other words, some individuals will experience a conflict between these two identities. An identity conflict occurs when there is an inconsistency in the make-up of two or more identities (Ashforth *et al.*, 2008). While there has been a significant amount of work on how individuals navigate multiple work identities (e.g. Bataille and Vough, 2022; Ramarajan, 2014), as well as some work explicitly addressing identity conflict (e.g. Lanaj *et al.*, 2021; Creed *et al.*, 2010; Kreiner *et al.*, 2006), there has been little work in operationalizing specific identity conflicts. We address this by defining, creating and validating a measure for organizational and professional identity conflict (OPIC), the psychological conflict that individuals experience between who they feel they are supposed to be in their organization and who they feel they are supposed to be in their profession. This includes the felt conflict between both of these collective identities in regards to their goals, beliefs, values, stereotypical traits and knowledge.

While the evidence on organizational identity and professional identity indicates that, separately, they are beneficial to organizations (e.g. Riketta, 2005; Loi *et al.*, 2004), we address what happens when these identities conflict. Specifically, through a two-study design across two different professional populations, we explore the effects of identity conflict (i.e. OPIC) on individual well-being (i.e. emotional exhaustion and psychological distress) and behavioral intentions (i.e. turnover intentions). Holistically, we find support for the hypothesized model, such that identity conflict has important practical implications for both employees and their organizations. Specifically, higher levels of identity conflict are related to increased emotional exhaustion and psychological distress, effectively reducing employee well-being.

Based on our findings, we suggest several practical takeaways for organizations. These include that organizations should pay special care to understanding professional standards and expectations, aligning organizations with these standards and communicating with employees how the expectations of the organization work with their professional expectations. Additionally, we suggest that organizations and professional groups may also want to implement a feedback system to solicit input from members regarding potential conflict between professional expectations and values and what is actively occurring in the workplace. Overall, our findings across both studies illustrate that the collective identities individuals hold have important implications for employees' wellbeing and, consequentially, important ramifications for organizations.

Conceptualizing identity conflict
Multiple identities. Individuals possess multiple identities because they occupy multiple roles, are members of multiple groups or collectives and claim multiple individual characteristics (Burke and Stets, 2009). Identity scholars, as well as philosophers and general social scientists, have long acknowledged the existence of multiple identities within the same individual (e.g. Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Thoits, 1983). As an example of this, two major theories in identity, social identity theory and role identity theory, each recognize that individuals have multiple group memberships and occupy numerous roles simultaneously (Roccas and Brewer, 2002; Thoits, 1986). One concept underlying the notion of identity and multiple identities is that identities are a resource pool (Anzollitto and Cooper, 2022). Thus, they provide (or deny) individuals access to a variety of tangible and intangible resources, ranging from legitimacy to schemas to social networks (Caza and Wilson, 2009). Multiple identities allow individuals access to different pools of resources, which can serve as an evolutionary and social advantage and even provide individuals social capital (cf. Coleman, 1990).

Despite the importance of multiple identities, research on identity has tended to focus on individual identities in isolation (McConnell, 2011). Stryker and Burke (2000) noted that little research has been guided by the notion of multiple identities, even though researchers acknowledge their existence and influence. Moreover, trends in both society and organizations – such as globalization, diversity and communication technology – are making multiple identities salient for more individuals (Ramarajan, 2014). As a result, individuals concurrently develop, monitor and manage these multiple identities, making it important to understand the implications associated with them (e.g. Maslach and Salvemini, 2014), especially as these different identities serve as inputs that individuals use to construct their overall perception of self (Blader, 2012; Blenkinsopp and Stalker, 2004).

Organizational identification. One of the more prominent ways social identity theory has been explored is through the construct of organizational identification. Ashforth and Mael (1989) defined organizational identification as "the perception of oneness with or belongness to the organization" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 21). When people identify strongly with their organization, they perceive its qualities as self-defining (e.g. Dutton *et al.*, 1994) and therefore become personally invested in the organization's successes and failures (Ashforth and Mael, 1989), speaking in terms of "we" rather than "I". Ashforth and Mael (1989) further noted that, since an individual's organization may provide an answer to the question "who am I", organizational identification is a specific form of social identification. This means that members begin to assimilate organizational goals as their own (Simon, 1947) and become intrinsically motivated to contribute to the organization as a collective (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton *et al.*, 1994; Lee, 2013). Belonging to an organization is one way an individual can achieve a social identity (Tajfel, 1978).

Organizational identification is linked to important organizational behaviors such as supporting objectives and defending the organization to outsiders (Lee, 1971), cooperation and effort (Bartel, 2001), intention to stay (Abrams *et al.*, 1998) and citizenship behaviors (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000). Given these potential benefits, organizational identification is one of the most studied and understood constructs of identification within the social identity theory perspective. There is, however, another important group identity that has been given less attention by identity scholars – that of an individual's professional identification.

Professional identification. Professional memberships and occupational groups are also important social identities (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Dutton *et al.*, 1994). The distinction between organizational identification and professional identification is important because professional affiliations are both separate from and usually happen before, the development of individuals' belonging and subsequent identification to any particular organization (Aranya *et al.*, 1981). Professionals may even identify more strongly with their profession and

be more committed to their profession than their organization (Johnson *et al.*, 2006). For example, a nurse may identify with their profession more than the health care organization in which they work and may be more likely to change organizations than leave nursing for another profession.

Specifically, professional identification refers to individuals defining their selves in terms of their profession's interests, associated abilities, goals and values (Kielhofner, 2007). It represents a complex structure of meanings in which individuals link their motivations with career roles (Meijers, 1998). It has also been conceptualized as a major component of one's overall self-concept (Kroger, 2007). Over the past 50 years, research has explored the structure, functions and development of these identities, with the majority of research conducted within the field of vocational psychology. This focus contrasts with the field of organizational behavior, where organizational identification has received more scholarly attention (Skorikov and Vondracek, 2012). While scholars have discovered much about the nature of professional identification, including its functions, development and formative influences, less it known about its relationship to important individual and organizational outcomes (Skorikov and Vondracek, 2012). Recently, however, scholars have begun calling for and investigating, these important relationships (Greco *et al.*, 2022; Obodaru, 2017; Welbourne and Paterson, 2017).

Organizational and professional identity conflict. An individual can have as many social identities as they have group memberships and these identities can potentially conflict with one another (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Often, individuals experience conflict between multiple work identities when they feel they cannot satisfy the expectations of both identities and that they must give precedence to one identity over the other (Settles, 2004). As a consequence, they may feel unable to validate the other identity they hold (Ashforth *et al.*, 2008; Burke and Stets, 2009; Hewlin, 2009). While individuals with too few identities can be ill equipped to handle challenging social situations (Hoelter, 1985), individuals with too many identities are prone to role overload and conflict (Pratt and Corley, 2012).

Scholars first acknowledged the potential for identity conflicts in the 1950s when they began to consider how employees managed their multiple identities – particularly how professionals handled the multiple loci of work identification. Gouldner (1957) was the first to problematize this issue by arguing that employees either identify with their profession or their organization at the expense of the other, viewing them as a continuum. Although current research on multiple identities indicates that identifying with the profession and identifying with the organization are not on a continuum – rather, individuals can identify with both simultaneously – conflict between the two identification foci often still exists (Caza and Wilson, 2009). This conflict is concerning, especially as research on work-family conflict has found that multiple identities can have a negative impact on psychological health (Caza and Wilson, 2009; Biddle, 1986). Thus, examining identity conflict – particularly between the common workplace identification targets of profession and organization – is both relevant and timely. Here, we focus on the perceptions of identity conflict between organizational and professional identities and name this specific type of conflict: OPIC. We define OPIC as the psychological conflict that individuals experience between who they feel they are *supposed* to be in their organization and who they feel they are *supposed* to be in their profession.

Consequences of identity conflict

A number of outcomes have been associated with various forms of identity conflict. These include negative outcomes for the individual, such as cognitive dissonance (Burke, 2003) and general distress (Jackson and Schuler, 1985). In addition to these proximal outcomes of identity conflict, more distal consequences with relevance to organizations have also been identified. For example, role conflict has been related to reduced job satisfaction, increased

tension and anxiety and increased turnover intentions (Jackson and Schuler, 1985). Although OPIC is distinct from role conflict – as OPIC is between two collective identities rather than between two role identities – it is similar in that it is an identity-related intra-individual conflict. As such, findings from the more studied construct of role conflict provide insight into the potential outcomes, both proximal and distal, of OPIC.

OPIC and emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is a chronic state of physical and emotional depletion and, as a facet of job burnout, an important outcome to organizations (Kilroy *et al.*, 2017; Maslach, 1982). As scholars from a variety of disciplines have noted, conflict is positively associated with felt emotional exhaustion, including role conflict (Babakus *et al.*, 1999) and work-family conflict (Nitzsche *et al.*, 2017). The underlying premise of this association is that competing demands cause an individual to use and deplete resources (Hobfoll, 2001). Similarly, OPIC is likely to contribute to emotional exhaustion as individuals balance competing demands from two workplace identities they perceive to be in conflict.

Uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2000, 2007) provides additional context for how OPIC may lead to emotional exhaustion at work. When an individual has two identities that are in conflict, they experience uncertainty regarding how they should behave. Instead of orienting and providing guidance to the individual, these identities now cause the individual to spend more time making decisions and balancing competing demands, depleting resources. For example, a health care organization may require that nurses spend less time with individual patients than they believe is necessary to fulfill their professional duty, causing them to question how they approach their work. In addition, individuals experiencing OPIC may feel that, no matter what action they take, they are failing to meet the expectations of one identity. These experiences lead to a chronic state of physical and emotional depletion for the individual while they are at work. Therefore, we posi:

H1. OPIC is positively related to emotional exhaustion.

OPIC and psychological distress

Individuals experiencing OPIC will also likely experience psychological distress – an emotional state that is the product of a stressor which results in harm (Ridner, 2004). Role conflict has been linked to distress (Jackson and Schuler, 1985). In addition, dual organizational identification has been suggested to be a source of stress due to potential lack of compatibility and conflict between identities (Vora *et al.*, 2007). As previously discussed, uncertainty-identity theory offers potential insights into why this distress may arise. When identities are in conflict, they create more uncertainty for the individual rather than reducing uncertainty. We posit that this uncertainty causes an individual to experience psychological distress as they grapple with how to handle the conflicting messages and demands from the competing identities. Research on the antecedents of psychological distress supports this perspective. For example, work-family conflict has been shown to have a reciprocal relationship with psychological distress (Westrupp *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, we posit:

H2. OPIC is positively related to psychological distress.

Emotional exhaustion, psychological distress and turnover intentions

Turnover intentions – also referred to as intentions to leave – is a subset of turnover research (Allen *et al.*, 2005). Turnover intentions specifically refer to an individual's intention to leave their company, generally within a specified time frame such as a year. Turnover models

indicate that strain is a distal antecedent of turnover intentions (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2007), with emotional exhaustion and psychological distress both positively related with turnover intentions (Jiang *et al.*, 2015; Lee and Ashforth, 1996). Drawing on this prior work, we posit that emotional exhaustion and psychological distress are positively related to turnover intentions.

H3. Emotional exhaustion is positively related to turnover intentions.

H4. Psychological distress is positively related to turnover intentions.

Based on these arguments and the proposed relationships expounded previously, we argue that emotional exhaustion and psychological distress mediate the relationship between OPIC and turnover intentions. Moreover, we suggest that OPIC will also directly influence turnover intentions due to its nature as a strain. Thus,

H5. Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between OPIC and turnover intentions.

H6. Psychological distress mediates the relationship between OPIC and turnover intentions.

H7. OPIC is positively related to turnover intentions.

A visual representation of our model and hypotheses is found below in Figure 1.

Method
Research plan
We conducted a two-study, quantitative design across two industries in which both organizational and professional targets of identification are relevant to participants (i.e. the participants are likely to identify both with their organization and their profession). The populations of interest are academia/higher education (Study 1) and health care (Study 2). Average organizational (M = 3.55, M = 4.01) and professional identification (M = 3.72, M = 4.11) in the samples suggested that both targets of identification were relevant to participants. Given that both industries have well-developed professional identities with associated values and organizing structures, they are ideal for examining potential OPIC and corresponding outcomes. Prior to these two studies, item generation and refinement were conducted using three expert reviewers. Study 1 was designed to validate
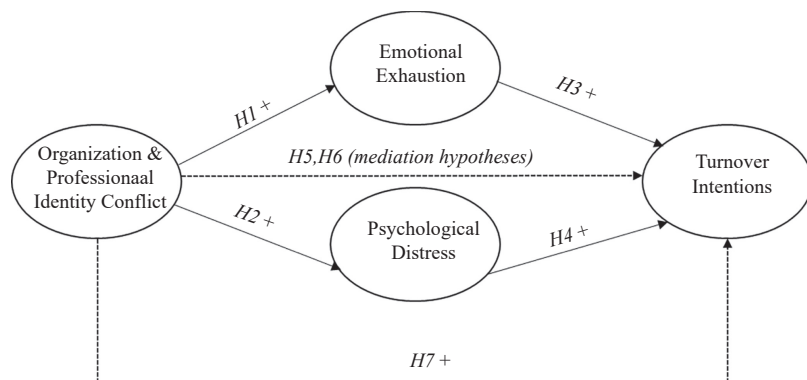
Figure 1.
Theoretical model

Source(s): Created by authors

the proposed measure (OPIC) and conduct preliminary hypothesis testing. Study 2 was designed to conduct additional hypothesis testing, utilizing a sample of health care workers who were enrolled in a healthcare MBA program across two waves. This constructive replication design provides an opportunity to contribute to the literature by increasing confidence in the validity of hypothesized relationships being tested and, furthermore, to enrich and bolster theory (Eden, 2002; Schmidt, 2009).

Transparency and openness
We describe our sampling plan and all measures in the study. The data and research materials relevant to the variables in the study are available at https://osf.io/c7en3/?view_only=73cfbe91357244ea936d8b5c8467e74f. Data was analyzed used IBM SPSS AMOS. This study's design and analysis were not preregistered.

Item generation and refinement
To create a measure for OPIC, we first reviewed the extant literature across multiple disciplines to identify how identity conflict has been conceptualized. Based on the literature, we defined OPIC as the psychological conflict that individuals experience between who they feel they are *supposed* to be in their organization and who they feel they are *supposed* to be in their profession. This includes the felt conflict between both of the collective identities in regards to their goals, beliefs, values, stereotypical traits and knowledge. Based on the above conceptualization, we created potential scale items for a quantitative measure of the construct. Both the scale items and the construct conceptualization were sent out to three expert reviewers, who critiqued the proposed scale items and provided suggestions for item refinement. The items were subsequently refined and ultimately six scale items for the construct were finalized. Preliminary measure development was conducted (e.g. construct validity and criterion validity) across both studies.

Study 1
Participants and procedure
The survey was distributed to two separate samples within the same population. The first sample includes the faculty, staff and doctoral students in a College of Business from a large public university in the southwestern United States ($n = 49$). The second sample includes academics who are members of the Academy of Management (AOM) and who were receiving emails from various AOM Listservs ($n = 176$). For both samples, the online survey was distributed via email. To test whether there was a significant difference between these samples, an independent two-sample t-test with unequal variances was conducted. The group statistics for both groups were compared for two of the dependent variables (emotional exhaustion and psychological distress) and the means and standard deviations were not significantly different. According to Levene's test with equal variances assumed ($p = 0.733$, 0.361), the means are not significantly different, with the p-values for both dependent variables greater than 0.05 ($p = 0.069$, 0.077). As a result, the two samples were subsequently combined into one. This final sample size had an n of 225. Respondents were 41.3% male and ranged in age from 24 to 77 (M = 45). Respondents included doctoral students (24.4%), post-doctoral researchers (4.9%), staff (5.8%), lecturers (4.9%), adjuncts (4.0%), assistant professors (19.4%), associate professors (9.3%) and full professors (15.1%) and other (12%), which included respondents who selected more than one category (e.g. doctoral students and public sector employee). In this study, we conduct both measurement development analyses around our new measure of OPIC, as well as conduct preliminary hypothesis testing.

OPIC measure development

Stage 1: scale item development. First, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted for the scale. The items loaded as theorized, with OPIC loading into a one-factor structure. Table 1 below displays the final items for the construct along with the exploratory factor analysis pattern coefficients.

Stage 2: psychometric properties and scale distinctiveness. The purpose of this stage of the study was to contribute toward understanding the construct validity of OPIC. Several indicators of construct validity were explored, following the procedure outlined by Welbourne *et al.* (1998). We calculated the Cronbach's alpha for the scale, which was well above the acceptable standards. To assess discriminant and convergent validity, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis. The fit indices for the one-factor structure for OPIC were overall acceptable ($X^2 = 27.34$, df = 9, *p*-value = 0.001, CFI = 0.961, RMSEA = 0.095, SRMR = 0.039). While the model fit for the measure was not perfect (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), it does meet Hu and Bentler's (1999) combinatorial rule and recent research has argued that these cut-off points for fit indices are guidelines rather than a gold standard (West *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, we argue that the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses provide sufficient evidence of the scales' reliability and discriminant and convergent validity. As measurement validation results supports the use of our OPIC scale, the next step was to continue with hypothesis testing.

Measures

The majority of measures, unless otherwise indicated, were based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5) with *neither agree nor disagree* (3) as the midpoint.

Organizational and professional identity conflict. OPIC was measured using the 6-item scale described in the previous section. For this scale, respondents were asked to think about who they are supposed to be within their profession and within their organization. The Cronbach's alpha for the six items was 0.89. A sample item includes, "The goals of my profession and organization are often in conflict".

Emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was measured with five items from the Pines and Aronson (1988) job burnout scale, following Pugh *et al.* (2011). Respondents were asked to think about how often they experienced each state at their job. The five-point Likert scale points for this measure ranged from *never* (1) to *all of the time* (5), with *some of the time* (3) as the midpoint. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.87 and a sample statement includes, "Feeling rejected".

Item	Factor loading
1. The goals of my profession and organization are well aligned. (R)	0.78
2. The values of my profession and organization are well aligned. (R)	0.79
3. I receive conflicting messages concerning what I should care about from my profession and my organization	0.86
4. The goals of my profession and organization are often in conflict	0.89
5. The major beliefs of my profession and organization are inconsistent	0.79
6. I often have to choose between following professional standards and doing what is best for my organization	0.74
Note(s): $N = 225$	
Source(s): Created by authors	

Table 1.
OPIC scale: principal component analysis factor loadings

Psychological distress. Psychological distress was measured with the four-item Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6). Respondents were asked to think about how frequently in the last 30 days have they felt the following states (Kessler *et al.*, 2002). The five-point Likert scale points for this measure ranged from *never* (1) to *all of the time* (5), with *some of the time* (3) as the midpoint. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.81 and a sample statement includes, "Nervous".

Turnover intentions. Turnover intentions were measured by a three-item scale from Mitchell *et al.* (2001), which was adapted from Hom *et al.* (1984). The Cronbach's alpha was 0.98 and a sample item includes, "I intend to leave the organization in the next 12 months".

Controls. To determine which, if any, of the demographic variables would significantly impact the proximal and distal outcomes, we conducted simple linear regression analyses and one-way ANOVAs to determine if the continuous (age) and categorical variables (e.g. gender) were significant predictors of the outcome variables. The regression analysis indicated that age was a significant (negative) predictor of psychological distress and emotional exhaustion, but that this effect was nominal, with age explaining less than 0.05% of variance. Thus, for model parsimony and statistical power reasons, age was not included as a control variable.

Data analysis
Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics and correlations for Study 1. Before conducting the data analysis, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis for the full model (including all of the continuous variables). Overall indices for the model indicate acceptable model fit (e.g. $X^2 = 208.47$, df = 124, p-value = 0.000, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.07) according to Hu and Bentler's combinatorial rule (Hu and Bentler, 1999). To test the hypothesized model, we used structural equation modeling to examine the direct and indirect effects.

Results
Hypotheses 1 and 2 posited that OPIC would be positively associated with both emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.39$; SE = 0.08; CR = 4.62; $p < 0.001$) and psychological distress ($\beta = 0.25$; SE = 0.08; CR = 3.26; $p < 0.01$), both of which were supported in the direction hypothesized. Hypotheses 3 and 4 posited that both emotional exhaustion and psychological distress would be positively related to turnover intentions. The relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions was not supported in this model ($p = 0.89$), but the relationship between psychological distress and turnover intentions was supported in the direction hypothesized ($\beta = 0.64$; SE = 0.25; CR = 2.55; $p < 0.05$).

Hypotheses 5 and 6 posited that OPIC influences turnover intentions through the mechanisms of emotional exhaustion (H5) and psychological distress (H6). While OPIC was positively related to psychological distress, and psychological distress was positively related to turnover intentions, OPIC did not have a significant, direct relationship with turnover

Variable	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Organizational identification (OID)	3.55	0.76	(0.84)					
2. Professional identification (PID)	3.72	0.81	0.33**	(0.87)				
3. OPIC	2.51	0.84	−0.23**	−0.02	(0.89)			
4. Emotional exhaustion	2.59	0.81	−0.12	0.14*	0.35**	(0.87)		
5. Psychological distress	1.98	0.76	−0.01	0.05	0.24**	0.65**	(0.81)	
6. Turnover intentions	1.99	1.28	−0.20**	0.004	0.14*	0.24**	0.24**	(0.98)

Note(s): $N = 225$, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$
Source(s): Created by authors

Table 2.
Study 1 descriptive
statistics and
correlations

intentions (p = 0.35; H7), indicating that the relationship between OPIC, psychological distress and turnover intentions is an example of indirect-only mediation, whereby the mediated effect exists, but with no direct effect (Zhao *et al.*, 2010), supporting hypothesis 6. This is supported by the statistical significance (β = 0.15; $p < 0.01$) of the indirect effect of OPIC on turnover. Holistically, the results from Study 1 indicate that OPIC is related positively to both psychological distress and emotional exhaustion, whereby the former transmits the effects of OPIC onto turnover intentions.

Study 2

Participants and procedure
A survey was distributed to individuals enrolled in a health care MBA program, who participated in order to receive extra-credit, via e-mail and across two waves. Participants were currently working full-time in the health care industry. The survey was made available to 250 health care professionals, with 194 (77.6% response rate) completing the first wave. Of these 194 students, 176 completed the second wave (91.2% response rate between the waves). A 60% response rate has been identified as very acceptable for web surveys (Manfreda *et al.*, 2008). The final sample size was 176 (n = 176). Respondents were 36.9% male and ranged in age from 22 to 70 (M = 36.3, SD = 9.62). The sample was 56.3% White or Caucasian, 19.9% Black or African-American, 10.8% Hispanic or Latino, 9.7% Asian, 0.6% Native American and 2.8% Other. Respondents held various positions in the health care industry, but the largest position category was that of nurse (26.1%). The respondents were fairly evenly split between working for a private organization (44.3%) and a public organization (55.7%). Respondents also worked in a variety of health care organizations, but the majority (54.5%) worked in a hospital. The tenure of respondents ranged from new hires (less than three months) to 40 years (M = 5.85, SD = 5.87). The proximal and distal outcomes were assessed in Wave 1. OPIC was assessed separately in Wave 2, two weeks later, to reduce common method variance.

Measures
Study 2 measures are identical to the measures assessed in Study 1. The scale reliabilities are displayed along the diagonal in Table 3.

Data analysis
As with Study 1, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted prior to hypothesis testing and the fit indices. The indices for the model again indicated acceptable model fit (X^2 = 188.97, df = 123, p-value = 0.000, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05) (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Variable	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Organizational identification (OID)	4.01	0.63	(0.80)					
2. Professional identification (PID)	4.11	0.66	0.42**	(0.81)				
3. OPIC	2.13	0.85	−0.21**	−0.01	(0.91)			
4. Emotional exhaustion	2.50	0.83	−0.08	−0.07	0.32**	(0.89)		
5. Psychological distress	1.80	0.66	−0.19*	−0.09	0.30**	0.62**	(0.76)	
6. Turnover intentions	1.15	1.21	−0.31**	−0.18*	0.28**	0.25**	0.25**	(0.97)

Note(s): N = 176, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01
Source(s): Created by authors

Table 3.
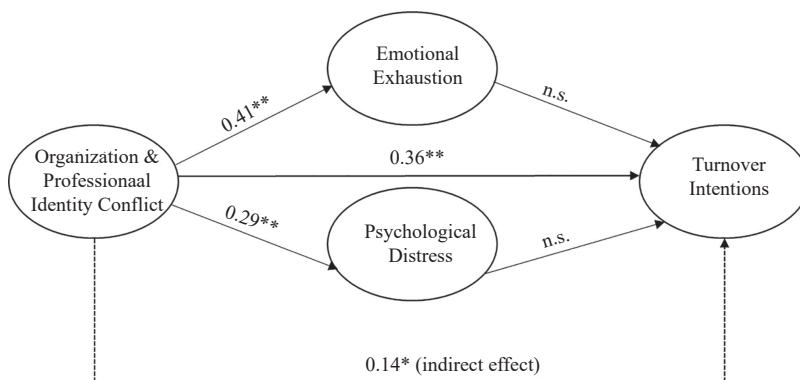Study 2 descriptive statistics and correlations

Results

As with Study 1, OPIC was positively associated with both emotional exhaustion (H1; $\beta = 0.41$; SE $= 0.10$; CR $= 4.08$; $p < 0.001$) and psychological distress (H2; $\beta = 0.29$; 9 SE $= 0.07$; CR $= 4.12$; $p < 0.001$), both of which were supported in the direction hypothesized. Diverging from Study 1, emotional exhaustion (H3; $p = 0.62$) and psychological distress (H4; $p = 0.22$) were not significantly related to turnover intentions, although OPIC was directly and positively related to turnover intentions as hypothesized (H6; $\beta = 0.36$; SE $= 0.14$; CR $= 2.47$; $p < 0.05$). The mediation hypotheses (H5, H6) were not supported, although the indirect effect of OPIC on turnover was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.14$; $p < 0.05$). Figure 2, below, displays these results.

Discussion

Trends in society and organizations have increased the relevance of multiple identities (Ramarajan, 2014), and individuals are tasked with managing these multiple identities, both at work and home (Bartel *et al.*, 2012). Recently, scholars have begun to explore multiple identities with much more intensity, calling for investigations beyond singular identities (Ashforth, 2016). With notable exceptions (e.g. Caza *et al.*, 2018; Richter *et al.*, 2006; Vora *et al.*, 2007), however, empirical work – especially quantitative work – on multiple identities is more limited. Yet, the issue of multiple identities clashing (and the resulting complications) has received attention in the popular press. As an example, professional standards may lead health care providers in obstetrics and gynecology to want to provide reproductive care that is legally prohibited in their state (and thus not allowed in their health care organizations). Because of this experienced conflict, physicians are leaving red states and their employers (Noor, 2022). And, in higher education, commonly held professional values support that free expression "should be nothing less than a core mission of any college or university" (ACLU, 2023). Yet, recent legislation and current organizational climates around what speech is allowed and protected may be in direct conflict with this professional value. Indeed, recent data suggests that more and more faculty self-censor and avoid researching controversial topics (Kortepeter, 2023). Arguably, both academics and health care professionals (as well as numerous other professions), are experiencing conflicts between the values and interests of their profession and those of their organizations. The question is, then, what are the consequences of this OPIC?

Thus, our research seeks to build on past work to quantitatively assess OPIC and examine what consequences, if any, exist when people experience this conflict. Holistically, the results

Figure 2.
Results model (study 2)

Source(s): Created by authors

across our two studies support the notion that OPIC has important ramifications for the individual and for their organization. Specifically, when individuals experience OPIC, they report increased psychological distress, emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions. Below, we discuss the contributions our work makes to both theory and practice. Based on our research, we suggest practical ways that both organizations and professions can take steps to mitigate identity conflict of their members.

Contributions to theory and future research

We contribute to the identity literature by providing a means of assessing a type of identity conflict that has long been discussed in the literature (e.g. Gouldner, 1957) and by providing quantitative empirical evidence of its influence. Specifically, this study highlights a new way to measure a specific type of identity conflict between two common targets of identification at work – the organization and the profession. We developed and validated a measure that captured this specific type of identity conflict (OPIC). While we focused on conflicts between the organization and the profession, we suggest that this measure can be used and adapted by identity scholars to study other pairs of identities. Ultimately, such measures will increase the quantitative work on the subject, which is necessary to assess the generalizability of identity conflict's relationship to important individual and organizational outcomes.

As predicted, the results demonstrate that experiencing OPIC is detrimental for the individual employee: it increases both emotional exhaustion and psychological distress, as well as increased turnover intentions through psychological distress. The findings that identity conflict leads to negative outcomes for the individual suggests that, similar to other more studied types of internal conflicts (e.g. role conflict: Burke, 2003; Jackson and Schuler, 1985), identity conflicts create distress for the individual. The findings also extend social identity theory by demonstrating that uncertainty about expectations or behavior through conflicting identities could lead to resource depletion (Hobfoll, 2001) and negative psychological states. This suggests that as the literature continues to explore the outcomes associated with managing multiple identities, the negative consequences of conflict between and among identities should be considered.

Practical implications

Our findings have important implications for both organizations and managers. If employees experience identity conflict, they will experience negative outcomes; namely, individuals who perceive that the person are supposed to be in their organization conflicts with the person they are supposed to be in their profession will be more burned out at work and more distressed overall. In addition to the negative experiences for individuals greater experiencing psychological distress and emotional exhaustion, organizations and managers will feel the repercussions of the increased turnover intentions. Indeed, our findings support that when employees experience this type of identity conflict, they are more likely to intend to "resolve" this conflict by leaving their organization, perhaps to find a better-aligned organization.

Thus, managers and organizations should find ways to help individuals manage their identities as well as strive for better organizational alignment with professional standards, expectations and values. For example, organizations can strive to highlight how the organization has values that are similar to the profession in order to lower the perceived differences in the identities. In addition, organizations can work to better understand wider professional values and expectations and adjust organizational expectations and practices to better align with professional norms. In the health care industry, this might look like hospitals highlighting that they do not just care about profit – that they also care about the quality of

patient care. In practice, organizations could increase the number of patient-facing staff to allow for more quality-time with patients to highlight this priority.

Moreover, in addition to helping employees manage their identities, organizations should support employees in developing and maintaining their professional identities and organizational identities. In practice, this could come through guaranteed reimbursement for professional activities, including conferences and training and through organizational-sponsored events that increase cohesion and foster a sense of shared organizational identity. Encouraging employees to develop and maintain professional identities, likely through memberships in external professional organizations, does not negate the possibility of employees encountering identity conflict. However, this may mitigate the perception of conflict.

Last, organizations and professional groups should create opportunities for members to voice concerns regarding potential conflicts. Allowing for some form of feedback would help prevent blind spots and unintended or unexpected conflict. Feedback would help organizations better understand the nature of any perceived conflict and focus messaging and adjustments. This feedback would also not be unidirectional, both work-related organizations and professional groups could benefit. While work-related organizations may try to better align with professional standards, professional groups may not be aware of changes or trends occurring in real-time in the workplace. Additionally, organizations can engage in benchmarking against organizations in the same space, to see if the changing demands they are experiencing are also felt by other institutions. By engaging in a formalized benchmarking process against other organizations and against the professional organizations that employees are a part of, organizations will be better able to mitigate potential conflicts employees might feel. Of course, it is paramount that employees also have the chance to engage in this benchmarking process and weigh in about the current environment, changing trends and perceived (mis)alignment of the organization with professional standards and practices. This benchmarking should be communicated to the professional organizations and results shared, as increased awareness on the part of professional groups might lead to adjustments to best practices or guidelines. In turn, this could help reduce experienced OPIC and the associated negative outcomes such as turnover intentions and emotional exhaustion. See Table 4, below, for more information on potential identity conflict interventions.

Overall, our results highlight that while identities are things that are felt and managed by individuals, organizations are not immune from the repercussions of these identities. Thus, it behooves both organizations and professional societies to take a proactive role in helping their members manage and resolve competing expectations, values and identities.

Limitations and future directions

These studies and findings do have some limitations. While the sample sizes in Study 1 and Study 2 were adequate, effects were relatively small and may be only detectable with larger sample sizes. Further, while two industries were examined, our findings could be industry-specific and not enough industries were explored to account for industry effects. Future research should explore identity conflict across different industries and in different countries to identify boundary conditions of these relationships. Additionally, even though for Study 2 our measures were separated across two waves to attempt to mitigate the effects of common method variance (CMV) (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), all the measures were perception based and, ultimately, subject to social desirability bias. Furthermore, there was not enough time between the waves (two weeks for Study 2) to truly examine the process of identity conflict and the resulting outcomes; thus, we can only speculate about this process. Future research should investigate the process of identity conflict in longitudinal designs over a longer time horizon. Moreover, although our findings provide useful insights into the ramifications of identity conflict, more work is needed to understand the relationship between multiple

Examples of perceived organizational and professional identity conflict	Potential interventions
	Organizational Interventions
Employee believes the organization may ask them to do something that contradicts professional values	Highlight how the organization has values that align with the profession
Employee is asked to perform a task in a way that does not conform to professional standards	The organization works to better understand professional values and norms
	Adjust organizational practices to better conform with professional standards
Employee feels that they are unable to be a professional while working at a specific organization	Support employees engaging with professional organizations
Groups of employees perceive the organization as unwilling to understand professional norms and standards	Create opportunities for members to voice concerns over conflicts
Employees suggest the organization does not align with professional standards when compared with previous employers	Benchmark against other organizations in same profession
	Professional Society Interventions
Professionals suggest that professional society is no longer relevant	Advocate to organizations on behalf of professional members
Professionals complain that professional society has unrealistic expectations of members	Work to better understand and communicate changes and trends in industry
	Create opportunities for members to provide feedback
Source(s): Created by authors	

Table 4.
OPIC prevention examples

identities and identity conflict and uncover when conflict is more likely. Lastly, as Mitchell and James (2001) note, when testing for causal relationships it is important to know when both X and Y occur. The scope of our research did not explore when identity conflict or any of our dependent variables occurred, which serves as both a limitation and an opportunity for future research.

Conclusion

Using a two-study, quantitative design spanning two industries, we studied the effects of identity conflict on individual psychological outcomes and turnover intentions. Findings from these two studies, holistically, indicate that when individuals experience identity conflict between their organizational and professional identities, they experience negative outcomes. These negative outcomes – increased emotional exhaustion, psychological distress and turnover intentions – have important ramifications for the individuals themselves and their organization. Organizations can strive to find ways to reduce identity conflict and, consequently, improve employee well-being. This research contributes to the identity literature and adds a new perspective to the conversation on the outcomes of multiple identities.

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