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# Integrating team and organizational identity: a systematic literature analysis

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This systematic literature review explores the impact of team and organizational identification on various factors such as wellbeing, behaviors, trust level, Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) and goal achievement. We use Social Identity Theory (SIT) to understand these dynamics. While strong organizational identification is generally linked to positive employee wellbeing, the presence of multiple groups within an organization (Nested Identifications or NID) can complicate matters. Over-identification with a specific team, as opposed to the organization as a whole, can lead to dysfunctional dynamics and reduce organizational effectiveness. The research provides insights into the factors that influence the alignment between team and organizational identification and its effects on employee behaviors. It calls for a more integrated understanding of the phenomenon, including which group categories to observe and which outcomes are most affected by different levels of identification. The primary focus of this work is the interaction between workgroups and the organization as a whole. The aim is to fill existing knowledge gaps, providing theoretical and practical insights to enhance wellbeing and effectiveness through targeted identification strategies at individual, team, and organizational levels. This systematic review seeks to guide future research toward a deeper understanding of identification dynamics within organizations, emphasizing a comprehensive approach that considers the impact of the most important levels of identification.

## KEYWORDS

wellbeing, organizational behavior, Social Identity Theory, organizational identification, Nested Identifications

## 1 Introduction

Social identity and categorization processes play a crucial role in how individuals perceive themselves and others within organizational settings. The systematic analysis described aims to shed light on the current state of research applying Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) to organizational contexts. The objective of this systematic analysis is to investigate the state of research in the application of SIT and the related SCT to organizations (Ashforth et al., 2008; Tajfel and Turner, 2004). This study aims to identify key findings on both the antecedents of identification levels and the effects on individuals, groups and the organization as a whole. Our goal is articulated across three fundamental dimensions: to deeply explore the literature to understand the different levels of employee identification with their groups within the organization, to synthesize research to outline an overview of the relationships that influence the sense of belonging and cooperation and to highlight gaps in our current understanding. These gaps indicate areas that require further study to refine our knowledge of existing dynamics. By identifying

these less explored and connected areas, we aim to stimulate new research and the development of practical interventions. Analyzing the causes and effects of identification allows us to determine what facilitates identification with the organization and teams, and to propose concrete strategies to enhance trust, promote employee wellbeing, and improve organizational effectiveness. A systematic review of the literature reveals how an optimal balance between team identification and organization identification can, in most cases, generate significant benefits.

## 1.1 Context and relevance

Social Identity Theory (SIT) and related research provide a comprehensive perspective on how individuals' identification with groups and organizations affects their behaviors, attitudes, and overall performance. When individuals identify with a salient group, this not only strengthens their sense of belonging and homogeneity among members but also promotes prosocial behaviors, trust, and a collective sense of efficacy (Haslam and Ellemers, 2005; Tajfel and Turner, 2004; Van Knippenberg, 2000). This dynamic interaction between individuals and groups underscores the fundamental role of the social context, as originally proposed by Lewin (1951), and highlights the cognitive mechanisms underlying group behavior (Hogg and Turner, 1987).

## 1.2 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner (2004) are fundamental for understanding how individuals establish and maintain their identification with groups and organizations. These theories illustrate the process through which belonging to certain groups impacts individuals' self-perception and behavior. According to SIT, a person's self-concept is influenced by their membership in various social groups and the emotional significance they attach to this membership. This overall self-concept helps to determine the level of self-esteem and individual satisfaction. This can promote internal cohesion and potentially generate discrimination toward external groups. John Turner further enriched this concept with Self-Categorization Theory, analyzing how an individual's identification with a group influences behaviors that conform to the norms and values of that group (Hogg and Turner, 1987).

Further research has deepened these concepts, highlighting the importance of social identity even in organizational contexts, as it influences motivation, communication, group performance, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) (Haslam and Ellemers, 2005). These works emphasize how identification with a group or with the organization as a whole can have a significant impact on individual wellbeing and collective effectiveness.

A central aspect of these theories is the concept of social identity salience, which depends on a group's ability to meet individuals' identity needs. Strong identification with a group induces a shift in a person's perspective: from action driven by personal interests to action motivated by a sense of collective belonging (Van Knippenberg, 2000). This process highlights the

role of emotion and positive evaluation in the formation of social identity and individual behavior, underscoring how significant groups profoundly influence people's social identity.

According to SIT, people tend to categorize themselves and others into various social groups such as the organization they work for, ethnicity, gender, religion, and so on. This categorization leads to favoritism toward the ingroup and prejudices against other groups (outgroups). Moreover, groups transmit norms, values, and beliefs that partially shape the identities of their members: by being part of a group, individuals internalize parts of the salient aspects of that group's identity, modifying their attitudes and behaviors accordingly. Groups also provide a sense of security through social bonds, emotional support, and a shared worldview.

## 1.3 Social identity in organizations

According to Ashforth and Mael (1986), organizations can be seen as social categories that offer individuals a sense of identity, thus making Organizational Identification (OID) a particular type of social identification. Promoting strong employee identification with the organization becomes crucial for companies. When workers identify with the organization, they tend to internalize its values and goals, viewing the company's success as their personal success: this process increases motivation, commitment, and work performance (Riketta, 2005). Additionally, high organizational identification is associated with lower intentions to leave the company and greater job satisfaction (van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000). Companies can foster social identification by creating a sense of belonging to something important, valuing membership in the organization, and making employees proud to be part of it. This can occur through human resource management (HRM) practices, effective internal communication, and identity leadership (Ashforth et al., 2008).

## 1.4 Effects of identification in organizations

It is clear from the practical side that increasing the organization's attractiveness meets a fundamental need for employee identification. This represents a strategic goal for organizations, allowing them to influence a wide spectrum of effects on employees and their interactions (Cornelissen et al., 2007). These behavioral effects are mostly not achievable directly and normatively; it is very energy consuming to impose cooperation between two individuals or two groups. Cooperative behaviors tend to arise spontaneously among individuals and groups who feel united by belonging to a salient ingroup (Phua, 2004). Indeed, when individuals perceive a group as salient, they automatically develop a tendency to adopt prosocial behaviors toward those they identify as members of the in-group. For example, the level of identification influences, among ingroup members, those behaviors that the literature defines as Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB), which are discretionary extra-role behaviors beneficial to the organization. These behaviors do not directly arise from role obligations but represent discretionary choices that benefit colleagues or the community, and such decisions

are positively influenced by identification with the organization (Van Knippenberg, 2000). Recent research also highlights how OCBs have an impact on work performance, cost reduction, and employees' ability to adapt to organizational changes (Sidorenkov and Borokhovski, 2021).

A strong sense of belonging to the organization is linked to positive outcomes for employees, as demonstrated by Van Dick et al. (2008). However, excessive Workgroup Identification (WID) at the expense of the broader organization can lead to negative outcomes. These include internal conflicts, resistance to changes proposed by management, and a reduction in collaboration, both within one's own team and between different groups. Ashforth and Mael (1986) explored these dynamics, while Pugliese et al. further highlighted how excessive WID can generate counterproductive dynamics (Pugliese et al., 2024). Another salient aspect of the effects of OID concerns its relationship with burnout, as highlighted by Lammers et al. (2013). In this study, the authors correlate the levels of identification with burnout and have shown that the levels of identification with the team and professional status play critical roles in modulating employee burnout. The study also reveals how no significant correlations emerge between the levels of identification with the organization and the propensity for burnout.

## 1.5 Multiple salient groups in organizations

The concept of Nested Identities (NID) explores the idea that individuals can establish their identities through different levels of identification with groups within an organization. This possibility of identification not only includes OID but also extends to teams, work groups, subunits, relational and professional identifications, and career paths. NID broadens this concept, suggesting that individual identities can be hierarchically structured within others, forming a chain of belonging that shows the complexity and stratification of organizational identification. An individual can simultaneously identify with various groups within an organization, each nested within broader levels of belonging, creating a complex structure of affiliation (Ashforth et al., 2008). Research has investigated how the interaction between WID and OID influences stress reduction and burnout, in addition to having a significant impact on other organizational aspects such as leadership, motivation, trust, cooperation and communication (Steffens et al., 2017). Moreover, identification with specific foci within an organization shows stronger correlations with outcomes directly related to that particular focus. For example, identification with a work group is more closely linked to specific outcomes of the work group compared to identification with the organization, which is more strongly correlated with general organizational outcomes, such as the intention to leave the job (Ashforth et al., 2008). The approach of NID emphasizes how different levels of identification can coexist and interact within the individual, contributing to the understanding of how identification at multiple levels can act as a psychological resource. This complex and stratified sense of belonging can mitigate stress and promote wellbeing, creating a mutual exchange between an individual and her work environment. From an HRM point of view, recognizing and valuing the multiple nested identities within organizations

can facilitate the development of targeted strategies to promote an inclusive and supportive work environment, which strengthens both individual wellbeing and organizational effectiveness.

## 2 Method

For this systematic literature review, we followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. PRISMA aims to ensure transparency and completeness in systematic reviews by guaranteeing that all stages of the process are documented in a clear and detailed manner.

### 2.1 Literature research

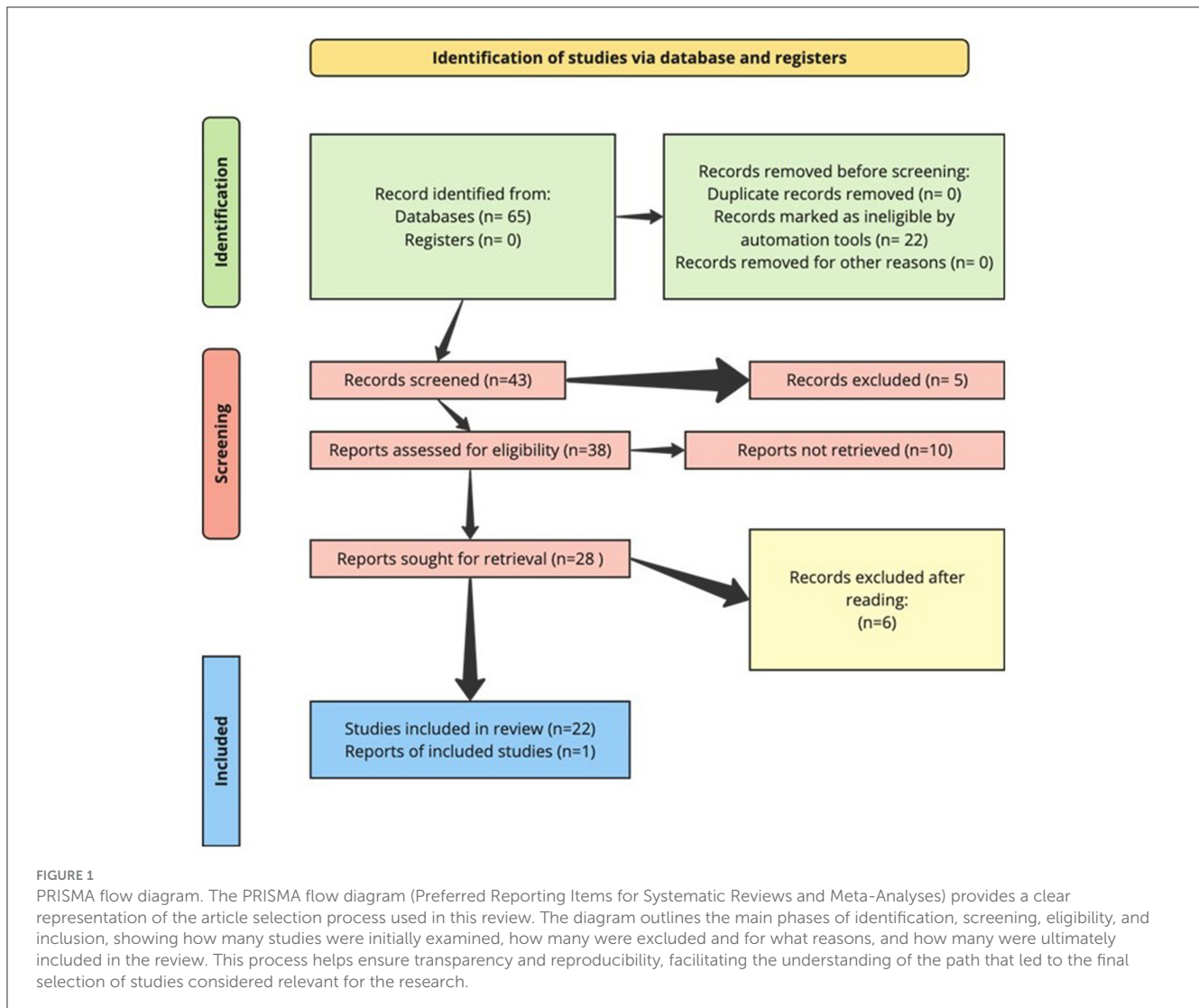
We focused our research on Scopus. The selected keywords were: "Organizational identification" OR "Corporate Identification" AND "Team identification" OR "Group Identification." The search was conducted on March 24, 2024. The database returned 65 articles, of which 22 were discarded due to set filters.

Filters: we did not set a temporal filter. As "Subject area," we limited the search to articles in: (1) Business, Management and Accounting. (2) Psychology, Social Sciences, Decision Sciences, Neurosciences, Economics, Econometrics, and Finance. We excluded the following keywords: (1) Meta-analysis. (2) Non-biological model. (3) Marketing management. (4) Marketing. (5) Hospital bed capacity. (6) Football, soccer. (7) Disaster. (8) Computer network. (9) Climate. (10) Cause-related sport marketing. (11) Basketball. (12) Ambidexterity. We also limited the search to articles in English.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: To ensure the relevance and quality of the reviewed literature, we applied the following inclusion and exclusion criteria. We included articles that were empirical or theoretical studies on organizational and team identification, within the context of business, management, psychology, social sciences, and related disciplines. We excluded articles with themes unrelated to organization identification, such as sports, disaster management, marketing, and non-organizational contexts. Meta-analyses, non-English articles, and studies focusing on highly specialized topics not directly related to organizational or team identification (e.g., computer networks, hospital bed capacity) were also excluded.

The analysis of the found articles (Figure 1) excluded five articles due to titles that clearly applied to other themes: two articles dealt with sports, two were meta-analyses not filtered by Scopus, and one was about marketing. Of the remaining 38 articles, 10 were discarded after reading the abstracts:

- (2020) is a collection of researchers' opinions on the topic of inter-age conflicts.
- Sidorenkov and Borokhovski (2023) examines identification levels in a prison.
- Miscenko and Day (2016) is a literature analysis not filtered by Scopus.
- Lee (2010) is a conference report with data extrapolated from interviews.



5. Foster and Hyatt (2007) researches identification with sports teams.
6. Cooper and Thatcher (2010) is a meta-analysis.
7. Avanzi et al. (2012) is a study on school teachers.
8. Walker (2022) is a meta-analysis.
9. Topa et al. (2006) is an article in Spanish.
10. Anand et al. (2013) is an interesting theoretical analysis.

Of the remaining 28 articles, 6 were discarded after reading:

1. Shen et al. (2022) focuses on the use of “Functional language” in multinational corporations (MNCs).
2. Rush and McNamee (2020) investigates the linguistic and emotional aspects of identification transforming in a “family-like” experience.
3. Rotondi (1976) conducts a survey on university staff.
4. Podnar (2011) examines identification in the relationship with enterprise stakeholders.
5. Oja et al. (2015) analyzes the sports context.

6. Krajcsák (2020) is an analysis of case studies.

## 2.2 Report PRISMA

The 22 articles included are listed in detail in Table 1. following the PRISMA Model (Page et al., 2021). We adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model to guide our systematic literature review process. PRISMA is a widely recognized set of guidelines designed to ensure transparency and completeness in reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses. It provides structured approaches, such as the PRISMA Checklist and the PRISMA Flow Diagram (Figure 1), to document the process of article selection, inclusion, and exclusion. The PRISMA Checklist helps ensure all essential elements are reported, while the PRISMA Flow Diagram visually depicts the process of screening and selecting studies. Using PRISMA allowed us to systematically track and justify our decisions, thus enhancing the replicability and reliability of our review.

TABLE 1 Limitations.

References	Journal	Limitations
van Knippenberg and van Schie (2000)	Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology	The study is based on two samples of Dutch employees, one from a telecommunications company and the other from a university faculty. The use of these specific samples limits the generalizability of the findings to other cultural and work contexts. Organizational identification and other variables were measured using self-reported data collected through questionnaires. The study employs a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time.
Van Dick et al. (2008)	Journal of Vocational Behavior	The study is based on two specific samples of employees, one from a consulting firm and the other from a travel agency. Organizational identification, job satisfaction, and OCB (Organizational Citizenship Behavior) were measured using self-reported data. The study uses a cross-sectional design.
Sidorenkov et al. (2022)	Behavioral Sciences	The study sample was not homogeneous, with differences in the profile of professional activity, and did not account for the character of interactions between groups and units, which could affect the strength of corresponding identifications. The cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for a causality inference.
Richter et al. (2006)	Academy of Management Journal	The study used a single-item measure for intergroup contact, raising concerns about uncertain reliability. Relationships with goal and relationship conflicts were tested cross-sectionally, which does not allow any inference of causality. Research was carried out with five public health care organizations within the British NHS.
Sidorenkov and Borokhovski (2021)	Behavioral Sciences	Limitation in the generalizability of the study's findings across different organizational contexts. It highlights the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the nature of work interactions
Tüzün et al. (2018)	International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management	The study focuses on a specific sample of academics in Turkey. The authors highlight that Turkish culture, characterized by high levels of collectivism and power distance, may have influenced the results. The study uses self-report measures for organizational identification and Psychological Capital (PsyCap). Job performance is assessed using Carmeli et al.'s (2007) "Perceived Job Performance Scale," which relies on participants' self-perceptions. The study employs a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time.
Wieseke et al. (2012)	Journal of Marketing	The research was conducted in collaboration with a single company in the chemical products sector and necessitates further investigation into the cross-industry applicability of the findings. The study primarily considered negative stereotypes but the social psychology literature acknowledges the existence of positive and mixed group stereotypes.
Wu (2021)	Frontiers in Psychology	The sample consists solely of administrative group members from schools in Taiwan, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or work groups. Convenience sampling was used, which is not a random sampling method, potentially affecting the study's generalization. The cross-sectional survey design limits the ability to infer causal relationships. Self-reported measures were used for all scales, including knowledge sharing.
Reade (2001)	International Journal of Human Resource Management	A limited number of antecedents were explored due to the lack of an established model of antecedents of identification in MNCs. The study's findings are based on a small number of subsidiaries, raising questions about the generalizability of the results to different countries, regions, or types of subsidiaries. The research utilized a cross-sectional approach, which does not allow for testing causality between the antecedents and identification.
Ho and Yeung (2021)	International Journal of Psychology	Cross-Sectional Data, Limited Sampling: The participants were office employees, which might limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Specific Cultural Context: The study was conducted in Hong Kong, a Chinese collectivist society where Confucianism is strongly supported. This could influence how age-related conflict is perceived and managed in the workplace. Use of Hypothetical Scenarios: The hypothetical scenarios used to simulate intergenerational conflict may not reflect the actual experiences of the respondents.
Porck et al. (2020)	Journal of Management	Both the main study and the replication study are cross-sectional, which limits the ability to infer causality even though conceptual analyses might suggest causal relationships with identifications influencing intergroup strategic consensus. All data were drawn from a single survey, which raises concerns about common method variance. Although procedural remedies were followed to mitigate this issue, it remains a potential concern for survey research.
Millward et al. (2007)	Organization Science	Limitations include the study's generalizability due to the specific industry or organizational context, the reliance on self-reported measures which might introduce bias, and the cross-sectional nature of the study which limits causal inferences.
Fernández-Salineró and Topa (2020)	European Journal of Investigation in health, psychology and education	The research was conducted on a sample of administrative and service staff from a single Spanish public university, which may limit the generalizability of the results. The scale used to measure perceived intergroup discrimination was adapted from an existing one, potentially failing to fully capture the complexity of the construct. Self-report bias is possible. The study did not explicitly control for potential confounding variables, such as past intergroup conflicts, leadership styles, or the overall organizational climate
Phua (2004)	Construction Management and Economics	The study sample is limited to a single sector (construction) and a single country (Singapore). The findings may not be generalizable to other sectors or cultures with different norms and collaboration practices. The study relies on self-reported data collected through questionnaires
Millward and Haslam (2013)	Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology	Single Cultural Difference Focus: The study primarily focused on one broad cultural difference between private and public-sector organizations. This was used as a proxy to investigate the impact of identity accessibility on the strength of identification, which may not capture other potentially influential factors or contexts.

(Continued)



TABLE 1 (Continued)

References	Journal	Limitations
Cremers and Curçeu (2023)	Systems Research and Behavioral Science	All data for the variables included are self-reported, and the study did not use an experimental design; definite causal conclusions cannot be drawn from the results. The study utilized convenient sampling from an MTS sample in a single organization, which could affect the generalizability of the findings. The identification scale used was a compact, one-question scale, which, although validated and extensively used in research, could benefit from more elaborated measures in future studies.
Al-Atwi and Bakir (2014)	Journal of Managerial Psychology	Single Organizational Unit: limits the generalizability of the results to other settings or organizations. Lack of Interactive Relationships: the hypothesized model does not include interactive relationships between Work Identification (WID) and Organizational Identification (OID), unlike some previous models such as those proposed by Van Dick et al. (2008). Measurement of Perceived External Prestige (PEP): PEP was conceptualized and measured in relation to general outsiders, which might be seen as a weaker approach compared to more targeted stakeholder-specific measures.
Lammers et al. (2013)	Management Communication Quarterly	The study uses self-reported measures to assess the quantity and quality of communication. This approach may be subject to recall bias or social desirability bias. The sample consists of employees from a single organization, which limits the generalizability of the results.
Eisenbeiss and Otten (2008)	Journal of Applied Social Psychology	The study is based on a small sample of participants (n=52). This limitation may affect the statistical power of the analysis and the generalizability of the results. Additionally, it uses self-report measures to collect data on identification, expectations, and motivation of the participants, which could introduce social desirability bias. The study focuses on a specific training group, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other training or work contexts
Marks and Lockyer (2005)	The International Journal of Human Resource Management	This work is based on a limited sample from only two software development companies. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable to other industries or to teams with different characteristics. Additionally, the 5-point scale used to measure identification may not fully capture the complexity of the construct.
Jetten et al. (2002)	British Journal of Social Psychology	The study was conducted on a sample of only 66 employees (56% of the population) from a single Australian government organization. Due to an administrative error, only three of the six intended items for measuring organizational identification were included in the pre-restructuring questionnaire. Self-report bias is possible.
Gleibs and Alvarado (2019)	Social Psychological Bulletin	Cross-Sectional Design, Self-Reported Measures that could introduce response biases and common method variance. Unbalanced Samples and Small Sample Sizes: The sample of workers with casual contracts was small and not representative. Lack of Inclusion of Other Relevant Variables such as pay level, perception of rights, or other health and wellbeing indicators.

### 3 Results

In this study, we grouped the findings by themes or categories with the aim of providing an integrated and comprehensive overview of the examined literature. The main focus of the chapter is on exploring the interactions between workgroup identification (WID) and organizational identification (OID), and how these two dimensions influence various aspects of organizational behavior. The chapter is organized around six key themes: the salience of groups and the factors that determine it (3.1); the concept of Nested Identities (NID) and the interconnection among different employee identities (3.2); the impact of different levels of identification on the management of organizational change (3.3); the analysis of antecedents influencing WID and OID, such as organizational prestige and supervisor support (3.4); the influence of physical contexts on identification processes (3.5); and finally, the exploration of the complex effects of employees' simultaneous identification with different groups (3.6).

#### 3.1 Which groups are salient and when?

Humans tend to identify with various groups, both internal and external to the organization; simply studying Organizational

Identification (OID) does not provide sufficient depth to the analysis. As forth emphasizes that members of an organization can identify with multiple social groups and “can define themselves holistically in terms of multiple identities” (Ashforth et al., 2008). A comprehensive analysis should include both the stable influence of some internal and external groups to the organization as well as the influence of the countless groups that become salient to the employee in relation to the context. Sidorenkov and Borokhovski (2021), in their research on identification and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), introduce a multidimensional conceptual model of employee identifications in an organization. This model is based on two factors: the first, which depends on the focus of identification, is composed of organizational, sub-organizational, group, micro-group, interpersonal, and personal levels. The second, which depends on the content, is distinguished into cognitive and affective identification. Remarkably the findings highlighted that both the intensity and the regularity of interactions among employees play a crucial role in modulating the effect of organizational and group identifications on OCB. It was found that more intense and frequent identifications tend to be associated with an increase in OCB, particularly marked when there are both strong group and organizational identifications. Furthermore, the study distinguished between the influences

of cognitive and affective identifications on OCB, suggesting that each has a unique impact (Sidorenkov and Borokhovski, 2021).

The research by Millward & Haslam investigates variations in employee identification within organizational contexts, focusing specifically on OID, WID, and career identification. Conducted in two healthcare organizations with distinct cultures (one with a collectivist culture and the other with an individualist culture), the research used experimental and quasi-experimental methods to explore how the salience of different organizational identities is influenced by (1) the accessibility (the facility with which a specific identity is recalled or perceived in a given context) and (2) the fit (the degree to which an identity appears appropriate or suitable to a specific situation) of the identity. The research reveals that workgroup identification is generally higher than organizational identification and that the strength of identification varies depending on the organizational context and is moderated by cultural values that influence identity accessibility (Millward and Haslam, 2013).

The authors also emphasize how context sensitivity influences the identification of employees: the salience of organizational, workgroup, and career identities varies significantly based on the specific context in which employees are located and the intentional manipulations of such contexts. Variations in contextual factors can significantly alter the strength with which employees identify with specific groups or the organization as a whole (Millward and Haslam, 2013). According to the authors this is crucial to consider the potential biases in scientific researches that emerge from how (and where) they are conducted; it is also significant that from an HRM perspective, even small interventions in the context in which employees operate can generate variations in an employee's perception of salience. By carefully manipulating and monitoring environmental cues, HR professionals can significantly influence how employees identify with their workgroups and the larger organization. This underscores the importance of a strategic approach to organizational culture and employee management, where even subtle changes can lead to meaningful outcomes in employee behavior and organizational success.

The study by Marks and Lockyer on groups belonging to two software companies, some of whom worked from the main office while others were geographically dispersed, explored the impact of dispersion on both organizational and team identification dynamics. The results showed that, despite no significant differences in organizational identification between dispersed workers and those at headquarters, team identification was found to be more salient, particularly among dispersed workers. These workers also tended to express greater intrinsic job satisfaction and a higher likelihood of staying within the organization compared to their non-dispersed colleagues. These findings confirmed the importance of team identification, which proved to be more significant than organizational identification for all employees, highlighting how this tendency is even more pronounced among dispersed workers. Surprisingly, no marked difference in organizational identification emerged between the two groups, contradicting some of the study's preliminary hypotheses (Marks and Lockyer, 2005). However, this study also highlighted the need to consider the possibility that excessive

team identification might induce competitiveness or hostility between different workgroups, which could be detrimental to the organization's functionality.

Similar conclusions regarding the salience of the team come from Tüzün et al., while investigating the different foci of organizational identification on employee performance and psychological capital (PsyCap). It emerges from this study that team identification is the strongest predictor of work performance (Tüzün et al., 2018). According to this research, organizations should therefore promote strong identification not only with the organization as a whole but also with specific work units as the relationship between these elements contribute significantly to work performance and psychological wellbeing (Tüzün et al., 2018).

Numerous studies underscore the negative aspects of strong WID: a significant issue that emerged is "Ingroup projection," as described by Porck et al. This phenomenon occurs when team members perceive their group as the ideal prototype of the entire organization and tend to evaluate other teams negatively because they do not match this prototype based on their own ingroup. This dynamic can lead to intergroup conflicts, hinder cooperation, and tends to reduce overall organizational effectiveness (Porck et al., 2020).

The investigation by van Knippenberg and van Schie (2000) also emphasizes the possibility that excessive identification with the workgroup may induce competitiveness or hostility between different groups, a situation that is harmful to the proper functioning of the organization as a whole.

Different results were obtained in 2004 by Florence Phua, who examined how organizational identification influences cooperative behavior within and between organizations in the construction sector. The findings of the study reveal that organizational identification plays a crucial role in both intra-organizational and inter-organizational cooperation, emerging as the main predictor of individual cooperative behavior. Surprisingly, identification with the internal group did not show the hypothesized effects, highlighting the predominant importance of organizational identification (Phua, 2004).

In their 2019 study, Ho and Yeung investigated the escalating phenomenon of intergenerational conflicts within workplaces among a large group of administrative employees in Hong Kong, noting that such conflicts are becoming more frequent as the age gap in the workforce increases. These conflicts are often rooted in differences in interaction and perception between different age groups, for which the authors use SIT to investigate the causes, underlying mechanisms, and management strategies for such conflicts. The research revealed that employees who exhibit a strong sense of belonging to their organization are inclined to prioritize cooperative over personal goals when interacting with colleagues of different ages. It was also observed that employees who do not perceive age-based distinctions tend to be more effective in managing conflicts (Ho and Yeung, 2021).

The studies analyzed in this section highlight the complexity of determining which groups are salient for employees and in which contexts. The research demonstrates that it is not sufficient to consider only OID; it is crucial to analyze the influence of various internal and external groups that may become relevant to employees depending on the context.

Most of the studies included use quantitative methods, such as questionnaires and self-report scales, to measure OID, WID, and other forms of identification. Some studies adopt a longitudinal approach, collecting data at different points in time, while others are based on a cross-sectional design, with a single data collection. The samples of the studies considered here are heterogeneous, including employees from various sectors (healthcare, manufacturing, software, etc.), with different roles and levels of seniority. Many studies rely on self-report data, which can be influenced by participants' desire to present themselves in a positive light, providing answers they perceive as socially acceptable (Social Desirability Bias). Additionally, some studies use convenience samples, which may not be representative of the target population, thus limiting the generalizability of the results (Sampling Bias) (see Table 1 for details). The analysis of the different studies included in this section highlights that the salience of groups for employees is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple contextual factors.

### 3.2 Nested identities

Nested identities represent a key concept in understanding how various identifications within an organization interact and influence employee behavior. This approach considers how identification with one's workgroup and the organization can overlap and reinforce each other. According to Van Dick et al., in situations where there is a positive overlap of identifications—where both WID and OID are high—these identifications are more strongly associated with employee job satisfaction and extra-role behaviors compared to cases where only one of the identifications is elevated. One identification enhances the influence of the other, highlighting the importance of careful management of multiple identities within organizational structures (Van Dick et al., 2008).

The experience of nested identities (NID) by the employee involves a convergence of their multiple identities within the organization, creating a sort of gestalt identity or cohesive whole. As highlighted by Ashforth et al. (2008) in Lammers et al. (2013):

“although individuals may have many identities... within an organization, these identities... tend to converge and combine to some extent, becoming a sort of loosely defined gestalt: not a single identity, but an ensemble” (p. 359). This process of identification with the organization can influence how the employee perceives themselves and their role within the company (Lammers et al., 2013). This study examines the impact of professional, group, and organizational identifications on worker burnout, using a mixed-methods research approach. The quantitative results revealed significant correlations between different forms of identification and components of burnout. Specifically, group identification was associated with lower levels of depersonalization, suggesting a protective effect against alienation in work contexts. On the other hand, professional identification showed a strong link to an increase in personal accomplishment, helping employees feel more fulfilled and satisfied with their work. Contrary to the

research hypotheses, organizational identification did not show a significant correlation with any of the burnout dimensions examined (Lammers et al., 2013).

These researches highlight that employees' identification with different groups within an organization can interact in complex ways, influencing their behavior. The theories on Nested Identities satisfactorily describe this dynamism and complexity. Various studies, such as the one by Van Dick et al. (2008), show how a positive alignment between WID and OID, with high levels of both, correlates with greater job satisfaction and increased extra-role behaviors. This suggests that employees who strongly identify both with their workgroup and with the organization tend to be more satisfied with their jobs and engage in behaviors that go beyond their specific duties, contributing to the wellbeing and effectiveness of the organization. However, the research also highlights the risk of an imbalance in favor of WID alone, which can lead to excessive competitiveness between workgroups. This may harm collaboration and communication among teams, reducing organizational efficiency and harmony. Moreover, these studies indicate that an individual's different identities converge and combine, creating a cohesive whole. Identities are not static or separate, but dynamic elements that interact, influencing how the individual perceives themselves and relates to the work environment. These studies also present limitations, such as the reliance on self-report data, which can be subject to bias, and the absence of a longitudinal design (Table 1).

### 3.3 Managing organizational change: effects on different foci

An example of the effect of NIDs and the need for organizations to strategically align different employee identifications comes from a study that explores the effects of different levels of employee identification in the context of a corporate restructuring that requires the re-composition of established workgroups (Jetten et al., 2002). The research reveals that, compared with the pre-restructuring situation, levels of WID, OID, job satisfaction, and perception of group performance appeared significantly deteriorated after the restructuring.

The authors partly explain this effect with the general consideration that “losing an identity or a permanent change to the meaning of the identity is likely to affect the individual in important ways” (p. 281). In this context, it appears that high organizational identification can alleviate the negative consequences of losing a salient WID. Thus, strengthening the overall organizational identity can function as protection against the negative impacts arising from the disintegration of groups during a restructuring, through emotional support and a sense of stability, which help employees navigate changes with less difficulty (Jetten et al., 2002).

In their research on Intergroup Strategic Consensus, Porck et al. (2020) find that organizational identification is partially positively correlated with intergroup strategic consensus, indicating that the greater the employees' sense of belonging to the organization as a whole, the more likely there is agreement among different groups on common strategies. This finding highlights how a sense of



belonging to the organization has a positive effect on the sharing of organizational goals, proving to be of high interest for the objectives of corporate management and HRM in harmonizing the strategic actions of various teams that contribute to complex business outcomes.

In contrast, identification with one's specific group showed a negative effect on intergroup consensus, suggesting that a strong bond with one's immediate group can actually lead to less strategic harmony with other groups within the organization (Porck et al., 2020). To counteract the harmful effects of strong group identification and promote greater strategic consensus, organizations should establish cooperative goals (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) and explain how team objectives connect to the overall organization strategy. This not only could allow teams to more effectively meet the needs of other teams but could also make them prouder of what they contribute to the organization, creating a more collaborative and less fragmented environment (Porck et al., 2020).

To sum up, these studies delve into how organizational changes influence different forms of employee identification. Various methodologies are used, including longitudinal studies, field experiments, and qualitative analyses. Longitudinal studies allow for the analysis of the evolution of identifications over time, while field experiments enable the manipulation of specific variables to evaluate the impact of organizational changes. The samples of the studies analyze different types of organizational changes, such as restructurings, mergers, acquisitions, and the introduction of new technologies. Here, selection bias and self-selection bias should be considered (participants can choose whether or not to participate, which can influence the results, as employees who choose to participate may have different characteristics from those who do not participate) (see Table 1 for details).

This literature highlights the importance of carefully managing organizational changes, considering their impact on different forms of employee identification. A notable element that emerges is that high OID can serve as a protective factor during periods of change, providing employees with a sense of stability and belonging. However, as repeatedly emphasized, it is essential to balance OID with WID, avoiding an excessive emphasis on WID alone, which could lead to harmful competition between workgroups.

### 3.4 Antecedents

Such a complex concept requires considering different types of antecedents of identification levels within an organization. Reade (2001), in a study analyzing identification in multinational corporations (MNCs), explored how various antecedents influence employees' identification both with their local subsidiary and the global multinational organization. The results show that identification with the local subsidiary is more influenced by local factors, such as the prestige and distinctive characteristics of the subsidiary, support and appreciation from local superiors, and perceived local career opportunities. Conversely, identification with the global organization is more determined by global antecedents, including access to facilities and organizational hierarchies on an international scale. This implies that while identification with the

local subsidiary can support the health and vitality of the specific unit, that with the global level can facilitate cooperation and unity of action across the different MNC subsidiaries (Reade, 2001).

In this article, the author also identifies seven antecedents that influence these levels: the prestige and distinctiveness of the organization, support, and appreciation from superiors, perceived opportunities for career advancement and personal fulfillment, and perceived access to the organizational hierarchy. These factors contribute to shaping individuals' identification with the organization, acting as levers that can intensify or diminish employees' sense of belonging within the workplace (Reade, 2001).

In 2021, Wei-Li Wu conducted a study on how ethical leadership can foster knowledge sharing through identification mechanisms within organizations. It was found that ethical leadership not only directly affects knowledge sharing but also indirectly through group, relational, and organizational identification. In particular, group identification was identified as a significant mediator in the relationship between ethical leadership and knowledge sharing, highlighting how ethical leadership can strengthen group cohesion and alignment toward organizational goals. Furthermore, the increase in relational and organizational identification under ethical guidance promotes knowledge sharing among team members (Wu, 2021).

The research conducted by Gleibs and Alvarado (2019) focuses on the analysis of organizational and team identification among millennials in Chile and the United Kingdom, through the perspective of Social Identity Theory. The results reveal that the type of employment contract (permanent, fixed-term, casual) plays a crucial role in influencing organizational and team identification of employees. It emerged that a positive communication climate significantly strengthens both identification and affective wellbeing, emphasizing the potential of effective communication in shaping social identity in workplaces. The authors highlight that organizational identification proves to be crucial for prosocial organizational behavior (OCB) only among workers with permanent contracts, indicating how job stability can strengthen the bond of identity and influence work behaviors (Gleibs and Alvarado, 2019).

#### 3.4.1 Physical contexts

An interesting antecedent emerged in literature is that corporate decisions regarding physical contexts can also influence the processes of employee identification within an organization. A study conducted by Millward et al. highlighted how desk assignments can have a significant impact on employees' focus of identification, both with their own team and the entire organization. Specifically, it was found that employees with a fixed desk tend to value face-to-face interactions more, strengthening their identification with the team. Conversely, those without a fixed desk prefer electronic interactions, favoring greater identification with the organization as a whole (Millward et al., 2007).

The studies included in this section use a variety of research methodologies, including cross-sectional studies, longitudinal studies, field experiments, and qualitative analyses. A wide range of antecedents are examined, including individual factors (e.g., motivation, values), relational factors (e.g., supervisor

support, relationships with colleagues), organizational factors (e.g., organizational culture, human resource management policies), and physical context factors (e.g., office design, workspace arrangement). Several types of bias are possible: social desirability bias, sample selection bias, and common method bias (some studies use the same method to measure both antecedents and identifications, which may artificially inflate correlations between variables). Moreover, Wu (2021)'s research highlights the importance of ethical leadership as an antecedent to identification and positive organizational behaviors, analyzing a sample limited to administrative group members from Taiwanese schools, thus describing a very specific cultural context.

The analysis of the antecedents of identification reveals a complex picture, in which different individual, relational, organizational, and contextual factors interact to influence employees' sense of belonging. Understanding these antecedents is fundamental for developing human resource management strategies aimed at promoting identification with the organization and workgroups.

### 3.5 Analyzing different foci and their mutual interactions

The importance of organizational identification dynamics in contemporary scientific debate is underscored by emerging empirical literature exploring the profound implications of such dynamics on organizational behavior. In this context, the concept of Identity Economics provides a valuable theoretical framework for interpreting a variety of behaviors and processes within organizations. Millward and Haslam (2013) highlight how the extent to which a person's identity is defined by their membership in an organizational group significantly influences key behaviors such as communication, compliance, leadership, and loyalty. This perspective is enriched by integrating the analyses of Akerlof and Kranton (2010), who illustrate how organizational identity not only models daily interactions but also guides strategic decisions and overall performance (Millward and Haslam, 2013).

In a 2020 study, Samuel Fernández-Salineró and Gabriela Topa analyzed intergroup conflicts within organizations, examining how the perception of discrimination influences these conflicts through group identification, with a moderating role played by organizational identification. The results indicated that perceived discrimination contributes directly to intergroup conflict, mediated by group identification. It was also observed that a strong sense of belonging to the organization can moderate and reduce the impact of perceived discrimination on conflict between groups (Fernández-Salineró and Topa, 2020).

Richter et al. (2006) focuses his study on OID and WID and their impact on intergroup relationships and productivity. The study showed that group identification, especially among members who are in a boundary-spanning position between groups and departments, is positively correlated with effective intergroup relationships and increased productivity. Boundary spanners are individuals within an organization who act as a bridge between different groups, facilitating the flow of information, resources, and ideas between internal and external entities. These individuals may

formally belong to a specific team, but they have roles and skills that enable them to cross organizational boundaries, both physical and symbolic, to connect otherwise isolated parts. Remarkably, this effect only manifested when there are high levels of intergroup contact and strong identification with the overall organization. Additionally, a significant three-way interaction between WID, intergroup contact, and OID was found to significantly affect relationship conflicts, goal conflicts, and intergroup productivity over time (Richter et al., 2006).

Al-Atwi and Bakir (2014) examined, in a study on a cement manufacturing company in Iraq, how evaluations of prestige and respect perceived by management and colleagues influence identification with the organization (OID) and the workgroup (WID), and how these identifications affect counterproductive behaviors. It was found that both perceived prestige and respect have a significant impact on employees' identification with their organization and their workgroups. This context is characterized by specific cultural and social dynamics, as the work environment in Iraq can be influenced by local cultural norms and management practices that reflect a collectivist and hierarchical society.

Moreover, in this study OID and WID act as mediators in the relationship between these evaluations and counterproductive behaviors, such as organizational and interpersonal deviant behaviors. Specifically, a higher OID is correlated with a reduction in organizational deviant behaviors, while an increase in WID is associated with a decrease in interpersonal deviant behaviors. These results suggest that organizations should strive to enhance internal prestige and respect to strengthen employees' identification with their group and the entire organization. This can be achieved by properly valuing employees' contributions and recognizing their work, which can help reduce deviant behaviors and improve the work environment and organizational effectiveness (Al-Atwi and Bakir, 2014).

A longitudinal study that sheds light on the antecedents of WID and OID was conducted in the context of a training program for flight attendants. This research explored how certain variables influence identification with the training group and with the organization. The results revealed that interpersonal attraction among participants is significantly correlated with identification with the training group. Additionally, it was found that professional motivation has a predictive longitudinal impact on identification with the organization, suggesting that individuals with strong professional motivation tend to develop a closer bond with the organization over time (Eisenbeiss and Otten, 2008).

In their 2022 work, Sidorenkov et al. examined the connections between different foci of employee identification within an organization. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the concept of social identity in a complex organizational context and helps clarify how different levels of identification can influence behaviors and relationships in the workplace. It was conducted on three independent samples: employees from the socio-economic sector, agents from a security agency, and academics from higher education institutions.

They proposed a list of six foci: personal, interpersonal, micro-group, group, sub-organizational, and organizational, through cognitive and affective dimensions. It emerged from the research that the intensity of these identifications and their interrelationships vary based on specific job characteristics,

although there are general trends, such as stronger identification at the micro-group level compared to other forms of identification (Sidorenkov et al., 2022).

Wieseke et al. (2012) investigated the impact of negative stereotypes about headquarters on sales performance and customer satisfaction in sales interactions. The survey was conducted using a large-scale, multilevel dataset, involving a sample of 1,548 sales representatives from 299 sales districts of a large U.S.-based company in the B2B sector. The survey was carried out using questionnaires administered to the sales representatives, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data related to their perceptions of team and organizational identification, physical distance from headquarters, and perceived competitive intensity. The authors also analyzed sales performance data and customer satisfaction, obtained directly from company records. It was found that negative stereotypes not only decrease sales performance but also customer satisfaction. The analysis also revealed that stereotypes of the headquarters fully mediated the effect of competitive intensity on sales outcomes. The conclusions of the study highlight the importance of actively managing negative stereotypes that specially form in geographically dispersed sales teams. These stereotypes can promote identification with subgroup identities, leading to strong subgroup loyalty which, in turn, can generate negative stereotypes harmful to organizational performance (Wieseke et al., 2012). An interesting effect of this phenomenon occurs in organizations with a complex and geographically dispersed sales network, where an entire sales team may leave the organization at the same time if team members experience uncertainty or dissatisfaction, manifesting their identification with their team.

Finally, we analyze a study that examines identification within teams and Multi-Team Systems (MTS) in an organizational setting where the MTS methodology introduction was in progress (Cremers and Curçeu, 2023). Multi-team systems are networks of teams that work interdependently toward shared superordinate goals, often requiring coordination and collaboration across different functional or departmental boundaries. In response to the complexity of current objectives, many organizations have actively started to design and implement new models based on versatile systems for the optimal employment of human resources and the effective efficacy and efficiency of processes: the structure of MTS facilitates collaboration and interdependence among teams, enabling organizations to respond better to environmental needs and pressures.

The research follows a 2-year longitudinal data collection and shows that there is a clear distinction between identification with the team and with the MTS, with a larger gap in larger MTS compared to smaller ones. This gap tends to decrease over time, mainly due to an increase in identification with the MTS. An important aspect that emerges from this research concerns (1) how identification with the team promotes innovative team performances and (2) how identification with the MTS moderates this association with the team by influencing potential excesses or limitations in innovation that could arise from a strong WID. The research findings, which we will revisit in the conclusions, have significant implications for the management of MTS in modern organizations, suggesting that identification with both the team and the MTS can positively influence innovative work behavior (Cremers and Curçeu, 2023).

This section examines how different levels of employee identification—with the organization as a whole, with workgroups, and with their profession—interact with each other and influence individual and organizational behaviors. It includes studies employing a variety of methodologies, including longitudinal studies, field experiments, and qualitative and quantitative analyses. The samples include employees from various sectors (e.g., manufacturing, healthcare, and technology), with different roles, levels of seniority, and specific cultural contexts. Among the various foci of identification, professional identification and career identification are also examined. It is important to consider the possibility of several types of bias: social desirability bias, sample selection bias, common method bias, and the lack of control for confounding variables.

The analysis of the different foci of identification and their mutual interactions shows the complexity of how employees relate to the organization and workgroups. OID, WID, and professional identification influence each other, and their interaction can have both positive and negative effects on individual and organizational behaviors.

## 4 Conclusions

In this literature review, we explored the importance of employee identification levels, their antecedents, and the impact of these on various types of outputs concerning the organization as a whole, teams, and individuals. The research highlights crucial aspects for both scientific research and corporate management practices. Initially, the analysis reveals that OID exerts a significant influence on various general aspects of the work environment; for instance, it helps to enhance intergroup cooperation, reduce stress levels, and align long-term goals across all levels of the organization, promoting harmonization between corporate and individual values, strengthening trust bonds, and encouraging Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB), which are key elements for a healthy and productive corporate climate.

Conversely, Workgroup Identification (WID) seems to have a more marked impact on positive team dynamics and is closely associated with an increase in collaboration and intra-group effectiveness, fostering a supportive and motivating work environment for employees in their daily lives. The virtuous dynamics emerging from high WID demonstrate how group cohesion can become a catalyst for both efficiency and the wellbeing of individual members. However, various studies have highlighted the potential for excessive WID to induce competitiveness or hostility among different work groups, which could be detrimental to organizational functioning (Marks and Lockyer, 2005). This suggests that while strong identification within teams can promote significantly positive outcomes, it is crucial to manage these dynamics to prevent intergroup conflicts and maintain organizational harmony.

Furthermore, it was noted how self-categorization can lead to stereotyped behaviors, transforming individual identification into rigidly determined group actions. Depersonalization, a direct result of self-categorization, manifests when employees begin to see themselves less as unique individuals and more as interchangeable members of a group. This process, in some cases, can reduce

the complexity of individual and team thinking and ultimately increase resistance to change (Hogg and Turner, 1987). For this reason, organizational strategies aim to govern the processes of self-categorization, maintaining identification salient enough to contribute in generating positive effects and mild enough to enhance the diversity and richness of perspectives of individuals and groups (Hogg and Turner, 1987; Porck et al., 2020).

Thus, the research has shown great attention to the complex and interactive effects of simultaneous employee identification with multiple groups, emphasizing both virtuous and deleterious effects of different combinations. This line of research in the literature necessitates further development, firstly by investigating the effects on employees and teams of Nested Identities (NID) (Van Dick et al., 2008), and subsequently on how to generate congruence in an employee and organization among these different salient nested groups. NIDs describe how individual identities of people are overlaid and interconnected within broader contexts. The concept, applied to organizations, shows how each more specific identity (such as that of a team) is embedded within broader identities (such as that of the organization), creating a dynamic network of relationships.

Some emerging questions that require detailed answers, in our opinion, include: (1) How and with what results, in organizational practice, can management actively act on the social identification of different groups to generate a congruence that makes them compatible when they produce their effects? (2) At what level of abstraction is it most effective to act on the different social identifications, and to what extent is it beneficial that the different nested groups are aligned by strong similarity and congruence? (3) What role does the sharing of fundamental values in different connected groups play? Under what conditions does a congruence of values between, for example, the organization and a work team, actually manifest in terms of cooperative behaviors, OCB, and interactions based on trust relationships?

A harmonious interaction between different groups requires alignment between: (1) Fundamental values expressed by groups at every level, (2) Strategic goals, and (3) Norms that regulate corporate life. A good practical approach highlighted in this research is the MTS system (Cremers and Curçeu, 2023), which aims to create a structure, in complex organizations, responsible for connecting peer-level groups and supervisory groups. According to the authors, the key characteristics of MTS are: (1) Identifiability and Stability: members identify as part of the MTS system are perceived by others as parts of the ingroup. (2) Functional Specialization and Task Interdependence: teams within an MTS work together toward superordinate goals. (3) Superordinate Goals: teams share at least one common goal that guides their collaboration within the system. MTS is a complex organizational structure designed to facilitate collaboration between different teams, improving operational efficiency, and innovation through coordinated management of resources and skills. These systems have become an important organizational device to respond agilely to contemporary challenges, especially in highly competitive and complex environments. This strategy, or others that will emerge from research and practice, should be carefully studied to identify both the antecedents that create the conditions for this harmonious multiple identification and the effects of these strategies on employees and the behaviors emerging within the organization.

A field of research that has already produced significant results on many of these aspects is the study of Person-Organization fit (PO fit), which investigates the antecedents and effects of the congruence of: (1) Values, (2) Strategic Goals, and (3) Individual and Organizational Norms on the functioning of organizations (Hoffman et al., 2011).

Additionally, the research stream on Human Values (Schwartz et al., 2012; Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987) can contribute to the investigation of SIT applied to organizations, precisely because it is capable of shedding light on values as an expression of the salience level of different corporate groups.

## 4.1 Practical implications

From the perspective of business management implications, research indicates that organizations need to invest in three areas: (1) Improving the level of employee identification with different groups, (2) Investing in the potential salience of identification with the organization as a whole, and (3) Creating a structure of professional figures capable of harmoniously connecting the micro and macro levels. According to research by Richter et al., a key role in promoting this connection within organizations is played by “boundary-spanners,” defined as “those who engage in significant transactions with outgroup members, facilitate intergroup transactions, and manage intergroup conflicts” (Richter et al., 2006, p. 1253). When these connecting figures between groups strongly identify both with their own team and with the organization as a whole, the relationships between groups are more harmonious and productive.

### 4.1.1 Superorganism

The metaphor of the superorganism can effectively illustrate how an organization functions similarly to a complex biological entity. In biology, a superorganism refers to a collective of individuals, such as an ant colony or a bee hive, that functions as a cohesive unit, where each member plays a specific role crucial for the survival and success of the entire community. However, when applied to humans, this metaphor has differences compared to other superorganisms found in nature. As Kesebir states, “What characterizes human beings is thus not membership in one discrete superorganism but a capacity to create and function in superorganismic structures” (Kesebir, 2011). In this context, the organization can be viewed as a system in which various business functions produce specialized outputs, while superordinate functions coordinate and harmonize activities, guiding the overall direction of the “corporate superorganism.” Connecting people within the organization facilitate this coordinated activity, allowing effective synergy between the various parts. According to Kesebir, similar to a superorganism where the wellbeing of the collective depends on the integrated functionality of all its components, in a modern organization emergent goals, values, and norms are the result of the dynamic and coordinated interaction among its members (Kesebir, 2011).



## 4.2 Challenges and opportunities

One of the main challenges identified in this analysis concerns the coordination and harmonization among different groups within organizations, a process defined as “congruence.” Corporate policies should aim to integrate these workgroups, fostering a culture based on shared corporate values and strong corporate social responsibility. In this regard, the study by Wach et al. (2021) provides an interesting example of how congruence between different groups, in this case HR and line managers, can lead to significant improvements in internal efficiency and perceived value of HR functions within the organization. The research emphasizes the importance of a shared vision and long-term goals between line managers and HR managers, promoting a positive impact both in terms of value and organizational effectiveness. This need for harmonization of strategic goals and values appears intuitively generalizable to every corporate function, and further research in this area is recommended. Moreover, this concrete example demonstrates how corporate strategies that promote congruence and integration among different groups can strengthen internal cohesion and improve overall business outcomes, thus supporting an aligned and responsible organizational culture (Wach et al., 2021). On this matter, Richter et al. (2006) highlight in the conclusions of their work the importance of promoting a strong sense of identity both with the specific group and with the organization as a whole to improve relationships and productivity among different groups.

## 4.3 Future directions

A future goal, as stated by Sidorenkov et al., is to offer a holistic view of employee identifications and enrich our understanding of how various identifications influence attitudes and behaviors within organizations (Sidorenkov et al., 2022). Future studies should investigate how specific strategies can facilitate both identification with the immediate workgroup (WID) and with the organization as a whole (OID) in a way that they exhibit congruence at every level. Exploring these aspects will provide new insights into how identification dynamics influence organizational efficiency and effectiveness. The most promising direction today is connected to Multi-Team Systems (MTS) or any other development direction that includes the creation of meta-groups composed of leadership from lower-level groups. In recent work, Zaccaro et al. highlight how, in an MTS context, communication, intergroup conflicts, cooperation, alignment of goals, and the sense of corporate values applied to different teams are more easily harmonizable. These are “emerging affective and motivational states” important for the effectiveness of MTS, including commitment to goals, social identity, cohesion, trust, and psychological safety. “Commitment to goals refers to the shared willingness of the team to direct efforts toward the distal goal of the MTS (DeChurch and Zaccaro, 2010)” (Zaccaro et al., 2020).

It is finally important to emphasize that, in current organizational practice, the organization as a whole is often considered part of further overarching groups, such as the market and the social environment in which the organization

operates. Since the salience of these further groups influences the SI of employees, its application to these additional levels represents a very promising research direction (for example Social Corporate Responsibility).

This research underscores the importance of careful management of identities within organizations. Through a strategic approach that values both the individual and the collective, organizations can thrive by promoting a balanced and dynamic work environment. The implications of these findings are extensive and of critical importance for corporate ethical leadership (Wu, 2021), which is committed to shaping organizations that harmonize their needs with those of the individuals who make up the organization.

The study’s conclusions also highlight the importance of a deep understanding of employee identifications to enhance human resource management policies and organizational practices. Additionally, the results indicate the need to adopt a dynamic approach in examining identifications, considering not only current ones but also the influence of other competing identifications in the context of organizational changes.

## 4.4 Further limitations

An additional set of limitations of this analysis concerns the potential underrepresentation of different disciplines and cultures. Most of the studies included in this systematic review focus on specific business contexts, predominantly in sectors such as manufacturing, healthcare, and technology, thus limiting the applicability of the findings to other professional fields. Moreover, much of the research comes from Western cultural contexts, with limited representation of other cultures, with exceptions such as: Al-Atwi and Bakir (2014), conducted in a single cement manufacturing company in Iraq; Ho and Yeung (2021), which focuses on the conflict between younger and older workers in a sample of employees from Hong Kong, a cultural context heavily influenced by Confucianism; Gleibs and Alvarado (2019), which analyzes the impact of atypical work contracts and the communication climate on organizational and team identification, focusing on a sample of millennials in Chile and the United Kingdom. The choice of these specific countries may have influenced the results and limited their generalizability to other cultures; however, all these findings appear to be consistent with those from other research, thereby providing hints about the cross-cultural universality of the underlying psychological mechanisms. For this reason, to improve scientific accuracy and promote a more comprehensive understanding of identification processes within organizations, future research should include more diverse samples in terms of disciplines and cultures.

## Author contributions

AR: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. AB: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. RP: Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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