



The Moderating Role of Organizational Identification in the Relationship Between Job Demands and Burnout

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Abstract

Scant empirical work has tested the implications of the social identity framework in understanding job burnout. In this study, we examined the moderating role of organisational identification in the relationship between job demands (workload and work-home conflict) and job burnout. We viewed stress from the social identity perspective. Survey data were collected from 272 employees (58 females) mean age 34.99 years ($SD = 9.59$) at a manufacturing company in the Philippines. Data were analysed using hierarchical moderated linear regression. Findings showed that compared to those who scored high on organisational identification, workload impact on job burnout was higher among those scoring as low identifiers. Similarly, the impact of work-home conflict on job burnout of low identifiers was more pronounced compared with high identifiers. This study provides support for one proposition derived from the theory focusing on the moderating role of organizational identification. The results support the viability of a social identity framework in expanding the nomological network of job burnout and highlight the value of integrating a social dimension into an individual-level psychological experience of job burnout. Practical implications of the findings highlight the value of developing social networks and social support for employees in addressing job burnout.

Key words: job burnout, organisational identification, workload, work-home conflict

Introduction

Burnout is a psychological syndrome characterised by feelings of exhaustion, depersonalization, and cynicism related to one's job which results from chronic workplace stress that has not been managed successfully (Maslach et al., 2001; Maslach & Leiter, 2017). Various theories have been used to understand the causes and consequences of job burnout (see Edu-Valsania et al., 2022 for a review of the theories). But as Demerouti et al. (2021) pointed out, one of the most widely used models to understand burnout is Karasek's (1979) Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. In the JD-R model, job resources refer to the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that can facilitate achievement of work goals, reduction of job demands, and stimulation of personal growth, learning, and development. Job demands on the other hand are "physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort on the part of the employee" (Demerouti et al., 2001, p.501). When specific types of job demands become chronic, they lead to depletion of energy and health problems unless sufficient resources are available to mediate their impact (Demerouti et al, 2001).

The demands-burnout relationship can be further understood from a transactional framework of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) which looks at the individual's appraisal of stressors as psychological mediators. In Lazarus and Folkman's model it is the individual's perception of job demands that can be stressful if the individual perceives they do not have sufficient resources with which to cope with the situation. This perspective has been dominant in the scientific literature since the 1980s, yet social psychologists have noted that it treats stress primarily as a personal phenomenon. It lacks the social nature of stress (Frisch et al, 2015). As Haslam (2000) pointed out, stress has significant social dimensions in that stress can be a function of activities that occupational groups have to perform, how groups are treated, the group structure itself, and group norms. From a social identity perspective, the social nature of stress is considered and the role of group membership and a sense of belongingness are crucial to the psychological experience of environmental stressors.

Social Identity and Burnout

The social identity perspective is rooted in two related theories –social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorization theory (SCT). The SIT essentially argues that people have multiple social identities as a result of their perceived membership in a social group (Turner, 1982). As a consequence, people categorize and define themselves as part of an in-group and are motivated to achieve positive self-esteem by positively differentiating their in-group from a comparison out-group.

The salience of a particular social identity in any given time and context is crucial in this process. The self-categorization theory expounds on this cognitive mechanism of social identity salience. According to SCT, people have at least three levels of self-categorization: the superordinate *human* level as a human being in contrast to other species, the intermediate *social* level as an in-group member (as distinct from out groups), and the subordinate *personal* level as a unique individual. As one level of self-categorization becomes more salient, then self-categorization at other levels becomes less salient (Turner, 1989). Motivations and behaviours at the individual and group level are accordingly influenced depending on the salient self-categorization in a particular context.

Implications of self-categorization and social identity theories in the context of various workplace outcomes including stress have been extensively articulated (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Haslam, 2000). Since burnout is a consequence of chronic stress, it can be premised that self-categorization and social identity implications will also contribute to understanding the experience of burnout in the context of work.

One form of social identification is organizational identification which is defined as the perception of oneness with or belongingness to a group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Identification to organizations or anything else, is “an active process by which individuals link themselves to elements in a social scene” and identifications help people make sense of their world and thoughts and help them make decisions (Cheney, 1983). The process enables an individual to recognize both in and out-outgroups. Social identification then leads to greater homogeneity among the perceived in-group which can strengthen social relationships and motivate individuals to be positively biased toward the group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In the context of the workplace, organizational identification will expectedly motivate employees to support organizational goals and perform behaviours that benefit the organization.

Various studies have linked the construct with workplace outcomes such as motivation and job performance (Van Knippenberg, 2000), organizational citizenship behaviours, job satisfaction (Riketta, 2005), and turnover intentions (Van Dick et al, 2004). But empirical work on the role of organizational identification to understand stress and more specifically job burnout has not been widely explored. It is in this context that this study examines the role of organizational identification in terms of the relationship between job demands (workload and work-home conflict) on burnout. More specifically, we hypothesized that organizational identification would moderate the impact of workload and work-home conflict on burnout among factory workers.

Job Demands and Burnout

A wide range of job demands predicts burnout. Leiter and Maslach’s (1999) framework neatly integrates the workplace stressors that predict burnout as a function of the misfit between the person and the work environment. Their framework identifies the following job stressors and associated areas: workload, control, reward, community (positive connection with others), fairness, and values. The consequent job demands from these stressors could either be quantitative (e.g., workload or work pressure), emotional (e.g., workplace conflict), or mental (e.g., mental load) (Peeters, et al., 2005). The present study focuses on the most pervasive job demand that many employees complain about that is workload and the impact this may have on work-home conflict.

Workload is the quantitative and qualitative amount of work that an individual has (Jex, 1998). It is a major component of work demands in the context of the Job Demands-Resources model. It becomes a stressor when there is role overload or having more work than can be accomplished comfortably, a time pressure to deliver, or when the work is too difficult (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Work overload is a major source of exhaustion which is the root of burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2005).

However, it is not just job demands that can lead to burnout. Home demands which could lead to work-home conflict can also be a source of chronic stress. Work-home conflict is a form of inter-role conflict that results from incompatible role pressures from the work and family domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). There is empirical support for a positive correlation between home demands and job burnout (Lee & Eissenstat, 2018; Netemeyer et al., 1996).

Organizational Identification as a Moderator

Organizational identification could potentially affect people’s appraisal of stressors. Principles from the social identity framework imply that for employees who are high in organizational identification, primary appraisal (perceiving a stressor as a threat) of organization stressors is affected in a positive way (Haslam & van Dick, 2011). Their perception of oneness with the organization will motivate them to positively view stressors as

essential for the benefit of the company. On the contrary, employees with low organizational identification will tend to perceive organizational stressors as more threatening. Thus, organizational identification is expected to have a buffering effect on the relationship between job demands and burnout.

Studies have shown that low organizational identification is associated with reduced levels of perceived social support (Haslam et al., 2005) and increased stress and burnout (Haslam & Reicher, 2006; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005). In a study of call-centre workers findings showed that organizational identification was negatively correlated with perceived stressfulness of the work environment (Wegge, et al., 2006). Similarly, teachers in Germany with low organizational identification tended to report more physical symptoms of stress (van Dick & Wagner, 2002).

Organizational identification can also affect secondary appraisal (perception of ability to cope). This is because shared social identity is a basis for help and support and thus potentially buffers the impact of stressors. Evidence supporting these hypotheses was found in studies of work-related stress among minority ethnic groups (James, 1997) and studies of responses to discrimination and prejudice toward Black Americans (Branscombe, et al., 1999; Levine, et al., 2005). It is in this context that organizational identification was proposed in this study as a moderator in the job demands-burnout link.

In this study, the role of organizational identification was examined in terms of the relationship between job demands (workload and work-home conflict) on burnout. It was hypothesized that organizational identification will moderate the impact of workload and work-home conflict on burnout among factory workers. Given the arguments presented, it was hypothesised that workload and work-home conflict were positively related to job burnout. It was further hypothesised that organisational identification moderated the impact of workload on job burnout. Finally, it was hypothesised that organisational identification moderated the impact of work-home conflict on job burnout.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Survey data were collected from a total of 272 employees in a manufacturing company in the Philippines. The majority were males (79%) and married (69%). The mean age of the participants was 34.99 years ($SD = 9.59$). Seventy one percent held line-level positions, 19% were supervisors, and the rest were managers/senior executives (10%).

Measures

Demographic Data. Participants were asked to indicate their age gender, marital status, position in and years of service at the company.

Workload. Workload was measured using two items adapted from Karasek's (1985) job content instrument: *I often have too much work for one person to do* and *It often occurs to me that I have to work extra hard to finish my work*. Items were rated on a 6-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. In the current study, the internal consistency of this scale was good (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

Work-home conflict was measured using 2 items from the Survey Work-home Interaction - NijmeGen, the SWING (Geurts et al., 2005): *I often find it difficult to fulfil my obligations at home because I am constantly thinking about work*. and *I maintain a good balance between work and other aspects of my life*. Items were rated on a 6-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. In the current study, the internal consistency of the items was good (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$).

Burnout. To measure burnout, items were adopted from the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Kristensen et al., 2005). Five items each from the personal burnout and work-related burnout subscales were used (e.g., *Do you feel worn out at the end of the working day?*). Items were rated on a 5-point scale from 1 = never to 5 = most of the time. In the current study, the internal consistency was excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$).

Organizational Identification was measured using 3 items from Smidts, et al.'s (2001) scale that captures perceived oneness with an organization (e.g., *I experience a strong sense of belonging to my organization*). Items were rated on a 6-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. In the current study, the internal consistency was excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$).

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected from staff at a manufacturing company that agreed for its staff to participate in the survey. The survey was administered as part of the company's annual employee engagement and satisfaction survey. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed during allotted sessions for each shift of employees. Respondents were fully informed on the nature and objectives of the survey. They were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and their option to withdraw at any point during the administration of the survey. No identifying information was requested.

Data Analysis Procedure

Hierarchical moderated regression analysis was conducted. A separate analysis was conducted to test for the interaction of organisational identification with each of the demand variables (workload and work-home conflict) in predicting burnout. Tenure, sex, age, marital status, and number of children were entered as control variables on Step 1 of the HMRA. The main variables - workload, work-home conflict, and organisational identification were entered on Step 2 of the analyses. Finally, the interaction terms were individually included at Step 3 of the analyses. Significant interactions were probed using the simple effects approach. Interactions were plotted using 1 standard deviation unit below and above the mean of the predictor and moderator values.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations among the measured variables are presented in Table 1. The correlations between burnout and all other variables were statistically significant and in the expected directions. There was no multicollinearity or singularity in the data.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	α
1 Burnout	2.81	1.03					.95
2 Organisational Identification	5.02	0.79	-.26**				.96
3 Workload	4.40	0.97	.31**	.161**			.84
4 Work-Home Conflict	3.88	1.17	.57**	-.06	.55**		.87

** $p < .01$, $N = 272$

Two separate hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses. The first analysis included the interaction of workload and organisational identification, and the second analysis included the interaction of work-home conflict and organisational identification.

On Step 1, tenure, gender, age, and marital status were entered as control variables. At Step 2, the main variables (workload, work-home conflict, and organizational identification) were entered as predictors. The respective interaction terms were entered at Step3.

The results of the hierarchical regression analyses are summarised in Tables 2 and 3. In both models the control variables (tenure, age, gender, and marital status) together explained 4.4% of the variance. On Step 2, R^2 change was 39.5% ($p < .001$) with workload and work-home conflict both significant positive predictors of burnout. Organisational identification was not significant.

Table 2

Results of Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analysis: Interaction of Workload and Organisational Identification

Predictor	Estimate (b)	SE	t	p	R ²	ΔR ²
Intercept	.621	0.953	0.651	0.516		
Step 1: Control Variables					.044*	
Tenure	-0.119	0.010	-1.389	0.166		
Age	-0.026	0.009	-0.313	0.755		
Gender ^a	-0.11	0.131	-0.859	0.391		
Marital Status ^b	0.045	0.14	0.33	0.741		
Step 2: Main Variables					.404***	.359***
Workload	0.069	0.223	2.692	0.008		
Work-Home Conflict	0.484	0.051	8.305	<.001		
Organizational Identification	-0.275	0.193	0.557	0.578		
Step 3: Interaction Variable					.416***	.013*
Workload * Organizational Identification	-0.079	0.044	-2.378	0.018		

Note: * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$ ^a 0=male, 1=female. ^b 0=married, 1=single

In Model 1 (Table 2), the interaction between organizational identification and workload was a significant predictor of job burnout over and above the effects of the control variables and the main variables with R^2 change was 1.3% ($p < .05$). Overall, the variables in the model explained 41.6% of the variance in burnout. The form of the interaction effect was illustrated using a simple slopes interaction plot shown in Figure 1.

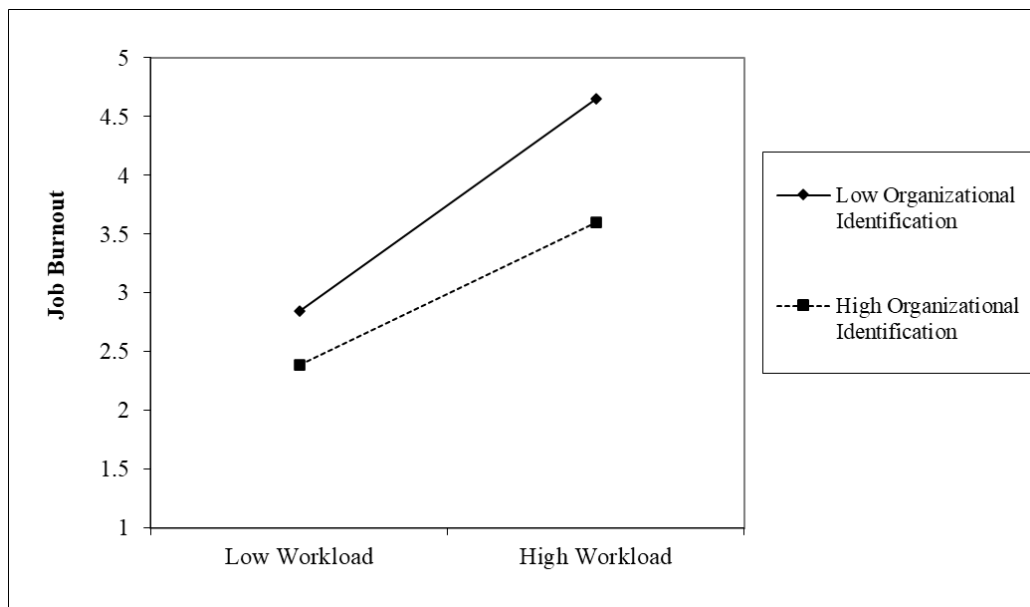
In Model 2 (Table 3), the interaction between organizational identification and work-home conflict was a significant predictor of job burnout over and above the effects of the control variables and the main variables where R^2 change was 1.1% ($p < .05$). Overall, the variables in the model explained 41.5% of the variance in burnout. The form of the interaction effect was illustrated using a simple slopes interaction plot shown in Figure 2.

Table 3

Results of Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analysis: Interaction of Work-Home Conflict and Organisational Identification

Predictor	Effect (b)	SE	t	p	R ²	ΔR ²
Intercept	0.977	0.87	1.123	0.263		
Step 1: Control Variables					.044*	
Tenure	-0.108	0.01	1.246	0.214		
Age	-0.031	0.009	0.364	0.716		
Gender ^a	-0.099	0.131	0.777	0.438		
Marital Status ^b	0.045	0.14	0.328	0.743		
Step 2: Main Variables					.404***	.359***
Workload	0.075	0.062	1.284	0.2		
Work-Home Conflict	0.483	0.218	4.111	<.001		
Organizational Identification	-0.262	0.172	0.151	0.88		
Step 3: Interaction Variable					.415***	.011*
Work-home Conflict * Organizational Identification	-0.085	0.043	2.203	0.028		

Note: * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$ ^a 0=male, 1=female. ^b 0=married, 1=single

**Figure 1**

Organizational identification moderates the relationship between workload and job burnout.

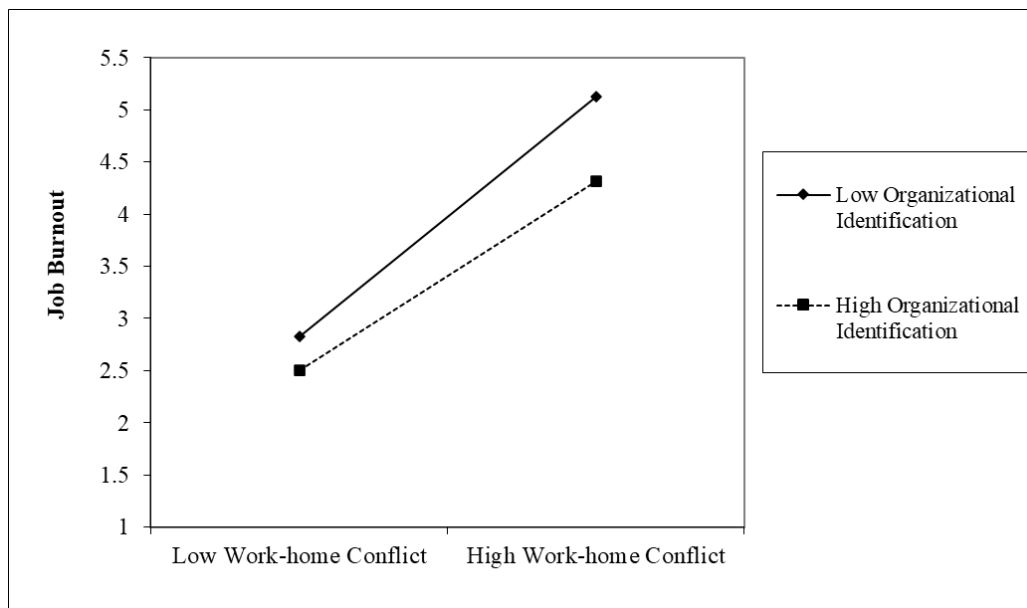


Figure 2
Organizational identification moderates the relationship between work-home conflict and job burnout.

Discussion

In this study we used hierarchical multiple regressions to examine separately the moderating role of organizational identification and home-work conflict and of organisational identification and workload on burnout after controlling for demographic variables, and the entry of demands (workload and work-home conflict) on job burnout.

The findings indicate that none of the demographic variables of age, gender, marital status, and tenure at the organisation were significant although together they accounted for 4.4% of the variance in burnout. Both workload and work-home conflict positively predicted job burnout, although organizational identification did not directly predict job burnout. The variance explained after these variables were entered on Step 2 was 40.4%.

In Model 1, the interaction of organisational identification with workload while significant, explained only a further 1.1% of the variance with those scoring higher on organisational identification reporting less burnout than those who scored low irrespective of their workload. That is, the slope shows that those lower on identification were higher overall on burnout than those high on organisational identification.

Similarly, in Model 2, the interaction between organizational identification and work-home conflict predicted job burnout by adding 1.3% to the variance explained. More specifically, the findings show that compared to high identifiers, the impact of work-home conflict on job burnout was higher among low identifiers. The slope representing the rate of increase in the level of job burnout was higher and steeper for those who scored low on organizational identification compared to those who scored high on organisational identification.

Theoretical Contributions

The findings from this study add validity to a social identity framework in expanding the nomological network on job burnout. The study highlighted the value of integrating the social dimension into an individual-level psychological experience of job burnout. In particular, organisational identification - a key construct in the social identity framework was

the focal variable of interest. As noted earlier, the social identity framework for understanding stress and burnout, in particular, is not the dominant approach in the scientific literature. To date, there has been limited empirical work testing the implications of the social identity theory in this domain. Thus, this study adds to the limited empirical work in this area.

Practical Implications

Although the variance explained by the interactions in the Models was statistically significant, the effect sizes were not large. Despite this, the current findings suggest that social identities can potentially serve to buffer chronic and unavoidable stressors from the workplace. Maintaining and developing social networks relevant in the workplace has therefore substantive contributions to employee health and well-being. This can be operationalised by providing opportunities for employees to become part of groups or social networks such as sports clubs and hobby groups within the organization. Investment in programs and activities that foster teamwork and group cohesion can be encouraged.

The value of social support is also implied in the findings of this study. Social support could come from co-employees and supervisors/managers. Supervisory support in particular can be deliberately incorporated into the organisational climate. This can be achieved by providing supervisors with the awareness of the value of employees perceiving support from them. Supervisory skills training and development and performance management systems should incorporate this aspect.

Directions for Future Research and Limitations

The current study was limited to only two forms of job demands. Future studies could include other forms of job and home demands and resources as well. For example, job demands such as workplace conflict, emotional demands, and lack of control can be considered. Job resources such as social support, rewards and recognition, voice, and trust can also be considered. In the context of home demands, various forms of work-home interactions or interphase can be investigated. By integrating both demands and resources, the role of organisational identification can also be tested in the context of a full model of the JD-R which also links burnout with work engagement.

Another important aspect for future research is the incorporation of social support which is another key construct in the social identity framework. Social support is premised to be a significant mechanism that potentially links the stress-strain relationship. Likely, organisational identification is strongly linked with social support. Thus, incorporating social support in the overall model would provide a fuller picture by which the social identity framework operates.

It is also acknowledged that an important limitation of the study is the use of purely self-report measures which potentially resulted in a common method bias. The cross-sectional survey design also limits generalisations in terms of causality. Thus, future studies should consider the use of alternative non-self-report measures and longitudinal designs.

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