

The Impact of Professional Identity on Work Group Dynamics

1. Introduction to Professional Identity and Work Group Dynamics

The professional identity of the individual, constructed through shared discourse and membership in occupational communities, can provide a sense of belonging, define and regulate acceptable roles and tasks, and control admission to the group. It is the professional aspect of this identity that is the current focus of interest and will be explored in the following sections. Within a work context, a personal and idiosyncratic construction of oneself as a professional is insufficient. Professional identity in such a context must be shared, and more than that, must be seen to be shared with others in order for its benefits to be achieved. But unlike some literature on identity and identification that views it as a mostly positive and desirable state of being, elements of our professional identity (the ways in which we as professional workers are similar to or different from other professionals) can form significant boundaries between us, our colleagues, and other professional groups.

Professional identity has the potential to influence interpersonal relationships, group dynamics, and preoccupations, and the ways in which we act collectively. Consequently, unresolved disputes about the changing nature of professional identity may strain work group relationships and performance. Undoubtedly, the current economic climate, with its emphasis on productivity and increased efficient working, has seen a greater interest among managers in how professional identity may be harnessed to enhance performance. This positive recognition of the importance of professional identity and its role in work teams must be balanced with an appreciation of the potential for it to hinder collaboration and the difficulties in harnessing and cultivating it to a work-oriented end.

The nature of, and influences on, professional identity and professional identity formation for expatriate and local staff warrant greater investigation. Such work will, it is hoped, confirm the existence of the relationship between those who share a

common professional identity and mechanisms that encourage and facilitate that shared professional identity, and make explicit this cultural and social practice of identity construction. This paper does not limit itself to the 'profession or occupation' of healthcare, but acknowledges that the commonality of a shared 'employment profession' such as 'hospital porter' would also be influential in shaping the individual professional.

2. Theoretical Frameworks and Models of Professional Identity

3.2 Theoretical Frameworks and Models of Professional Identity

Professional identity is a complex and multifaceted concept, and a wide range of theories and models contribute to the way it is currently understood and studied. A variety of different facets of the theoretical background explain professional identity in the workforce.

Theoretical Frameworks and Conceptual Models

A plethora of different theories tackle conceptualizations of what professional identity means in the first place, when professional identity is established, and how it can be transformed. Social identity theory, the related concept of social categorization, as well as theories proposing the salience of professional roles and other concepts or fundamental professional features focus on the early exposure of professional identity. To specific behavior and cognition in a social context, social identity theory acknowledges that an individual's self-esteem is partially based on the perception of belonging to and achieving acceptable results for the team whose dimensions were compared in various fields. More recently, researchers using social identity theory and organizational psychology found that team memberships could directly predict an individual's behavior, with employees being more likely to help and trust colleagues within their own in-group than colleagues from an out-group. Starting from investigations like these and other related issues, a new body of work has evolved, which we hereinafter refer to as the Social Identity Perspective.

3. Key Components of Professional Identity

For individuals, key factors contribute to their professional identity and inform how they see themselves and others in the workplace. Workforce research has identified four components of professional identity.

It is never too early for an undergraduate student to begin thinking about the skills they hope to gain on the job and how these skills will prepare them for their long-term professional goals. Reflecting on their career skills and job experiences to clarify professional strengths better allows workers to become more self-aware.

Many recent graduates can already identify their personal values from four years of university experience. With increasingly greater experience in the workplace, employees can use this personal foundation of values to build a more defined picture of their professional identities. Prior experience in making decisions also helps workers feel confident about their choices. Are the people we are looking to hire ready to make effective choices and communicate those choices based on previous employment and decision-making experience?

Decisions workers make are framed in an environment of organizational culture. It is thus important for workers to become familiar with the cultural attributes of the organizations where they have worked in the past. These previous work experiences can help guide worthwhile employment choices for the future. Although professional identity is a coherent narrative, individuals have different components on which their professional identities depend. Of course, these different narratives are what make teams and groups of diverse professionals functional. There are various forms and quantities of discussion and decision-making regarding clinical teamwork. One such form that both decides and discusses works as a small-group discussion in a variety of contexts.

4. The Role of Professional Identity in Work Group Formation

Professional identity, or the significance that which we are committed to has on who we are, dictates not only what group or groups an individual chooses to participate in but also the manner in which they collaborate with other group members. Because the expression of one's professional identity is an expression of who an individual is, in the early days of group formation, professional identities can create norms and expectations that members will hold each other accountable to. These established expectations become norms that bind group members together. Because behavioral expectations arise from deeply ingrained professional values that are tied to individual identity, it is socially, as well as personally, costly to violate these

norms. A group decision may not only conflict with an individual's personal ethical values but also with the collective norms of the profession to which they belong.

During the formative stages of a work group, the interactions between individuals with diverse professional identities can be the source of either substantial conflict or constructive debate. Identity groups can form, where individuals that share a common professional identity develop a subgroup within the larger one. The idiosyncrasies among the professional identities of members can at times add genuine depth to and at other times complicate the work of the group in useful ways. For example, members with sharply divergent professional identities will take different paths to problem-solving and may be less likely to become subsumed by groupthink. Conversely, such diversity of opinion can fracture the group and destroy group focus, particularly if members become entrenched in their personal professional identities at the expense of collective cohesion. This implies a tension between leveraging individual professional identities for a multi-faceted group approach and overcoming the personal commitment to individual professional identity in order to align fully with the group's collective goal.

5. The Influence of Professional Identity on Work Group Cohesion

Professional identity is a significant element contributing to work group dynamics. Clearly, in occupations and certain industries, professional identity delineates a majority of a person's working self and consequently their opinions, feelings, and communication with others. The attitudinal and behavioral consequences of shared and divergent professional identity between team members are considerable, as common features of professional identity mechanisms foster greater levels of trust, team efficacy, social support, and informal collaboration. We contest the widely held notion of studying work group dynamics without addressing issues of professional identity. Further, we investigate the two likely mechanisms behind this process: in-group bias and common goals.

Although there is evidence to suggest that cohesion directly leads to team performance, largely by improving the relationships between members, we propose that it is actually similarities in professional identity that drive, to a certain extent, this process. One of a professional identity's primary functions is to create a sense of belonging to a professional group while orienting workers towards common

occupational goals: those values, beliefs, motives, and attributes that work towards the betterment of a specific profession. Those who share a professional identity are likely to appreciate that their expansion is intertwined with the expansion of their colleagues, making insiders more likely to facilitate cooperation between individuals. Consequently, communication patterns are formulated in a manner that assists information dissemination in a constructive way; that allows exploration of collective capabilities. Using professional identity as a collective reference point can foster interpersonal relationships that rely on individuals' qualities rather than their professional role. It is therefore to varying extents—the awareness of a common purpose—that leads to coherence in a team's interconnectivity. The greater the number of employees in a team sharing a professional identity, the less their attention is devoted to differentiating themselves. Consequently, teams with high levels of professional identity likewise experience increased sticking power as team members are less inclined to differentiate through political or atypical behavior. They also tend, then, to actively facilitate an expansion in communication networks, propelling media richness and transactive memory systems.

6. Professional Identity and Leadership Styles

Professional Identity & Leadership Styles Substantial research has illustrated that one's professional identity shapes how individuals influence each other and co-create relationship dynamics. Despite the potential importance of this interplay of professional identity in the context of leadership and management, almost no research has explored it conceptually and none has studied it in the workplace. Within dyads, leaders' professional identities may shape, in part, the way in which they influence group processes and outcomes. No research has examined this possibility. Indeed, the extent to which leaders even have professional identities is unknown. This question is particularly relevant given the central role that identity—be it self-identity or professional identity—seems to play for organizational leaders. As explored in the prior section, professional identity appears to be an important moderator of performance.

To begin to address some of these issues, we draw on the management and leadership literatures to suggest how leaders' professional identities might influence the dynamics and cohesion of work groups. In part, leaders' professional identities may be important because they help a group to establish its identity and thus create norms and values to guide members' behaviors. We discuss more generally in the conclusion to this section how work groups may respond when they

learn about their leaders' prestige. Leaders in organizations adopt a range of styles and strategies to optimize members' contributions to their unit. In this section, we suggest that a similar flexibility based on two central components of professional identity—prestige and ethics—affects leaders in work groups and thus can affect work group dynamics. More specifically, we draw upon contemporary research in the area of transformational leadership and management, as well as the more classic distinction between transactional and transformational leaders, to illuminate how it is that leaders can leverage their professional identities to inspire and entail the commitment of their subordinates.

7. Challenges and Opportunities in Managing Professional Identity in Work Groups

The professional identity of a team member can sometimes conflict with, and sometimes be aligned with, the professional identity of the work group to which that person belongs. Such differences create challenges and opportunities for the effective management of work group dynamics. Team members may be reluctant to seek help from colleagues who share their professional identity for fear of signaling incompetence, a recognition of a stereotype threat. Team members may also become resigned to when the management of an identity difference just seems too difficult. In cases where team and individual professional identities cannot be adjusted to fit with each other, members of the work group may negotiate a solution that maintains teamwork but compromises individual career choices.

Despite the challenges, the existence of diverse professional identities in a single work group can create benefits for team creativity and conflict resolution. Managing such opportunities requires an understanding that identity differences matter and a belief in the right of diverse professional identities to patients. This raises the risk of a divided and dysfunctional work group. These challenges and opportunities are not simple contrasts. The effective management of the challenges posed by professional identity differences requires recognition of and understanding of a diverse range of professional identities. The time-consuming and emotionally draining negotiation of such differences can limit the available resources for work group activities. In contrast, the effective management of an inclusive ethos in relation to professional identity is the key to optimal growth and development for the work group. The identity differences identified here can create the perfect storm for team conflict. The effectiveness of diversity is critically dependent on recognizing that identity

differences create different perspectives. For example, two clerical or operational staff who have chosen a role to suit their professional identity might have quite different perspectives on not only what the problem is but the right solution. Identifying and articulating their professional differences of opinion can 'deescalate' conflict.

8. Cultural and Contextual Factors in Professional Identity and Work Group Dynamics

The Community of Practice (CoP) model identifies five interrelated concept areas that influence an individual's professional identity. Professional identity is also a central concept in sociology and has been studied from a sociological perspective. This study is concerned with the impact of cultural and contextual factors on professional identity and team dynamics. International comparisons consistently show that the professional identity of a group strongly influences team dynamics. In larger cultural areas with modern values and the developed world, a person's profession is often thought to be a central part of who they are. They may believe that their professional identity is determined by how much they contribute to the good of society. In contrast, in many other cultures, a person's value is often thought to be based on the family to which they belong or the team to which they belong.

Further evidence suggests that the perceived effect of one's professional identity on one's value can change depending on the specific cultural context. We know that how a specialty is perceived, what kind of work it entails, how different professionals should interact, and which specialties can best serve as leaders — all of these are influenced by the country in which one works, the organization to which one belongs, and even the subcultures that congregate within one team. Indeed, there is no single medical profession, nursing profession, or management profession, but rather a whole series of these professions. These can all be considered sub-specializations because they offer different forms of expertise that allow one to represent knowledge and values in different ways. An expert from one of these areas may be valued as a person with their particular values and contribution to the good. The CoP model identified a number of different levels of cultural difference within a community of practice that could influence professional identity. Starting with cultural dimensions, we can suggest that nations with collectivist and higher power distance values will tend not to see their professional status as so central to who they are.

In organizations, industry norms, organizational culture, or a dominant local professional group influence what special knowledge and values are deemed important. As these can change from one hospital to the next — indeed, from one ward to the next, all may involve different professional identities. It was surprising to find that although all of the professionals in a Malaysian sample were taught Western management theories in university, when they arrived at their workplaces there were a range of industry norms that defined what it meant to be a good manager. A was of course for Agriculture. A was also for Arrogant. Woe betide the village manager whose arrogance levels slipped, as discovered when interviewing the command group on a first field trip. This story, as told by one of them, occurred around the same time that an interview took place: The District Audit had come to the division. You can imagine the scene. The audit was run on sheets listing how the 27 different felling issuing stations stacked up against each other on a range of indicators, e.g., volume of logs felled, overtime, sales, etc., and songs blared out of a speaker-phone in accompaniment.

9. The Intersection of Gender, Race, and Professional Identity in Work Groups

Gender, race, and professional identity are intertwined, yet these intersections have seldom been addressed in discussions of professional identity and work groups. Identity categories are socially constructed, often based on physical features, collective histories, and social norms. As a result, identity affects individual experiences and group dynamics, including access, legitimacy, privileges, and stigmatization. Work group research has largely focused on the experiences of majority group members, often neglecting the challenges faced by those from marginalized groups. Here, we investigate how the intersectionality of gender, race, and professional identity shapes individual and group experiences. This can result in a lack of interpersonal and professional acceptance, potentially influencing team cohesion and conflict.

However, an intersection of diversity can provide new opportunities for improvement and innovation, addressing problems and ideas about which groups of similar members may not even be aware. Identity is complex and diverse, and we propose that ignoring, despising, or only tolerating other people on the grounds of superficial identity signifiers of appearance and/or heritage is harmful to rational and coherent group interactions. However, research shows that recognizing

differences and rejecting bias can also lead the way to more productive, innovative, and increasingly interdisciplinary academic work environments. Strategies to decrease bias and encourage inclusivity within work and learning teams can encourage innovation and reduce antagonism within interdisciplinary science professions. Management scholars argue that fair, ethical, and transparent treatment of all employees, and valuing their contributions, can lead to increased motivation and commitment. Leaders who are able to recognize these differences and leverage a diverse group's comparative advantage through inclusive leadership practices are positioned to succeed. This study will include studies focusing on gender or race and work group dynamics. Our conceptual analysis assumes the underlying importance of and advocates for valuing diverse professional identities in the workplace. Focusing on intersectional categories in professional work groups advances discourse and helps us examine the implications of these traditionally dissociated streams of research in order to make recommendations for future research. We view contemporary diversity management paradigms as offering important advances by calling for the recognition of heterogeneous individuals' contributions, as well as their collective benefit as a diverse workforce. These stand in contrast to past diversity management systems designed to mete out equity to select minority groups and women.

10. Professional Identity and Conflict Resolution Strategies

Work groups are often a patchwork of differing training and identity. The varied professional identities carried by individuals into work groups – a nursing identity or a medical identity – often owe a good deal of their character and consciousness not so much to group norms or work pressure, but to background academic, professional, and life activities and decisions. Professional identities, along with the skill sets and ethical priorities often attached to them, are created in this complex vacuum where conversations and encounters, professional and everyday, are strongly characterized and guided by factors of identity. Not only do the differing individuals have different professional identities, but they are often recruited into jobs on the basis of those identities. At the level of work groups, conflict can start from identity troubles like these. When individuals disagree about what can be emergent priorities, what can be a justified response to a given situation, or what are the best strategies for solving the given workplace problem, those differences can often be traced back to starting differences in discipline- or knowledge-

generated consciousness. These tensions, potentially arising from different professional values, are heightened because the professional 'other' is often not just unfamiliar, but insensible; they do not see it the way to which I am accustomed, but they are apparently unable or unwilling to be educated into the appropriate way of seeing things. Where discussion events such tensions, it is usually invested with considerable emotional punch. Recognizing the importance of professional identity-based disputes in the workplace leads to a reorientation of some of our thinking about potential strategies for resolution. Mediation and negotiation techniques can all become vehicles of resolution and group cohesion, but only if they are adapted to confront the identity living of the given team. In addition, basic problem-solving negotiation exercises usually conducted in representative practice settings should be replaced with negotiation and argumentative theory, and a live enactment of the professional priorities and concerns which may facilitate a negotiation debate in the disputed ward situation. Finally, training participants should explicitly recognize and explore emotional responses to their own and others' professional identities and activities. Solutions to the given ward conundrums and problem negotiation exercises, and debates or communications which may arise out of them, might then be facilitated by these strategies. In sum, recognizing and understanding the role of professional identity can make concrete changes to our strategies for resolution. Conflict resolution strategies must be aligned not only with the particular history and ideology of the conflicting individuals or groups, but also with the ways that individuals' ethical priorities are colored by occupation and background knowledge. Such tensions arising from everyday group identities often emerge in the workplace, and they can result in practices of judgment that are rife with disagreement about core ethical priorities. Conflict resolution and management mediation have been discussed as a way to preempt, contain, or resolve identity troubles within workplace groups. Both are presented as essential and lay the groundwork for preserving good employee relations and the continuation of productivity and group output.

11. Ethical Considerations in Professional Identity and Work Group Dynamics

In the overall canons of ethical considerations associated with work group studies, management behavior, and other organizational research, many issues have arisen in the professional identity and work group dynamics discussion listed above. When deciding to become vocal or to remain silent regarding an aspect of team dynamics,

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managers must consider the impact of that decision on individual and team relationships, as well as the overall functional efficacy of the workplace. To illustrate the potential problems resulting from a lack of ethical consideration in understanding "professional identity" and the associated "labeling processes" that drive them, it is best to illustrate various scenarios. Consequently, a leader or manager may choose to exclude someone from decision-making processes, confidences, or work group activities based on rational reasons such as time zones, shared responsibilities, or skill sets, but not as a result of discrimination or other forms of bias. The nature of those decisions, and if they are perceived by members of a work group to be ethical or poor, predisposes members either to embrace the individual based on a consideration of some shared professional characteristic, or to bypass him or her based on a consideration that is associated with that very same characteristic. Organizational policies and practices that proscribe such activity could encourage employees at all levels to be more aware and ethically considerate of the implications of team decision-making on others. Furthermore, a leader may not engage in charity with a member of a team based upon ways to define their professional identity, which could create an additional rift between that team member and the group. In extreme cases, a leader may openly use a member's professional "label" to intentionally marginalize that person within a group. To provide a foundation for an overview of the kind of ethical framework that can be used to determine the relevance of these "labeling" issues, professional identity issues, and other such aspects of work group relationships, we suggest the following measures: Define the potential harm of such issues to the subject. It is the least critical sometimes, and in many cases is the hardest to do, as different people may view what offends them differently. Help the subject understand the nature of the process. Offer a neutrally biased reflection and valuing of the diverse professional identity. Ethical decision-making has been discussed, but the exceptions of the above literature have been largely idealized and utilized to support theory development. However, none has systematically reviewed empirical findings. Whether social psychology and other fields have identified such dilemmas, and what they are, formally validate those dilemmas. This paper summarizes our findings on identified ethical decision-making dilemmas.

12. The Future of Professional Identity Research in Work Group Dynamics

While professional identity has been addressed to some extent in the organizational context, there is still much room for growth. Moreover, strides in integrating professional identity with professional work group research are likely to occur. First, the current state of professional identity research in work group dynamics is reviewed in regard to the meta-analysis. Taking into account the meta-analysis, two research gaps are also identified. From there, a host of emerging trends that are ripe for even greater scholarly attention is highlighted. Future directions are also suggested both inside and outside the organization. Outside of organizational contexts, it is emphasized that research on professional identity in work groups is increasingly drawing insights from a variety of related fields. In the conclusion, a vision of the future of professional identity research in work group dynamics is provided.

As scholars continue to investigate how the professional identity of individuals manifests and develops within organizations and other work group contexts, several insights and recommendations from this literature create promising avenues for future research in professional identity and work group dynamics. The increasing development of technology and remote work settings presents a list of research gaps associated with professional identity in work groups, suggesting several promising areas for future work. Data collection is one promising area of work. Longitudinal investigations offer a distinctly rich source of inquiry and remain woefully underrepresented in the literature. Additionally, scholars will benefit from work that unpacks the contemporary emergence of formal professional identities that may have addressed prior qualitative data collection waves not otherwise emerging. I have encouraged further investment in intersectionality research as critical to unraveling the development and consequences of professional identities across work groups and broader society. Indeed, scholars are likely to benefit from the examination of geographical contexts outside of North America, wherein professional identities formed of different social identities may be further impacted due to societal cultural and historical factors. Overall, researchers and scholarly practitioners interested in professional identity and work group dynamics should collectively expect more robust dialogues and new threads of research that help to bridge promising new insights to the practice of professional identity management for organizations in the 21st century. (Tomlinson & Jackson, 2021)(Cole,

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2024)(Charness & Chen, 2020)(Wang et al.2020)(Martin et al.2021)(Fransen et al., 2020)(Price et al.2021)(Worley et al., 2020)(Héliot et al.2020)

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