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Identity Predicament and Identity Defense: The Developmental Process of Dispatched Workers' Organizational Identity

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Abstract

Purpose: To explore how dispatched employees resolve identity issues during the development process of dual organizational identity (complementarity and dynamism). **Method:** Through a two-stage interview design, in-depth interview and questionnaire data were collected from 34 dispatched employees across different industries, and combined with the first author's internship observation materials, three authors conducted open, axial, and selective hierarchical coding analysis. **Results:** The study found that the "match-mismatch" in the comparison between expectations and experiences of dual organizational identity is the main cause of dual organizational identity awkwardness (identity issues), which dispatched employees address through four identity defense strategies. **Limitations:** It neglected the influence of individual characteristics or organizational context on identity awkwardness and identity defense strategies, and provided insufficient exploration of the dynamism of dispatched employees' dual organizational identity. **Conclusion:** It constructed a dynamic development model of dual organizational identity for dispatched employees, enriching identity theory and organizational socialization theory.

Full Text

Preamble

Identity Embarrassment and Identity Defense: The Development of Organizational Identity of Dispatched Employees

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Abstract:

[Objective] This paper explores how dispatched employees manage identity problems in the development process of dual organizational identity (characterized by complementarity and dynamism).

[Methods] Through a two-stage interview design, we collected in-depth interview and questionnaire data from 34 dispatched employees across different industries, supplemented by the first author's internship observations. Three authors conducted open, axial, and selective coding analysis.

[Results] The study reveals that “match-mismatch” in the comparison between dual organizational identity expectations and experiences is the primary cause of dual organizational identity embarrassment (identity problems), and dispatched employees adopt four identity defense strategies to cope.

[Limitations] The study overlooks the influence of individual characteristics or organizational contexts on identity embarrassment and defense strategies, and provides insufficient exploration of the dynamic nature of dispatched employees' dual organizational identity.

[Conclusions] We construct a dynamic development model of dual organizational identity for dispatched employees, enriching identity theory and organizational socialization theory.

Keywords: dispatched employees; dual organizational identity; identity embarrassment; identity defense; identity synergy

Classification Code: C93

“Where do I really belong?” This question frequently troubles dispatched employees who simultaneously maintain relationships with two organizations. The issue of identity belonging among dispatched workers has sparked widespread and intense public debate. From being labeled as “stepchildren” or “second-class citizens” at the host organization, to being called “slaves” or “money-making tools” at the dispatching agency, to society's perception of them as “lower-class laborers,” these discriminatory and stigmatizing labels constantly accompany dispatched employees in their work and life, exacerbating their confusion about identity 归属. In reality, while collective strikes and protest marches triggered by identity issues among dispatched employees emerge incessantly, threatening social stability, there are also numerous examples of career development and personal growth achieved through labor dispatch [1][2]. Why do such divergent outcomes occur? How do dispatched employees, often troubled by identity issues, handle this problem?

Theoretically, concepts related to dispatched employees' identity or identity belonging are organizational identity or organizational identification. According to social identity theory and self-categorization theory, organizational identity is a type of individual's social identity [3], derived from their knowledge or beliefs as organizational members [4][5]. This knowledge or belief can be the emotional and value significance of belonging to an organization [5], or characteristics

concerning organizational centrality, distinctiveness, and endurance; it can be subjectively constructed or objectively existent [4][6]. Organizational identification refers to the extent to which individuals define themselves through the organization, reflecting a sense of oneness with the organization, a perception of belonging, and consequent emotional and behavioral manifestations [4][7]. In a single-organization context, employees' cognition or attitudes toward organizational identity are often represented by organizational identification, indicating the degree to which employees define themselves using organizational identity [4]. Higher organizational identification means employees' beliefs about the organization are more integrated into their self-concept, making them more likely to exhibit behaviors consistent with organizational membership [5][8].

However, for dispatched employees, from the moment they sign contracts with dispatching agencies and are assigned to host organizations, they possess two organizational identities: the dispatching agency's organizational identity and the host organization's organizational identity. Therefore, dispatched employees' dual organizational identities appear in pairs, characterized by "duality." This feature is the most fundamental characteristic of dispatched employees' organizational identity, distinguishing them both from directly employed staff at host organizations and from internal employees at dispatching agencies. More importantly, dispatched employees' dual organizational identities have a complementary relationship—the two identities exist independently yet interdependently, jointly constituting the complete organizational identity of dispatched employees.

Furthermore, dispatched employees' organizational identities exhibit "dynamic" characteristics that change with dispatch assignments. This special employment scenario of labor dispatch has attracted widespread academic attention, with numerous studies exploring dispatched employees' cognition (e.g., fairness perception, identity perception) [9][10], emotions (e.g., job burnout) [11], and behaviors (e.g., turnover, voice) [12][13] at host organizations. Few studies have examined dispatched employees' perceptions of dispatching agencies [14] or the interactive influences between host and dispatching organizations [15]. While existing research provides different perspectives for exploring dispatched employees' identity 归属 issues, it lacks analysis of the essential cause—the "complementarity" and "dynamism" of dispatched employees' dual organizational identity—leading to limited understanding of how dispatched employees manage dual organizational identities with these characteristics. In literature on individual-level dual identity management or identity work, scholars have explored how individuals manage two identities with independent, overlapping, or nested relationships (see Table 1) [16][17], but no theory has examined management strategies for identities with complementary structures. Based on this, this study adopts qualitative research methods grounded in grounded theory to explore the development process of employees' dual organizational identity and identity problem management strategies in the labor dispatch context.

1.1 Current State of Labor Dispatch Research

Labor dispatch is an unconventional employment method composed of “three parties” and “two contracts” [18][19] (see Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). The three parties refer to: the labor dispatch agency, the host organization, and the dispatched employee. The two contracts refer to: the labor contract signed between the dispatch agency and the dispatched employee, and the labor dispatch agreement signed between the dispatch agency and the host organization.

Figure 1 Schematic Diagram of Labor Dispatch

Source: Adapted from references [19][20]

Dispatched employees’ daily work activities primarily occur at host organizations, which has led most domestic and international scholars to focus on dispatched employees’ attitudes and behaviors at host organizations, with few studies simultaneously considering factors related to both host and dispatching organizations [2][9][10][15]. Literature based on identity/social identity theory mainly explores antecedents of host organization identification (e.g., organizational prestige, perceived organizational support), with some examining outcomes (e.g., turnover intention) [21][22]. Other studies have found that differences in identity and status between permanent and dispatched workers at host organizations significantly affect dispatched employees’ work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, job insecurity) [23] and behaviors (e.g., workplace deviance) [24]. Although a few scholars have noted the dual identity characteristic of dispatched employees [22], they have only 停留在 the level of “simultaneously possessing two organizational identities” without further analyzing the special meaning behind this duality. Yet in-depth analysis of dual organizational identity is precisely the basic prerequisite for understanding dispatched employees’ identity confusion and answering how they resolve it.

1.2 The Special Nature of Dispatched Employees’ Dual Organizational Identity: Complementarity and Dynamism

The structure of dispatched employees’ dual organizational identity is complementary, whereas previous literature on dual identities has primarily discussed independent, overlapping, and nested structures [25][26] (see Table 1). Independence means that in specific contexts, only one identity is activated [27]. There are also situations where both identities are activated simultaneously, presenting overlapping or nested relationships. Overlap refers to two identities having intersecting parts in meaning, value, or goals [25][28]. Nesting means lower-level identity A (e.g., team identity) is nested within higher-level identity B (e.g., organizational identity) [26]. Additionally, based on different analytical levels, identities can be categorized as personal identity, relational identity, and collective (social) identity [17]. Personal identity is primarily based on individual unique attributes or qualities; relational identity is mainly based on role relationships; collective identity refers to self-definition based on collective or

social categories, such as dispatched employees' organizational identity in this study context.

Table 1 Literature Review on Dual Identity Studies

Source: Compiled by authors based on literature [25][28]

Unlike previous dual identity structural relationships, dispatched employees' dual organizational identity has complementarity (see Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]). First, the two organizational identities answer "Who am I?" at work from different perspectives. The dispatching agency is their legal employer, the actual employer; the dispatching agency's organizational identity indicates "I am an employee of the dispatching agency." The host organization is where their daily work occurs; the host organization's organizational identity shows what they do, indicating "I provide labor at the host organization." The two organizational identities exist independently and jointly constitute the complete organizational identity of dispatched employees, ensuring the integrity of their identity as dispatched employees. Lacking either organizational identity means one is not a dispatched employee. Second, dual organizational identity has mutually supplementary and dependent characteristics. Dispatched employees' interaction with dispatching agencies mainly involves auxiliary activities that provide work security; the dispatching agency's organizational identity should be related to knowledge or beliefs about survival security and stability. Dispatched employees' interaction with host organizations concerns main work activities affecting career development; the host organization's organizational identity is related to knowledge or beliefs about self-worth and self-growth. Only when the two organizational identities complement each other and play their respective roles can dispatched employees' work proceed smoothly, generating synergistic effects and promoting long-term development. The author argues that the complementary structure embedded in dispatched employees' dual organizational identity is the most unique feature, distinguishing it from other dual identity structures. However, existing labor dispatch research has overlooked this point.

Figure 2 Dispatched Employees' Dual Organizational Identity: Complementary Relationship

Note: Two semicircles form a complete circle, representing the integrity of dispatched employees' organizational identity.

Moreover, dispatched employees' organizational identity has obvious dynamic characteristics. Typically, dispatch agencies assign dispatched employees to host organizations based on the host's requirements and the employees' capabilities and expectations. After completing dispatch assignments, dispatched employees return to the dispatch agency to prepare for the next assignment. Therefore, for dispatched employees, workplaces or locations change. Furthermore, due to significant differences in labor demands across host organizations, compensation, job content, and dispatch duration related to dispatch assignments vary, causing dispatched employees to establish and develop new dual organizational identities when entering each dispatch assignment.

When dual organizational identity with complementarity and dynamism triggers identity confusion, how do dispatched employees respond? We reviewed literature on individual dual identity management and found most focus on management strategies for personal identity (based on individual values, gender, etc.) [17] and social identity (based on work teams, organizations, professions, etc.) with overlapping structures. For example, Piening et al. [32] noted that when organizational identity conflicts with personal identity (e.g., values), some employees adopt social distancing strategies to separate themselves from the organization. Many studies discuss management strategies for collective identity with overlapping structures. For instance, Lee et al. [33] found that when host country managers in multinational corporations perceive subsidiary organizational identity threatening national identity, they reduce identity integration, showing low subsidiary organizational identification and high national identification.

Some research involves management strategies for two identities with independent relationships, particularly extensively discussed in work-family identity conflict or spillover [34][35]. Regarding nested relational identity literature, lower-level identities share higher-level identities' goals, values, beliefs, etc., with higher-level identities exerting certain constraints on lower-level identities [6]. For example, in global multinational corporations, subsidiary managers' organizational identity is nested within headquarters' organizational identity, with subsidiary and headquarters organizational identities containing similar perspectives, business practices, and norms [26]. Compared to the other two dual identity structures, nested structure dual identities have fewer identity problems [3][5][26], with limited literature specifically exploring their identity management strategies.

Overall, no research has theoretically explored or empirically tested dual identities with complementary structures. Whether existing dual identity management strategies apply to dispatched employees' dual organizational identity management warrants further consideration. The complementary structure of dispatched employees' dual organizational identity means the two organizational identities are both independent and mutually supplementary. Independence means dispatching and host organizational identities play different roles and functions; maintaining certain independence is a prerequisite for them to exert their specific effects, making integration or fusion strategies unsuitable [3]. Meanwhile, mutual supplementation means dispatching and host organizational identities only function when both are indispensable; needs related to dispatching agency identity differ from those related to host organization identity, and the two organizational identities cannot substitute for or compensate each other [35][36], making segmentation or separation strategies inappropriate.

2 Research Design and Methods

This study aims to explore how dispatched employees' dual organizational identity (complementarity and dynamism) develops and how identity problems

emerging in this process are managed. Previous research on dispatched employees has mostly focused on host organization identity, neglecting the special nature of dispatched employees' dual organizational identity. Moreover, few studies have emphasized dispatched employees' cognitive or psychological processes regarding self-belonging issues; no research has depicted the development process of dual organizational identity, preventing us from capturing the full picture of dispatched employees' organizational identity and making it difficult to accurately grasp the essence of their identity 归属 problems. In multiple identity or identity work research, no theory has elaborated how two identities with complementarity and dynamism develop and influence each other, making it difficult to infer dispatched employees' identity management strategies from previous theoretical research. Grounded theory methodology emphasizes that research questions emerge from real contexts and is particularly suitable for inducing theory from qualitative data when theory is lacking [37][38], thereby providing a basis for answering practical questions. Therefore, this study primarily adopts grounded theory principles for data collection and analysis.

2.1 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through three methods: interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Interviews and questionnaires were completed simultaneously. Observations primarily came from the first author's internship experience.

(1) Interviews and Questionnaires

This study used theoretical sampling to conduct in-depth interviews with 34 dispatched employees. Among them, 27 were conducted via one-on-one Tencent Video conferences, and 7 were face-to-face interviews. After each interview, researchers conducted preliminary analysis of the interview text, using concepts or issues obtained from the analysis to determine characteristics of additional interviewees. Throughout the interview process, we successively identified that host organization type, education level and age, job skill level, and marital status might affect dual organizational identity development, thus incorporating them into sampling criteria.

Interviews focused on three themes: "What is dispatched employees' dual organizational identity?" (e.g., "If someone asks you which company's employee you are, how would you express it? Why?"), "How does dual organizational identity develop? Are there changes?" (e.g., "How did your identification with the dispatching agency emerge? Can you elaborate?"), and "The interactive relationship between dual organizational identities?" (e.g., "Does your view of the dispatching agency affect your view of the host organization?"). Specific interview questions were adjusted based on respondents' answers. The average interview duration was 50 minutes per respondent. Data collection and analysis were interwoven throughout the research process. After each interview, respondents completed online questionnaires covering basic information, career

planning, dispatching agency organizational identification, host organization organizational identification, and professional identification. Identification measures referenced Vough's [39] scale (see Appendix 1). Researchers transcribed interview recordings within 24 hours and wrote interview logs for preliminary analysis.

Table 2 Basic Information of Interviewees

ID	Gender	Age	Income (RMB)	(AID, CID)
XZ-01	Female	26-29	3000-5000	(Low, Low)
SB-02	Male	20-25	3000-5000	(High, Low)
GC-03	Male	26-29	5000-10000	(High, High)
...
QT-30	Female	30-35	5000-10000	(Low, Low)
CP-34	Female	20-25	3000-5000	(Low, Low)

Note: Due to space limitations, only partial information is shown. Letters in IDs represent job types, numbers represent sequence. XZ=Administrative Management, CX=Programmer, SB=Equipment Operator, CP=Product Inspector, GC=Engineering Project Manager, QT=Other. AID indicates dispatching agency organizational identification; CID indicates host organization organizational identification. "Low" represents low identification (scores below mean), "High" represents high identification (scores above mean).

Average monthly income was obtained during follow-up in the first revision.

(1) First-Stage Interview Design

The first stage included 9 interviewees. The first three were introduced through the first author's friends, and the other six were introduced by the first three respondents. Average dispatch duration was 10.6 months. Industries included pharmaceuticals, construction engineering, and manufacturing. Interview questions focused on the first two themes, with interviewers adding follow-up questions based on respondents' answers to explore specific views and feelings.

In analyzing these 9 respondents' data, we found that when discussing attitudes toward dispatching or host organizations, especially confusion arising from dual organizational identity, respondents often connected or compared the two organizations. We hypothesized that dispatched employees' dual organizational identity likely involves some interaction that determines their views on organizational identity. Therefore, in subsequent interviews, we added a third theme—"interactive relationship between dual organizational identities."

(2) Second-Stage Interview Design

The second stage included 25 dispatched employees. Among them, 18 were online video interviews: 14 recruited online and 4 recommended by first-stage

respondents. Considering that interview format might affect results, we selected 7 respondents for offline interviews based on sampling criteria. Average dispatch duration was 10.5 months. Newly added positions were primarily internet company programmers and public institution clerical staff. Interview questions covered all three themes, following the same process as the first stage.

Additionally, we conducted follow-up online interviews with 6 first-stage respondents, focusing on interactions and influences between dual organizational identities. We also interviewed 1 dispatching agency marketing specialist and 2 host organization HR managers to understand dispatched employees' daily management and career development.

(2) Observations

The research team established a partnership with X Company, a national HR firm specializing in labor dispatch and outsourcing. The first author interned at X Company for 2 months, during which they learned about and participated in the management of dispatched employees, accumulating over 110,000 words of observation logs.

2.2 Data Analysis

Using NVivo12plus qualitative analysis software, we analyzed nearly 400,000 words of interview data from dispatched employees following Corbin and Strauss's [37] three-stage coding procedure: open, axial, and selective coding. Three authors participated in the analysis.

Before formal coding, the first author introduced the research topic, relevant concepts from existing literature (e.g., organizational identity), and basic interview data information to the other two authors, and conducted pilot coding using case XZ-01.

(1) Open Coding

Centered on the research topic, we decomposed interview texts by “posting labels” and further merged similar “labels” into first-order concepts. Throughout this process, the three authors respected data objectivity while maintaining openness, using words or phrases that reflected respondents' views for coding. Initially, the three coders labeled any content that seemed to reveal the connotation, change, adjustment, and interaction of dispatched employees' organizational identity. After independently completing coding for four interview texts, they held group meetings to compare coding results. Through in-depth discussion, they merged labels with similar meanings and unified coding terminology; for labels with different meanings, the three authors returned to interview texts for careful comparison and adjustment. After describing each respondent's dual organizational identity development with labels, we found that dispatched employees' understanding of dual organizational identity could be distinguished by stages. This stage distinction helped further explore the development process

of dispatched employees' dual organizational identity. Subsequently, the three authors followed the same procedure to label remaining samples.

After completing coding analysis for the 8th respondent, we found 212 labels related to the theme had emerged, and some labels with different meanings could be further categorized to form first-order concepts. Therefore, through multiple group discussions, we abstracted and merged current labels into initial concepts. In subsequent coding, labeling and primary concept formation proceeded alternately, using current labels to describe dispatched employees' dual organizational identity development process. Finally, 37 first-order concepts were generated.

(2) Axial Coding

Axial coding aimed to find logical relationships between first-order concepts, further clustering and abstracting them into second-order concepts related to the research theme. Throughout this process, we referenced relevant literature to precisely describe and express some second-order concepts. For example, “asymmetric emotional practice,” “asymmetric cognitive practice,” and “asymmetric behavioral practice” of identity referenced identity enactment theory [16]. Moreover, in coding, we distinguished between dispatching and host organizational identity practices. Most second-order concepts were generated closely around the research theme, faithful to the logic presented in interview texts and coding. Axial coding produced 16 second-order concepts, including “family-supporting and stability-seeking needs,” “growth-curve needs,” “identity creation,” and “identity rumination.”

(3) Selective Coding

Selective coding primarily involved selecting core concepts and preliminarily constructing theory through systematic analysis linking core concepts. The authors first analyzed and discussed relationships among the 16 second-order concepts obtained from axial coding, further abstracting 6 core concepts: dual organizational identity expectations, dual organizational identity experiences, dual organizational identity embarrassment, dual organizational identity synergy, dual organizational identity defense, and dual organizational identity outcomes. Subsequently, combined with the labor dispatch timeline, the 6 concepts were divided into three intervals: pre-dispatch stage, dispatch stage, and organizational identity outcomes. Next, the authors repeatedly analyzed and discussed the essence and internal logic of the 6 core concepts, linking them by drawing core concept relationship diagrams to preliminarily construct theory. Finally, during formal theory refinement, the authors re-read interview texts, interview logs, data analysis logs, memos, and other materials. Based on this, they repeatedly compared 34 respondents' dual organizational identity development processes, and after multiple discussions integrating existing concepts, finally formed the “Dynamic Development Model of Dispatched Employees' Dual Organizational Identity” (see Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]).

Overall, the entire coding process involved repeated cycles from text to coding

and back to text; the three-stage coding was not completely separate [37]. After completing coding for the 30th respondent, we found that the structure and main concepts presented in data coding were relatively clear and stable. When coding the remaining 4 interview texts, new data did not change the original coding structure, and interview content from various respondents began to show large amounts of similar information, with no new information emerging under this study's theme, reaching theoretical saturation. Therefore, we stopped adding interviewees.

To ensure research reliability and validity, this study adopted two strategies. First, during coding and theoretical model formation, we integrated questionnaire results, interview data from 1 dispatching agency marketing specialist and 2 host organization HR managers, and observation logs from the first author's internship at X Company. Through multiple data sources, we explored dispatched employees' dual organizational identity development process from multiple angles more comprehensively, and could form "triangulation" among different data types to perfect evidence chains and enhance research reliability. Second, after theoretical model formation, we randomly fed the model back to some respondents, receiving their recognition.

3.1 Dual Organizational Identity Expectations: Family-Supporting and Stability-Seeking, Growth-Curve, and Surface-Level Identification

Dual organizational identity expectations include a belief held by individuals, which is the values, goals, and behaviors shared by dispatched employees as organizational members. Since dispatched employees simultaneously establish connections with two organizations, their organizational identity expectations often appear in pairs: dispatching agency organizational identity expectations and host organization organizational identity expectations.

In content, dispatching agency organizational identity expectations are usually related to wages, family support, and life stability, implicitly containing family-supporting and stability-seeking needs. This study identified three main types of family-supporting and stability-seeking needs: meeting basic family expenses, meeting family role requirements, and temporarily alleviating personal survival pressure. Expectations related to these three needs often focus on non-loss, stability, and security, such as "no arbitrary wage deductions" and "timely wage payment." Host organization identity is primarily related to employees' self-worth enhancement or self-growth. Notably, when most respondents discussed "choosing employment through labor dispatch," they often showed helplessness in facing reality. For example, some dispatched employees pointed out that labor dispatch was their only way to enter host organizations given their capital (low education or insufficient capability) at the time; the belief that "as long as I work hard and seriously, I can get development opportunities" makes dispatched employees temporarily tolerate the difference between this employment

relationship and regular employment.

Therefore, we conceptualize dispatched employees' self-growth needs as "growth-curve needs." Family-supporting and stability-seeking needs contain dispatched employees' expectations for future survival stability. Particularly for married dispatched employees with children, their family-supporting and stability-seeking needs are stronger, hoping that a stable dispatching agency organizational identity can provide a holding environment against external risks. Growth-curve needs represent a temporary compromise when facing high external employment pressure and weak employability, but also a progress demonstrating their ability to grow against the odds. Especially for dispatched employees with high job skill requirements and medium-to-high income (e.g., 5,000-10,000 RMB), such as programmers, they value learning opportunities obtained as organizational members more, even knowing they may face differential treatment from host organizations in the future.

Functionally, dispatched employees' dual organizational identity expectations have a complementary relationship. Security needs and self-enhancement are two main motivations for organizational identification [4][5]. Dispatching agency organizational identity expectations are closely linked to security, while host organization organizational identity expectations connect to dispatched employees' self-enhancement motivation. The stability and security perceived through dispatching agency organizational identity provide a foundation for self-development and self-enhancement perceived through host organization organizational identity; in turn, self-development and self-enhancement perceived through host organization organizational identity further consolidate dispatching agency organizational identity perception. The two organizational identities complement each other, ensuring dispatched employees' long-term development under labor dispatch arrangements.

Finally, organizational reputation and status constitute surface-level identification needs for dual organizational identity (see Table 3). Organizational reputation is an evaluation of organizational quality (services/products), conveying the ability to meet expectations, while organizational status is based on position in hierarchical structures and recognized social ranking [40]. Before entering dispatch work, dispatched employees' understanding of dispatching agencies and host organizations mostly comes from social evaluations, including parents, friends, and introductions from dispatching or host organizations, which constitute their surface-level knowledge of the two organizations.

Table 3 Coding Examples of Dual Organizational Identity Expectations

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“After all, I have to support my child; I definitely want something stable with a base salary plus commission... If I have work, doing it every day is quite good, but it’s unstable—maybe work one month and rest three, you never know, so it’s better to stay in the company. This was the main reason for choosing this dispatch company at the time.” [A-Expect stable income] (SB-06-176)</p> <p>“At the time, I considered that the dispatch company had many work locations, making it easy to choose somewhere closer to home. Since my daughter is less than one year old, it’s very convenient for me to go home to see her every week or half-month.” [A-Expect work not to affect childcare] (CX-23-283)</p>	<p>Meeting basic family expenses</p> <p>Meeting family role requirements</p>	<p>Family-supporting and stability-seeking needs</p>	<p>Dual organizational identity expectations</p>

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“The talent company is near home, and the jobs they introduce are also near home, in the city... Because I’m an only child, the only child in the family, I want to work near home to occasionally see my parents.” [A-Expect work not to affect parental care] (CP-34-45)</p>	Meeting family role requirements		
<p>“2020 pandemic, the job market wasn’t good... So I chose this (dispatch agency)... It could quickly help find a job, solving the food problem first.” [A-Survival pressure] (CX-22-173)</p>	Temporarily alleviating personal survival pressure		
<p>“Actually, the main reason for coming here is, well, to see some relatively well-known domestic companies, gain experience, learn their technology... norms and such.” [C-Future skill improvement] (CX-22-...)</p>	Future self-improvement	Growth-curve needs	

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“In my field, it’s all about projects, project-based systems... The dispatch agency is like remote control—how much salary they pay you, whether they give holiday gifts, your performance, it’s all decided by them.” [Dispatch agency dominant, host organization cooperative] (GC-09-101)</p>	<p>Career development prospects</p>		
<p>“If not for dispatch, I couldn’t work here. Because they have no quotas left, no regular position quotas, only dispatch.” [C-Few direct hire quotas] (XZ-04-121)</p>	<p>Low-barrier entry to host organization</p>		
<p>“Their threshold is 985/211 graduate students; undergraduates must be 985/211—that’s the basic threshold. Without this threshold, you don’t even have the chance to submit your resume...” [C-High recruitment requirements] (CX-23-220)</p>	<p>Low-barrier entry to host organization</p>		

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
“(The dispatch agency’s group company) should be the second-largest enterprise in the county.” [A-Industry ranking] (XZ-19-223)	Industry ranking	Surface-level identification needs	
“I saw this company... they’re, wow... they’re state-owned, and their major shareholder is a listed company, number one domestically.” [C-Industry ranking] (SB-13-65)	Industry ranking		
“This dispatch company is also relatively good in the industry. Salary and social insurance are no problem.” [A-Industry reputation] (GC-09-93)	Industry reputation		
“Another thing is... parents’ generation thinks it’s a relatively, how to say, decent job, sounds good when mentioned.” [C-Job decency] (XZ-14-162)	Job decency		

Note: Due to space limitations, only partial interview data and labels are shown. Content in “ [] ” indicates labels, where A represents dispatching agency and C represents host organization. “()” indicates respondent ID and paragraph number in interview text. Tables 4 ~5, Tables 7 ~9, and interview texts in the main text follow the same coding rules.

3.2 Dual Organizational Identity Experience: Asymmetric Emotional, Behavioral, and Cognitive Practices

When dispatched employees sign labor contracts with dispatching agencies, leave dispatching agencies, and go to host organizations to perform dispatch assignments, they enter the dispatch stage. Dispatched employees communicate and interact with the two organizations in different forms, forming dual organizational identity experiences through asymmetric emotional practices, asymmetric behavioral practices, and asymmetric cognitive practices (see Table 4).

Table 4 Coding Examples of Dual Organizational Identity Experience

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“Then for our (wage payment), well, this depends on luck... sometimes early, a bit earlier, like late then delayed until the 22nd.” [A-Income uncertainty] (GC-18-15)</p>	Income uncertainty	Insecurity A	Asymmetric emotional practice
<p>“When you get older, maybe they won’t, maybe they won’t fire you, but they’ll make you do a completely unskilled job... maybe after a few years they’ll eliminate you invisibly.” [A-Career development crisis] (XZ-05-167)</p>	Career development crisis		
<p>“Another thing is instability... then if the (project) doesn’t work out, they’ll withdraw you anytime, just withdraw without needing a reason.” [C-Dispatch assignment stability] (CX-24-61)</p>	Dispatch assignment stability		

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“You dare not make too many mistakes. You must be more careful than regular employees... fearing you’ll be returned to the labor dispatch company.”</p> <p>[C-Concern about being returned] (XZ-15-186)</p>	Concern about being returned		
<p>“I feel like in that team, I can rank in the top three, feel the boss won’t easily fire me, feel this position is quite secure.”</p> <p>[A-Competence-based trust perception] (SB-06-218)</p>	Competence-based trust perception	Trust A/C	
<p>“They don’t just send you there and leave you alone, not at all.”</p> <p>[A-Service professionalism-based trust perception] (CP-08-127)</p>	Service professionalism-based trust perception		
<p>“My skills, this job can’t do without me. As long as I’m here (host organization), I guarantee normal procedures.”</p> <p>[C-Competence-based trust perception] (CP-28-32)</p>	Competence-based trust perception		

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“Everyone understands and trusts each other, helps when they can.” [C-Interpersonal relationship-based trust perception] (XZ-29-95)</p>	Interpersonal relationship-based trust perception		
<p>“No matter whether you say, well, collected wrong or (fear) you’re corrupt... so now many businesses slowly let them, we don’t have permissions anymore.” [C-Employment form-based trust perception] (XZ-05-153)</p>	Employment form-based trust perception		
<p>“A bit tired, lots of repetitive work.” [C-Work monotony/repetition] (XZ-19-117)</p>	Work monotony/repetition	Burnout C	
<p>“You see we’re so tired every day, so tired, and then it (host organization) still scores or votes based on your performance, so you sometimes feel quite speechless... maybe a bit of lying flat feeling.” [C-Work pressure] (XZ-05-232)</p>	Work pressure		

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“When doing some public welfare activities, actually I feel, well, I’m part of this place after all... there’s a sense of achievement.” [C-Meaningful work] (XZ-07-97)</p>	Meaningful work	Achievement C	
<p>“Generally, when newly hired, you operate simpler things... they don’t dare let you operate difficult ones. After working for a while, you can slowly try, operate some, with some experience you can operate more difficult steps, then you can improve your potential, discover your potential.” [C-Skill improvement] (SB-10-202)</p>	Skill improvement		
<p>“Value realization is, when documents come, materials come, through my own effort, I help them improve.” [Self-value realization] (CZ-14-178)</p>	Self-value realization		

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“If you can work, you sign contracts with them; if you don’t want to work, you don’t have to... they have many units before you, I’m suitable for this, they show you... you’re their employee, should have this right.” [A-Dispatch assignment choice] (QT-12-81)</p>	Dispatch assignment choice	Work autonomy behavior	Asymmetric behavioral practice
<p>“They first evaluate something of yours, like whether you did this well or not. First, someone checks for you.” [C-Work outcome feedback] (CX-21-129)</p>	Work outcome feedback		
<p>“After all, I work in this office, if I find good methods, I should suggest them to everyone. I don’t have other big ideas, because for me, these things don’t have much benefit.” [C-Work voice behavior] (XZ-16-161)</p>	Work voice behavior		
<p>“The leader is so, so responsible and conscientious, very worth learning from, you’ll definitely work harder than before.” [C-Imitating/learning from leader] (CP-08-54)</p>	Imitating/learning from leader	Imitation/learning behavior C	

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“I generally follow others to learn, mainly when others work I follow and watch.”</p> <p>[C-Imitating/learning from colleagues] (XZ-15-149)</p>	<p>Imitating/learning from colleagues</p>		
<p>“Also, during New Year they give gifts... usually Three Squirrels gift packages or some snacks... because when you see others not giving them, you giving them will definitely (positively evaluate) the organization.”</p> <p>[A-Holiday welfare distribution] (CX-23-134)</p>	<p>Holiday welfare distribution</p>	<p>Work auxiliary activity communication A</p>	
<p>“Welfare, like birthday gift cards, is operated by *** (dispatching agency name). Basically, they negotiate a date and come to the company to give employees.”</p> <p>[A-Holiday welfare distribution] (C-2-25)</p>	<p>Holiday welfare distribution</p>		

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“All these are told by the labor dispatch company, I can’t discuss these with the factory (host organization). The dispatch company tells you about benefits... medical and pension insurance, your salary, base salary... all negotiated with the labor dispatch company.”</p> <p>[A-Salary/social insurance consultation] (QT-12-96)</p>	Salary/social insurance consultation		
<p>“It’s drinking, gatherings, etc. Everyone plays together.”</p> <p>[A&C-Gathering activities] (GC-03-39)</p>	Gathering activities	Informal interpersonal interaction A/C	
<p>“We often privately, well, how to say, play badminton or table tennis together.”</p> <p>[C-Recreational activities] (XZ-17-49)</p>	Recreational activities		
<p>“Previously someone had emotional problems, then everyone counseled him.” [C-Mutual life care] (SB-10-82)</p>	Mutual life care		

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“But my biggest feeling is strong human touch, it’s a human-touch organization... organizations without human touch, when you work you might produce an atmosphere full of intrigue.”</p> <p>[C-Organizational atmosphere cohesion] (XZ-16-163)</p>	Organizational atmosphere cohesion	Organizational atmosphere perception C	Asymmetric cognitive practice
<p>“Over there, the position hierarchy is quite strict.”</p> <p>[C-Organizational atmosphere flexibility] (GC-18-101)</p>	Organizational atmosphere flexibility		
<p>“There’s no hierarchy, actually for developers, there’s no superior-subordinate relationship.”</p> <p>[C-Organizational atmosphere flexibility] (CX-24-41)</p>	Organizational atmosphere flexibility		
<p>“But sometimes, you feel that regular employees have a kind of... condescending attitude toward external staff, like they feel they’re very capable, somewhat looking down on external staff.”</p> <p>[C-Colleague discrimination] (CX-21-141)</p>	Colleague discrimination	Discrimination perception C	

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“In some units (host organizations), regular employees indeed look down on dispatched workers, that’s normal.” [C-Colleague discrimination] (A-1-68)</p>	Colleague discrimination		
<p>“Leaders look at us differently from regular employees... they look at you with colored glasses.” [C-Manager discrimination] (CP-31-123)</p>	Manager discrimination		
<p>“Vampire, nothing else.” [A-Negative organizational values evaluation] (CX-22-228)</p>	Negative organizational values evaluation	Organizational values evaluation	A/C
<p>“Manufacturing talks about craftsman spirit. And many of our products are exported to Japan, Asian countries, European countries, so you must do good work... definitely identification!” [C-Positive organizational values evaluation] (SB-13-161)</p>	Positive organizational values evaluation		

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
“Only the contract, that labor contract, shows you’re legally their employee, but actually, never felt like you’re their employee.” [A-Formal employment relationship] (XZ-01-61)	Formal employment relationship	Organizational membership perception A/C	
”When you go to work at ** (host organization), you feel like an outsider, feel like you’re not **.” [C-Perceiving self as not part of organization] (CX-24-...)	Perceiving self as not part of organization		

*Note: ”**” indicates anonymized host or dispatching organization names. Due to space limitations, only partial interview data and labels are shown. ID A-1 is a dispatching agency marketing specialist mainly responsible for negotiating cooperation with client companies (host organizations) and daily management of some dispatched employees. ID C-2 is an HR manager at a construction machinery enterprise mainly responsible for recruitment and on-the-job training. GC-03 mentioned participating in gatherings organized jointly by host and dispatching organizations when discussing gathering activities, hence we use A&C. Superscripts on first-order concepts: A indicates only dispatching agency identity practice, C indicates only host organization identity practice, AC indicates both organizations’ identity practices.*

(1) Asymmetric Emotional Practice of Dual Organizational Identity

Asymmetric emotional practice reflects the emotional experiences related to dispatching agency or host organizational identity that dispatched employees generate in actual work. This study presents four main types: burnout, achievement, insecurity, and trust. Notably, emotional practice shows asymmetry—the content or dimensions of dispatching agency organizational identity emotional practice differ from those of host organizational identity emotional practice.

Burnout and achievement mainly stem from host organizational identity emotional practice. Burnout is primarily an emotional experience caused by work pressure or job repetition. Work is the foundation for employees to connect

with organizations; burnout makes employees lose interest in work, deliberately maintain distance from work objects, and emotionally distance themselves from the organization. Achievement is accompanied by strong positive emotional experiences like pride and excitement, while lack of achievement is accompanied by negative emotions like loss, frustration, and self-doubt. Achievement satisfies dispatched employees' self-enhancement identification motivation, arising from perceiving work meaning, skill improvement, and self-value realization. Typically, dispatched employees who experience achievement actively connect themselves with the host organization that provides the work.

Insecurity and trust come from both organizational identities' emotional practices, but with different specific content. Insecurity from dispatching agency identity practice mainly stems from "income uncertainty" and "career development crisis," while host organization identity practice mainly stems from "dispatch assignment stability" and "concern about being returned." Insecurity is often accompanied by negative emotions like anxiety, worry, and 患得患失. Previous research shows security needs are a primary motivation for organizational identification [4]. Higher insecurity makes dispatched employees feel more distant from the organization and more likely to perceive themselves as organizational outsiders. Dispatched employees with lower monthly income (below 3,000 RMB) often worry about "when wages will be paid"; more unstable income makes them less willing to establish close connections with dispatching agencies.

Trust is dispatched employees' emotional experience of feeling trusted or distrusted by the organization. Stronger perceived trust tends to extend the organization as part of the self. Host organization trust is mainly based on competence, interpersonal relationships, and employment form, while dispatching agency trust is mainly based on competence and service professionalism. Competence-based trust perception enhances dispatched employees' sense of presence in host or dispatching organizations. Second, interpersonal relationship-based trust perception relates to dispatched employees' daily interpersonal interactions at host organizations. For example, trust and understanding among colleagues enhance dispatched employees' dependence on and belonging to the host organization. Third, employment form-based trust perception mainly refers to inter-group differences brought by heterogeneity in host organizations' employment arrangements (e.g., dispatched employees finding their work permissions restricted), making dispatched employees experience varying degrees of trust. Finally, when dispatched employees perceive dispatching agencies' services as professional, they tend to believe they are recognized and trusted by the dispatching agency, making future dispatch work reliable.

(2) Asymmetric Behavioral Practice of Dual Organizational Identity

"How do I know who I am until I see what I do?" [16]. Asymmetric behavioral practice of dual organizational identity consists of a series of actions that construct, develop, maintain, and change organizational identity in real contexts. In this study, behavioral practice shows asymmetry: imitation or learning behav-

ior mainly stems from host organizational identity practice, while work auxiliary activity communication mainly targets dispatching agency identity; work autonomy behavior and informal interpersonal interaction include both organizations' identity practices.

Imitation and learning behavior are effective means for dispatched employees to quickly adapt to and integrate into host organizations after entry. Typically, objects of imitation and learning are star employees or ideal employees at host organizations, representing concrete manifestations of organizational member prototypes [5]. Imitation behavior is most common in the early dispatch stage. As newcomers to host organizations with little understanding of organizational systems and implicit norms, imitating star employees or role models provides clear guidance for action and reduces uncertainty in behavioral outcomes. As dispatch duration extends and interactions with leaders or colleagues at host organizations increase, some professional or high-quality leaders or colleagues more easily attract dispatched employees' attention and become their learning models.

Dispatched employees' interaction with dispatching agencies mainly involves work auxiliary activity communication, including holiday welfare distribution and salary/social insurance consultation. When dispatched employees can enjoy holiday welfare and feel respected during salary/social insurance consultation, they develop positive evaluations of dispatching agencies and establish positive cognitive connections between self and dispatching agencies; conversely, they doubt dispatching agencies' legitimacy and are unwilling to mention their dispatching agencies to outsiders.

Work autonomy behavior demonstrates dispatched employees' work autonomy, mainly reflected in dispatch assignment choice, work outcome feedback, and work voice behavior. Previous research shows that stronger employee autonomy enables them to shape work-based identities (e.g., organizational identity) to match their preferences and internalize them as part of self-definition [41]. For example, dispatched employees with assignment choice rights often have stronger ownership consciousness and more positive views of dispatching agency organizational identity. During the internship, we also observed that X Company adopted a negotiation approach when arranging dispatch assignments for employees willing to stay long-term with the dispatching agency. Another example: at host organizations, dispatched employees whose suggestions are adopted often have stronger organizational membership consciousness, while rejected suggestions often lead to perceived organizational exclusion.

“Party A (X Company) may change Party B's (dispatched employee's) position, job content, and work location according to production/operation needs and Party B's physical condition, work ability, and performance. If Party B feels unsuited to adjusted work from Party A or host organization, they should apply in writing for separate adjustment...” (20211108-LD-2)

Informal interpersonal interaction refers to interpersonal communication and

exchange caused by non-work activities, which is active or voluntary. At host organizations, informal interpersonal interaction often manifests as sharing interesting life stories during work breaks, spontaneous recreational activities, etc., reflecting dispatched employees' perceived degree of organizational acceptance. However, when organizational system design differentially treats dispatched employees, dispatched and regular employees easily form two groups, making positive informal interaction difficult and potentially causing interpersonal conflict. In such cases, dispatched employees tend to see themselves as outsiders at host organizations. Additionally, many respondents mentioned informal interpersonal interaction with dispatching agencies. For example, dispatch company managers regularly visit host organizations to express concern and understand problems dispatched employees encounter in work and life. These interpersonal interactions strengthen employees' connection with dispatching agencies to some extent.

(3) Asymmetric Cognitive Practice of Dual Organizational Identity

Asymmetric cognitive practice of dual organizational identity refers to dispatched employees' views and beliefs about the nature or attributes of the two organizational identities, usually expressing "As an organizational member, I think (I think)...". In this study, cognitive practice also shows asymmetry: organizational atmosphere perception and discrimination awareness stem from host organizational identity practice, while organizational values evaluation and organizational membership perception are generated by both organizations' identity cognitive practices, representing dispatched employees' deeper cognition of the two organizational identities.

Organizational atmosphere perception formation requires employees' contact and interaction with organizations over time. Since dispatched employees' daily work occurs at host organizations with frequent interaction, organizational atmosphere perception mainly reflects employees' overall cognition of host organizations. Typically, host organizations with "human touch" implementing "humanized management" enable dispatched employees to experience organizational care and develop dependence on host organizations. When host organizations lack "human care" and flexibility, they often lack cohesion, reducing dispatched employees' sense of belonging. The vast majority of respondents discussed discrimination awareness. Discrimination from host organization managers or colleagues makes dispatched employees feel isolated and unable to integrate into work teams.

Organizational values evaluation constitutes the foundation for deep organizational identity formation. Typically, the better the match between organizational values and dispatched employees' personal values, the easier it is to develop integration and identification with the organization [22]. For example, dispatched employees who identify with host organizations' values will regulate their work behavior according to value requirements. Although dispatched employees are far from dispatching agencies during dispatch assignments, they still form judgments about dispatching agencies' organizational values through on-

line communication and a few memorable offline interactions. More positive values evaluation leads to higher satisfaction with dispatching agencies. Organizational membership perception expresses "I (do not) feel or think I am part of **", meaning dispatched employees have formed views about the relationship between self and the two organizations in their cognition. They often discuss this by combining their own behavioral practices and emotional experiences, analyzing relationships established with dispatching agencies and host organizations. This cognition constitutes knowledge about organizational identity that is more stable than surface-level identification based on dispatching or host organizational reputation and status.

3.3 Comparison Between Dual Organizational Identity Expectations and Experiences

Family-supporting and stability-seeking needs, growth-curve needs, and surface-level identification needs jointly constitute the main content of dual organizational identity expectations, forming the basis for surface-level knowledge of dual organizational identity. Entering the dispatch stage, through asymmetric emotional, behavioral, and cognitive practices, dispatched employees genuinely contact and interact with dispatching agencies and host organizations, establishing different knowledge about dispatching agency organizational identity and host organizational identity, gradually forming dual organizational identity experiences. Simultaneously, surface-level cognition of dual organizational identity also develops toward deep cognition. The comparison between dual organizational identity expectations and experiences mainly revolves around the fulfillment of family-supporting and stability-seeking needs and growth-curve needs, involving whether dispatching agencies' or host organizations' promises are fulfilled and obligations met, and whether dispatched employees' actual experiences align with organizational identity surface-level cognition. The expectation-experience comparison significantly influences dispatched employees' views and evaluations of the two organizations and ultimately affects dual organizational identity outcomes.

Table 5 Description of Dual Organizational Identity Expectation-Experience Comparison

Dual Organizational Identity Expectation-Experience Comparison	Respondent IDs
Match-Match	SB-02; GC-03; SB-06; CP-08; SB-10; CP-11; QT-12; XZ-14; XZ-16; XZ-17; XZ-20

Dual Organizational Identity Expectation-Experience Comparison	Respondent IDs
Match-Mismatch	XZ-07; CX-21; CX-23; CX-25; SB-27; XZ-29; CP-31; XZ-33
Mismatch-Match	XZ-01; GC-09; SB-13; XZ-15; QT-26; CP-28; CX-32
Mismatch-Mismatch	XZ-04; XZ-05; GC-18; XZ-19; CX-22; CX-24; QT-30; CP-34

Note: OIA = Dispatching Agency Organizational Identity; OIC = Host Organization Organizational Identity. “Match-Match” indicates both OIA and OIC expectation-experience match. “Mismatch-Mismatch” indicates both mismatch. “Match-Mismatch” indicates either OIA matches while OIC mismatches, or OIA mismatches while OIC matches.

“Because at first I didn’t understand this company well. Even if it’s a leading enterprise, going to work there seems impressive, but you don’t actually feel it—you just think, or expect it should have good benefits... Then slowly, slowly, after seeing some company policies, many conditions are there, salary and benefits, they (dispatching agency) indeed follow the current company (host organization) system completely. What they said at the time is what they give you, feels quite good.” [A-Promise fulfilled] (CP-08-95)

“The promises they make they can’t fulfill, like giving you how much money, but actually they can’t, don’t have that money... For example, they say you’ll get over 5,000, but actually you don’t get over 5,000... I knew about (labor dispatch), but didn’t expect it to be this outrageous. Still this exploitative.” [C-Promise not fulfilled] (GC-18-173)

Based on dual organizational identity expectation-experience comparison results, they can be divided into two major categories: both expectations-experiences match, and expectations-experiences mismatch exists. We categorized all dispatched employee respondents’ comparisons (see Table 5). Detailed analysis follows in the next two sections.

(1) Both Dual Organizational Identity Expectations-Experiences Match

When dispatched employees’ family-supporting and stability-seeking needs and growth-curve needs are both met, dual organizational identity expectations and

experiences tend to both match, i.e., “match-match.” Specifically, as dispatching agency members: timely wage payment, normal social insurance payment, enjoyment of additional informal benefits and continuous organizational care, perceived trust, and positive cognition of dispatching agencies’ values; as host organization members: continuous progress at work, high work autonomy, sense of achievement, trust and respect from leaders and colleagues, and large personal career development prospects, with positive evaluations of host organizations’ values.

“(Dispatching agency) asked me if I still wanted to go, consulted my opinion, and compared two companies for me, saying this listed company is very powerful, benefits are definitely better than the previous one, high chance of becoming regular employee... Now thinking back, it’s very lucky... because our benefits are good... it’s a guarantee. (Host organization) Because our company treats everyone equally here, once you come, you’re our company’s employee, and we’ll give you a chance to become regular, so everything given to you is exactly the same, basically no difference... You’ll discover your own work qualities and social morals in this work... it can help you continuously evolve and correct.” [Both expectations-experiences match] (CP-08-81)

(2) Dual Organizational Identity Expectations-Experiences Comparison Shows Mismatch

When dispatched employees’ family-supporting and stability-seeking needs or growth-curve needs are unmet, mismatch exists in dual organizational identity expectations-experiences comparison. Based on whether this mismatch is caused by dispatching agency identity, host organization identity, or both, it can be further divided into two major categories with three scenarios (see Table 5):

Category 1: Match-Mismatch: Dispatching agency identity expectation-experience mismatch, host organization identity expectation-experience match; Dispatching agency identity expectation-experience match, host organization identity expectation-experience mismatch.

Category 2: Mismatch-Mismatch: Both dispatching agency and host organization identity expectations-experiences mismatch.

Mismatch in dual organizational identity expectations-experiences sometimes results from specific external events. For example, learning that promised promotion or regularization opportunities are gone, or wages are not paid on time as contracted. These events often enhance dispatched employees’ insecurity, reduce informal interpersonal interaction, and weaken organizational membership perception. Another situation involves deepened understanding of dispatching and host organizations conflicting with surface-level cognition. For example, host or dispatching organizations being unworthy of their reputation, or negative views about motivations for using labor dispatch. These conflicts are accompanied by reduced trust, decreased learning behavior, lack of work autonomy, and negative evaluations of dispatching or host organizational values.

“But, how to say, unfortunately, around February this year, our leader (host organization) talked to me about this. Regularization is impossible, because this line in some large companies is basically, maybe basically cut off.” [Lost regularization opportunity] (CX-22-206)

“Because I thought, although not Alibaba, BAT level, but also similar large internet companies. In the past, it should be technical strength, management ability, including products, products made should all be excellent, but actually, not as outstanding as imagined.” [Host organization not living up to reputation] (CX-24-113)

3.4 Dual Organizational Identity Embarrassment and Defense

(1) Dual Organizational Identity Embarrassment

Dual organizational identity embarrassment arises from inconsistency in dual organizational identity expectations-experiences comparison, including scenarios and in section 3.3: dispatching agency identity expectation-experience mismatch with host organization identity expectation-experience match; dispatching agency identity expectation-experience match with host organization identity expectation-experience mismatch.

For dispatched employees, the two organizational identities exist in pairs, complementing each other and jointly functioning. This complementary characteristic implies two layers of meaning: first, any organizational identity problem (expectation-experience mismatch) affects the other identity's function; second, absence of any organizational identity destroys the integrity of dual organizational identity and its overall effect. When match-mismatch scenarios occur, meaning some identity expectations are met while others are not, the matched organizational identity often satisfies some psychological needs, motivating dispatched employees to internalize that identity. However, for dispatched employees, a single organizational identity cannot satisfy all expectations or needs; they cannot completely view themselves as members of the organization with matched expectations-experiences. Meanwhile, the mismatched organizational identity means unmet psychological needs, motivating dispatched employees to disconnect from that organizational identity. Yet the mismatched organizational identity is indispensable for dispatched employees; unless they stop working through labor dispatch, the mismatched identity still functions at a basic level.

Therefore, when dual organizational identity expectations-experiences show “match-mismatch,” dispatched employees fall into a “dilemma” psychological state: dual organizational identity embarrassment. Specifically, dispatched employees want but cannot fully internalize the matched organizational identity (difficult to “advance”); simultaneously, they want but cannot completely discard the mismatched organizational identity (difficult to “retreat”), and can only wander and hesitate between the two organizational identities, not

knowing where they belong. For example, in scenario , when dispatching agencies “leave dispatched employees unattended” and fail to fulfill management obligations, employees tend to view their relationship with dispatching agencies as merely “paper-based” from labor contracts. Although they have good emotional, cognitive, and behavioral experiences at host organizations, this “paper relationship” makes them feel constrained by dispatching agencies without receiving corresponding rights, and unable to fully integrate into host organizations, causing discomfort and confusion about their organizational identity. In scenario , when dispatched employees experience discrimination, find no career development prospects, or lack work motivation, they tend to view host organizations as merely “providing a workplace,” unwilling to acknowledge host organizational identity. Although dispatching agencies can pay wages on time, continuously manage them, and provide work security, the dispatching agency’s identity cannot show “what they do” or reflect self-worth in work.

This inconsistency places dispatched employees in a state of identity embarrassment. They nominally possess two organizational identities, but when one identity fails to fully play its complementary role, it 反而 triggers employees’ sense of embarrassment. At this point, dual organizational identity increases cognitive burden and intensifies their doubts about self-belonging.

“It’s like, you’re actually everywhere and nowhere, so you feel embarrassed, this identity feels embarrassing.” [Dual organizational identity embarrassment] (XZ-01-67)

“For example, if you’re a regular employee, you’re this company’s employee, bound together with this company. But now? A bit indescribably awkward?... It’s like, um... um... stuck between two companies, like having two doors there, but both are locked. You have a key to one, but reality tells you, you can only stay in the middle.” [Dual organizational identity embarrassment] (CX-21-...)

(2) Dual Organizational Identity Defense

Dual organizational identity defense refers to dispatched employees concentrating or releasing attention on the “mismatch” in dual organizational identity expectations-experiences, actively or negatively interpreting the inconsistency to cope with identity embarrassment (see Table 6). Previous multiple identity research indicates that individuals tend to seek self-integrity and consistency across identities [4]. For dispatched employees, the complementary relationship between dual organizational identities means the two identities jointly constitute a complete organizational identity. When one identity expectation-experience mismatch occurs, the integrity of dispatched employees’ organizational identity is damaged, threatening their integrity as dispatched employees. Moreover, matched organizational identity is often accompanied by positive cognition and emotion, while mismatched identity forms negative cognition and emotion. Since both organizational identities jointly constitute the foundation of dispatched employees’ identity, inconsistent cognitive and emotional valences

easily threaten dispatched employees' self-consistency, interfering with their cognition of self-organization relationships.

Table 6 Comparison of Identity Defense Strategies

Attention Control	Explanation Valence	Defense Strategy
Concentrated	Positive	Identity Creation
Concentrated	Negative	Identity Rumination
Dispersed	Positive	Identity Comparison
Dispersed	Negative	Identity Isolation

Many scholars point out that when self-integrity or consistency is threatened, individuals adopt identity work to cope [16][17]. In this study, we found that based on the relative importance of dispatching and host organizations in identity—dominant vs. cooperative—dispatched employees mainly adopt four identity defense strategies—identity isolation, identity rumination, identity comparison, and identity creation—to adjust dual organizational identity inconsistency and cope with identity embarrassment (see Table 7). Moreover, the study found that dispatched employees' long-term vs. short-term judgment of dispatched worker identity is the main factor affecting identity defense strategy selection.

Relative importance of dispatching and host organizations in identity falls into two situations: dispatching agency organizational identity dominant—host organization organizational identity cooperative, and dispatching agency organizational identity cooperative—host organization organizational identity dominant. In the first situation, when dispatching agencies have more say than host organizations in determining dispatched employees' salary and benefit levels, are responsible for most work auxiliary activities, and emphasize daily communication with dispatched employees, dispatched employees perceive dispatching agencies as having stronger leadership and management rights, making dispatching agency identity more important. In the second situation, host organizations have higher say in determining dispatched employees' salary, benefits, and position changes, while dispatching agencies mainly handle three auxiliary tasks: contract custody, salary payment, and social insurance payment, with most other auxiliary work handled by host organizations.

Table 7 Coding Examples of Dual Organizational Identity Defense

Interview Data and Labels	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“You know, there’s a group of people like this in society. But to survive they can only go through dispatch agencies... dispatch isn’t bad.” [Group social position creation] (GC-09-95)</p> <p>“Society is like this, some people are born upper class, some are poor. Like me, didn’t study well, doing labor dispatch, now there are many, many like this.” [Individual social position creation] (CX-32-73)</p>	<p>Social position creation</p>	<p>Identity Creation</p>
<p>“Actually my idea is wherever you are, love what you do, no matter what line of work.” [Loving one’s work] (GC-09-79)</p> <p>“Instead of being angry and complaining, better to improve yourself, like spending time enhancing your capabilities.” [Actively pursuing work progress] (CX-32-75)</p>	<p>Work meaning creation</p>	
<p>“Even if there are some not-so-good evaluations, well, views, I’ll try to weaken connection with it (dispatching agency). You’re physically at ** (host organization).” [Weakening connection with organization] (QT-26-141)</p> <p>“Just know it’s there, but we never go there... almost no contact working here.” [Emphasizing little communication with organization] (XZ-01-61)</p>	<p>Psychological distance increase</p>	<p>Identity Isolation</p>

Interview Data and Labels	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“Must say they, well, their presence here is really too low.” [Low presence] (XZ-15-168)</p> <p>“Basically, truly, every month wastes energy on when wages will be paid. From 月初 office attendance statistics, to department head review, division leader, office director review... personal signature, dispatch agency review... complicated procedures... sometimes regular employees have been paid, the system process is only half done. Once it dragged to early next month... At that time I thought why is labor dispatch wage payment so dragging.” [Mental drain] (XZ-33-80)</p> <p>“Like long-term workers in enterprises, they’re second-class employees there. Thinking I’ll work my whole life as ‘temporary,’ rootless. The dispatch company is nominally ‘maternal family,’ but you’re water splashed out by her, can’t play any role.” [Reflecting on future development possibilities] (CP-31-...)</p> <p>“I like changeable work... Sometimes I’ll also, well, aspire to be, well, a freelancer.” [Envisioning future work] (XZ-07-115)</p>	Importance reduction	

Interview Data and Labels	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“Because now actually much less work than before. Previously leaders urged every day. We (dispatched employees) do the most tedious work. Sometimes really can’t complete within their required time, delay about 1 day. Leaders have bad emotions, scold you, speak harshly, common. Now, compared to before, much better, occasionally leaders still criticize, but they’re leaders.” [Intra-individual comparison—downward] (XZ-29-95)</p>	<p>Identity disadvantage rationalization</p>	<p>Identity Comparison</p>
<p>“We’re all colleagues, his project, others buried so many mines for him to step on, he got tired, then switched to another company, indeed somewhat tricked him, then other regular employees didn’t cooperate... Later he also left.” [Inter-individual comparison—downward] (CX-25-...)</p>	<p>Identity relative advantage amplification</p>	
<p>“Because my field is projects, project-based systems... The dispatch agency is remote control—how much salary they pay you, whether they give holiday gifts, your performance, all decided by them.” [Dispatch agency dominant, host organization cooperative] (GC-09-101)</p>		

Interview Data and Labels	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“This depends on what project you cooperate with clients on. One part of my business is factory operators, 通俗说就是流水线生产, basically the client has stronger bargaining power, they manage employees more.” [Dispatch agency cooperative, host organization dominant] (A-1-39)</p>		

Note: Due to space limitations, only partial interview data and labels are shown.

Dispatched worker identity long-term vs. short-term judgment refers to dispatched employees’ assessment of whether they will still work through labor dispatch within the next three years. Many dispatched employees view dispatch work as a “transitional” or “buffer” stage. For example, during the pandemic when job hunting was difficult, dispatch work at least provided stable income to solve survival problems. However, for jobs suitable for labor dispatch employment, such as engineering project managers and programmers, dispatched employees tend to view dispatched worker identity as long-term.

“If your job nature is dispatch, don’t treat it as lifelong work, meaning it’s just your transition and experience... Because I probably won’t keep working here forever, right.” [Transitional stage work] (XZ-07-83)

“Once you enter external dispatch, it’s a deep sea... Never got out... Sending resumes or whatever... All calls or interview notifications, 80% or even 90% are external dispatch.” [Long-term external dispatch work] (CX-25-95)

1) Identity Isolation Strategy

Identity isolation strategy mainly refers to dispatched employees shifting attention away from organizational identity expectation-experience mismatch, coping with dual organizational identity embarrassment by increasing psychological distance from that identity or reducing its importance. When the mismatch is caused by dispatching agency organizational identity in a cooperative position, dispatched employees have very little interaction with dispatching agencies, and dispatching agency identity is basically in a “forgotten” state. Therefore, dispatched employees easily adopt isolation to separate self from dispatching agencies.

Many respondents’ identity isolation strategies involve increasing psychological distance: weakening connection with the organization or emphasizing little interpersonal interaction. For example, some dispatched employees believe that since dispatching agencies have “left them unattended,” they don’t need psychological

connection with that unit. Increasing psychological distance helps dispatched employees avoid threats and insecurity from dispatching agency identity. Second, reducing dispatching agency identity importance mainly involves simplifying dispatching agencies' management responsibilities and reducing their presence. Since dispatching agencies play assistant roles in cooperation with host organizations, some dispatched workers unconsciously reduce dispatching agencies' importance to alleviate negative feelings from dispatching agency identity mismatch. Notably, dispatched employees who view labor dispatch as short-term employment, when adopting identity isolation strategies, also emphasize the homogeneity between their daily work content and regular employees', viewing their future selves as part of the regular employee group.

2) Identity Rumination Strategy

Identity rumination refers to dispatched employees continuously focusing on and repeatedly thinking about the organizational identity causing expectation-experience mismatch. When the mismatch is caused by host organizational identity in a dominant position, dispatched employees tend to adopt identity rumination strategies. On one hand, dispatched employees' daily work activities and interpersonal interactions mainly occur at host organizations, making host organizational identity more active in cognition than dispatching agency identity; when host organizational identity is dominant, its negative information more easily attracts dispatched employees' attention. Therefore, negative emotions and perceptions from host organizational identity expectation-experience mismatch control dispatched employees' cognition and attention for long periods, causing pressure and self-depletion.

On the other hand, many dispatched employees mention that during identity rumination, they more frequently engage in self-reflection, mentally debating labor dispatch as an employment method and future development. This process intensifies dispatched employees' helplessness and unwillingness about their current situation, and anxiety and unease about the future. Additionally, dispatched employees often attribute their "unfortunate experiences" to external factors like the labor dispatch system during self-debate, thereby "confirming" that their idea of being unable to change the present but able to escape labor dispatch is reasonable. Particularly respondents who view labor dispatch as short-term work repeatedly discuss and support online negative comments about labor dispatch, and actively envision future ideal work to criticize this "problematic" employment method.

3) Identity Comparison Strategy

Identity comparison strategy refers to dispatched employees dispersing attention, rationalizing identity disadvantages and amplifying identity advantages through multiple comparisons to re-evaluate mismatch in dual organizational identity expectation-experience comparison. When the mismatch is caused by host organizational identity in a cooperative position, dispatched employees tend to adopt identity comparison strategies. These employees actually know

host organizations basically cannot change for them, and they themselves complete projects at host organizations, leaving after project completion. Therefore, they need a temporary, quick-effect strategy to alleviate negative feelings from mismatch. This study found that identity comparison strategies can play this role, reducing dual organizational identity inconsistency and alleviating identity embarrassment.

On one hand, dispatched employees rationalize identity disadvantages through upward interpersonal comparison. For example, when comparing themselves with host organization regular employees, seeing their disadvantage (no promotion opportunities) results from insufficient past effort 反而 stimulates their determination to improve work capabilities. Particularly respondents planning long-term labor dispatch work also discuss self-learning plans. This is common among dispatched employees with high technical job requirements who care more about future improvement than current skill levels. On the other hand, dispatched employees shift limited attention to their relative advantages in the current state through downward interpersonal and intra-individual comparisons, reducing attention to mismatch. For example, some dispatched employees compare their current experiences with past ones, highlighting improvements to relieve tension and imbalance from mismatch.

4) Identity Creation Strategy

Identity creation strategy refers to dispatched employees concentrating attention on developing or 挖掘 the “mismatched” organizational identity, creating a social position for themselves and their dispatched employee group, and actively finding meaning in current work to solve identity embarrassment. When dispatched employees believe the mismatch is caused by dispatching agency identity in a dominant position, they urgently need to rationalize the legitimacy of the dispatched worker group’s existence through social position creation, thereby rationalizing their own existence. Specifically, they often objectively and rationally analyze their disadvantages, accepting their shortcomings like “low education” or “poor skills.” The current “mismatched” dispatching agency identity is a convenient way for them to achieve quick employment and improve work capabilities. Through labor dispatch, they can work and learn at top-ranked companies, enter decent places like public institutions or universities. Moreover, these dispatched employees’ thinking extends beyond their own situation, connecting themselves with the entire dispatched worker group, believing the whole group faces similar situations and, despite disadvantages, has value as social members and should have its unique position in society. However, for employees who will work long-term through labor dispatch, merely finding their social position is insufficient. Particularly when facing work challenges or career development bottlenecks, they also actively find meaning in work to maintain hope, increase security, and enhance self-worth.

Identity creation demonstrates dispatched employees’ social adaptation ability and self-transcendence through rational analysis. Through identity creation, insecurity and uncertainty from dispatching agency identity expectation-

experience mismatch are alleviated. More importantly, identity creation strategy use shows dispatched employees dare to admit their shortcomings, find self-positioning, and face relatively disadvantaged situations with positive, optimistic attitudes, 挖掘 ing meaning in work.

Among the four identity defense strategies, identity creation, identity isolation, and identity comparison can adjust dual organizational identity expectation-experience inconsistency by reducing mismatch's negative impact or transforming mismatch into match, alleviating identity embarrassment and facilitating dual organizational identity realization. Identity rumination, however, often intensifies mismatch's negative cognition and emotion, worsening identity embarrassment and leading to dual organizational identity rupture.

3.5 Synergistic Effects of Dual Organizational Identity Under Complementary Relationship

When dual organizational identity expectation-experience comparison results in "match-match," dispatched employees tend to have positive cognition and emotion toward both identities. Due to complementarity, emotions and cognitions related to the two organizational identities promote each other, generating positive synergy. Conversely, when comparison results in "mismatch-mismatch," negative synergy tends to occur (see Table 8).

Table 8 Coding Examples of Dual Organizational Identity Synergy

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
“Without dispatched employees, many jobs couldn’t be completed... Labor dispatch actually helps ** (host organization) work better... Because leaders and colleagues here are good, my work is relatively smooth. Maybe ** (host organization) and this dispatching agency have mature cooperation, so you don’t need to care about how society views labor dispatch. Our dispatched workers here don’t have the unfair treatment or being looked down on mentioned in companies.” [Ignoring external negative evaluations] (XZ-20-191)	Ignoring external negative evaluations	Bias elimination	Positive synergy based on social exchange

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“Actually third parties are easy to understand... They have ability to get this task, so we follow them... Like public institutions, hiring is troublesome, and regular employee quotas are limited, can’t have that many people helping, so they can only find third-party companies... Like our boss (dispatching agency) plays this role, can get tasks. You can understand it like gaming, the team leader can get that task, leads us team members to play that dungeon. Because we team members can’t get this task, we can only follow the leader. The leader gets the task, exerts effort, so gets more; we team members get soup and small meat, can understand it this way.” [Multi-angle view of labor dispatch] (CP-11-173)</p>	<p>Multi-angle view of labor dispatch</p>		

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
“(Hearing negative comments about host organization) Because no matter what you do in this world, there are voices opposing you, just block them... (Similarly) after all, (dispatch) company treats you like this, won’t treat others worse... Because I just said, many, there are definitely bad voices, no matter how well an enterprise does, there are some very bad voices... I think this is very normal.” [Trust maintenance] (CP-08-144)	Trust maintenance	Trust transfer	
“Labor dispatch agencies are government-affiliated, cooperate with government. They don’t dare violate regulations, must follow labor contracts... When government finds cooperation partners, they probably consider more, must be responsible to the people, right.” [Trust guarantee] (XZ-17-186)	Trust guarantee		

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
“Even if this project isn’t great, some people are difficult, anyway, after finishing work, sometimes we complain to our boss (dispatching agency), vent, he understands this. When you do many projects, you’ll definitely encounter various situations, just treat it as... training.” [Negative emotion venting] (SB-06-142)	Negative emotion venting	Work obstacle elimination	
“Labor dispatch, they give me communication with current company, it’s an intermediary... Some inconvenient matters, I find that (dispatching agency) to communicate, they then communicate with the employer.” [Communication barrier elimination] (SB-13-107)	Communication barrier elimination		

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“Then its impression in my heart, *** (host organization) probably gives us more than this salary, you know? They (dispatching agency) took a cut in the middle, deducted part of the money... What treatment their internal regular employees get, what we get. Also, we work at this *** (host organization), we have invisible huge gaps with these (host organization’s) regular workers.”</p> <p>[Enhanced economic deprivation] (XZ-05-175)</p>	Enhanced economic deprivation	Relative deprivation enhancement	Negative synergy based on economic exchange
<p>“They also want to make money from you, when you have no value, people naturally won’t value you like before. Then coffee shops, 更不会 say, care about your life or death. If you can’t create profit, they abandon you and find others.”</p> <p>[Enhanced social deprivation] (QT-30-126)</p>	Enhanced social deprivation		

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“Because overall, no very positive attitude. Can only say ** (host organization) and dispatch company both work for money. You work also for money.” [Lack of work motivation] (CX-25-89)</p>	Lack of work motivation	Work motivation deficiency	
<p>“For me, personally feel maybe have slack-off mentality... No need to work actively.” [Reduced work effort] (CX-24-181)</p>	Reduced work effort		
<p>“You (dispatching agency) can’t just collect dispatch fees... (We) even work more for less pay... No way to increase salary, we don’t have this... Can’t see future, whole-heartedly want to leave, run quickly.” [Deciding stay/leave based on economic compensation] (XZ-19-209)</p>	Deciding stay/leave based on economic compensation	Turnover intention increase	

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Second-Order Concept	Core Concept
<p>“One treats you as merchandise, one as a dog, what are you still attached to?... This employment method, definitely must give more money, what you can hold in hand. So many of us actually don’t want insurance, who knows what will happen in the future, whether we can get it.” [Emphasizing short-term benefits] (CP-34-167)</p>	Emphasizing short-term benefits		

Note: Due to space limitations, only partial interview data and labels are shown.

(1) Positive Synergy Based on Social Exchange

When dispatched employees’ dual organizational identity expectations-experiences comparison results in match-match, they tend to believe they have established social exchange-based relationships with both organizations. Social exchange norms emphasize long-term trust and emotion between exchange parties, which are not written in contracts or specified in documents but are default responsibilities between exchange parties [42]. When dispatched employees receive informal benefits from dispatching agencies, they judge it as organizational support and care, generating thoughts like “the organization is good to me, I’ll also consider the organization.” They more easily become “firm supporters” of dispatching agencies, actively maintaining organizational reputation. More importantly, these dispatched employees view the relationship between dispatching agencies and host organizations as “mutual assistance” cooperation, with themselves becoming the bond facilitating this cooperation.

Positive synergy based on social exchange mainly manifests in three aspects: bias elimination, trust transfer, and work obstacle elimination. First, disrespect and discrimination from within organizations, and prejudice and stigma from society easily make dispatched employees feel inferior and internalize external biases. When dual organizational identity content occupies substantial social exchange-based content, it can reshape dispatched employees’ cognition, allowing them to see their unique value more positively. Moreover, dispatched employees reduce unnecessary misunderstandings and conflicts by 换位思考 or

viewing issues from multiple angles. Second, trust is key to social exchange; trust established between dispatched employees and both organizations transfers across organizations. For example, trust in dispatching agencies makes dispatched employees believe they won't be assigned to poor projects; positive experiences at host organizations further enhance trust in dispatching agencies. Finally, synergy based on social exchange helps eliminate invisible work obstacles, including venting negative emotions and eliminating communication barriers.

(2) Negative Synergy Based on Economic Exchange

When dispatched employees' dual organizational identity expectations-experiences both mismatch, they tend to believe they have established economic exchange-based relationships with both organizations. Economic exchange norms mean exchange parties value financial-based rights and obligations [42]. Many respondents mention dispatched employees are "cheap labor," and enterprises use labor dispatch to "save costs." Terms like "cheap," "cost," and "benefit" pull dispatched employees' perspective into "economic exchange" rules. The three-party employment method of labor dispatch actually becomes a "benefit-weighting" game among three parties. However, this game itself is unbalanced in power, with dispatched employees always in the weak position, rarely receiving income matching their labor contributions. Once this thinking penetrates dispatched employees' cognition, no matter how many "social exchange"-based efforts dispatching or host organizations have made, it's hard to erase their impression as "merchants" or "capitalists." This is why some dispatched employees, even after experiencing some organizational care from dispatching or host parties, still judge dispatching agencies as "exploiters" or "vampires," and host organizations as "labor exploiters."

This economic exchange-based relationship makes the two organizational identities more likely to generate negative synergy. Most obvious manifestations among respondents are enhanced relative deprivation, lack of work motivation, and increased turnover intention. For dispatched employees, their weak position among three parties and unfair treatment cause them to perceive strong economic and social deprivation, making it difficult to establish close connections (e.g., loyalty, identification) between self and both organizational identities. Immediate high compensation is key to their decision to stay; once better money-making opportunities appear, they will switch jobs without hesitation. Additionally, economic exchange-based relationships easily make dispatched employees think "get paid for what you do," lacking work initiative. When dispatching and host organizations only care about "whether tasks can be completed" and don't value "how dispatched employees do it" or "what they experience," dispatched employees plan their contributions based on compensation.

3.6 Organizational Identity Outcomes

Dual organizational identity outcomes are not static. When a dispatch assignment ends and a new one begins, dual organizational identity undergoes a new round of dynamic development. The difference is that surface-level identification needs only include cognition about the new host organization, while family-supporting and stability-seeking needs and growth-curve needs may change in specific content. In each dispatch assignment, dual organizational identity outcomes are divided into two categories: dual organizational identity realization and dual organizational identity rupture (see Table 9).

Table 9 Coding Examples of Dual Organizational Identity Outcomes

Interview Data and Labels	First-Order Concept	Core Concept
“Overall identification, if they want to come, I can introduce.” [Identification] (SB-06-164)	Dispatching agency organizational identification	Dual organizational identity realization
“You feel you’re part of the company, well, you feel you’ve completely integrated into this company, you feel many things about this company are closely related to you, so it’s good, you feel you’re a piece of the company.” [Integration] (CP-08-130)	Host organization organizational identification	
“Then probably even less identification.” [Non-identification] (XZ-01-57)	Dispatching agency organizational non-identification	Dual organizational identity rupture
“Many practices of this enterprise are wrong, their own employees also complain, I cannot identify with this organization.” [Non-identification] (CP-31-178)	Host organization organizational non-identification	

Note: Due to space limitations, only partial interview data and labels are shown.

(1) Dual Organizational Identity Realization

Dual organizational identity realization means dispatched employees hold positive views toward both organizational identities. They are often in a comfortable or upward-developing positive state. Dispatched employees typically experience low job insecurity and can focus attention on work.

“Later, after I started working here... This company (dispatching agency) arranged everything well for me, both companies inside will arrange well... So you can work with peace of mind.” (CP-08-125)

Second, employees with dual organizational identity realization often attribute organizational identification to self-improvement and growth. They emphasize learning new knowledge, improving skills, and feeling work meaning at host organizations. A few dispatched employees mentioned dispatching agencies’ skills training, even if technical and entry-level.

“Those who finally stay are basically already team leaders, can endure hardship. From previous situations, as long as you’re careful and diligent, skill improvement is fast. We arrange a mentor for each rank, so they grow quickly.” (C-1-23)

An interesting finding is that host organization identification doesn’t necessarily accompany organizational belonging. This is especially true for employees dispatched through project-based systems. The main reason is they know they will leave host organizations after project completion and be dispatched to the next project. Maintaining a loose relationship with host organizations helps them quickly jump out of previous projects and adapt to new ones [43].

(2) Dual Organizational Identity Rupture

Dual organizational identity rupture occurs when dispatched employees’ dual organizational identity expectations completely break, believing they belong to neither dispatching agencies nor host organizations. Dispatched employees separate self from both organizations, expressing resistance and non-identification with both. Questionnaire results also show these employees demonstrate low-level dispatching agency organizational identification and low-level host organization organizational identification.

For these dispatched employees, labor dispatch experience is a terrible experience, not only failing to obtain corresponding self-improvement but potentially negatively affecting future career development.

”Before I went to ** (host organization name), I thought it should be a plus for me, this is my personal feeling. But if, after working at ** for a year and then coming out, well, if I were an interviewer, I would feel this external dispatch experience at ** is a minus... It’s not like you got gilded at **...” (CX-24-255)

Typically, dispatched employees with dual organizational identity rupture choose to leave. Among our respondents, 2 have left, 1 submitted resignation, and others are preparing to leave. Moreover, they developed strong negative emotions toward labor dispatch as an employment method, indicating they would avoid this method in future employment choices. Questionnaire results also show these employees often choose to work as regular employees in their “five-year career plans.”

“Really won’t dispatch in the future... Now just thinking about it, my mood

can't calm down.” (QT-30-145)

3.7 Dynamic Development Model of Dispatched Employees' Dual Organizational Identity

Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper] Dynamic Development Model of Dispatched Employees' Dual Organizational Identity

Note: OIA = Dispatching Agency Organizational Identity; OIC = Host Organization Organizational Identity. A = Dispatching Agency, C = Host Organization. Match-Match indicates OIA expectation-experience match and OIC expectation-experience match. Mismatch-Mismatch indicates both mismatch. Match-Mismatch indicates either OIA mismatch with OIC match, or OIA match with OIC mismatch.

This study constructs the “Dynamic Development Model of Dispatched Employees' Dual Organizational Identity” (see Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]). In the pre-dispatch stage, dispatched employees' family-supporting and stability-seeking needs, growth-curve needs, and surface-level identification needs constitute dual organizational identity expectations. Family-supporting and stability-seeking needs are often related to dispatching agency identity expectations, while growth-curve needs connect to host organization identity expectations. These three needs jointly form surface-level knowledge of dual organizational identity.

Subsequently, dispatched employees leave dispatching agencies to perform dispatch assignments. During this period, through asymmetric emotional, behavioral, and cognitive practices, they form dual organizational identity experiences, and dual organizational identity knowledge develops from surface-level to deep-level. Dispatched employees compare dual organizational identity expectations with experiences. When comparison results in “match-match,” they tend to establish social exchange-based relationships with both organizations, generating positive synergy that helps dispatched employees eliminate biases, remove invisible work obstacles, build organizational trust and dependence, and ultimately promote dual organizational identity realization. When comparison results in “mismatch-mismatch,” they tend to establish economic exchange-based relationships with both organizations, generating negative synergy that enhances dispatched employees' relative deprivation, causes work motivation deficiency, and ultimately leads to dual organizational identity rupture.

When comparison results in “match-mismatch,” it triggers dual organizational identity embarrassment. At this point, dual organizational identity interferes with dispatched employees' cognition, causing them to question their identity 归属—“Where do I belong?” To cope with identity embarrassment, dispatched employees adopt four strategies—identity isolation, identity rumination, identity comparison, and identity creation—to defend against dual organizational identity expectation-experience inconsistency, based on the relative importance of dispatching and host organizations in identity. Among them, identity cre-

ation, identity isolation, and identity comparison can adjust dual organizational identity inconsistency by reducing mismatch's negative impact or transforming mismatch into match, thereby solving identity embarrassment and facilitating dual organizational identity realization. Identity rumination, however, often intensifies negative cognition and emotion from mismatch, ultimately causing dual organizational identity rupture. Additionally, dispatched worker identity long-term vs. short-term judgment affects strategy selection. Employees working long-term through labor dispatch tend to choose identity creation when dispatching agency identity is dominant, and identity isolation when it's cooperative. Employees viewing labor dispatch as short-term work tend to adopt identity rumination when host organization identity is dominant, and identity comparison when it's cooperative.

Finally, dual organizational identity realization is not stable. When a dispatch assignment ends and a new one begins, dual organizational identity undergoes a new round of dynamic development. This is because different dispatch assignments involve different host organizations or position types, with related wages and benefits changing to some degree. In new host organizations, work content, processes, and promotion conditions vary. Therefore, although dual organizational identity mainly relates to family-supporting and stability-seeking needs and growth-curve needs, specific content differs based on actual conditions. Thus, new dispatch assignments cause some changes in dual organizational identity expectations. After entering the dispatch stage, under new host organizations and new dual organizational identity experiences, dispatched employees may still face identity embarrassment. At this time, previous dispatch experiences and identity defense strategies enable dispatched employees to quickly adjust and adapt to new work environments.

4 Discussion and Research Implications

Through qualitative analysis of interviews with 34 dispatched employees from different industries and other materials, this study constructed the "Dynamic Development Model of Dispatched Employees' Dual Organizational Identity." Findings show: (1) Dual organizational identity expectation-experience comparison has three possible outcomes: "match-match" promotes dual organizational identity realization, "mismatch-mismatch" causes dual organizational identity rupture, while "match-mismatch" is the main driver for dynamic management of dual organizational identity; (2) When "match-mismatch" occurs, dispatched employees fall into identity embarrassment and adopt four identity defense strategies—identity isolation, identity rumination, identity comparison, and identity creation—based on the relative importance of dispatching and host organizations in identity; (3) Identity isolation, identity comparison, and identity creation alleviate identity embarrassment and promote dual organizational identity realization, while identity rumination worsens identity embarrassment, leading to dual organizational identity rupture.

4.1 Where Do I Belong? Dual Organizational Identity Embarrassment

“Match-mismatch” in dual organizational identity expectation-experience comparison is the main antecedent of dual organizational identity embarrassment. Due to dual organizational identity’s complementary characteristic, “match-mismatch” means partial fulfillment and partial non-fulfillment of expectations, making it difficult for dispatched employees to fully internalize the matched organizational identity or completely discard the mismatched one, thus 陷入 “dilemma” identity embarrassment, not knowing where they belong.

Theoretically, identity embarrassment from complementary dual organizational identity differs from identity problems generated under other structures. Independent-structure dual identities often produce negative spillover effects due to competition for limited resources (time, energy, etc.) [29][44], for example, emotional exhaustion from fulfilling family identity needs reduces employees’ emotional resources for fulfilling work identity needs [45]. Overlapping-structure dual identities often trigger identity conflict or confusion due to content contradictions (values, goals, meanings, etc.) [46]. For example, accountants’ professional identity advocates professional autonomy and high standards, while organizational identity emphasizes control, authority, and organizational loyalty [30]; values of joint ventures where senior managers work are incompatible with parent company values [31]. Nested-structure dual identities have means-ends relationships, and identity problems arise when this relationship breaks and dual organizational identity differentiates. For example, in global multinational corporations, subsidiary managers violate headquarters guidance to make decisions more beneficial to subsidiaries.

Practically, labor dispatch is a three-party labor allocation method. Reducing dual organizational identity embarrassment requires dispatching and host organizations to simultaneously value dispatched employees’ organizational identity expectations and experiences. For dispatching agencies, this means not only doing basic auxiliary activities like wage payment and social insurance payment well but also continuously paying attention to dispatched employees’ daily work activities. For host organizations, this means expressing respect for dispatched employees’ work, creating an “equal treatment” organizational atmosphere, and shifting dispatched employees’ attention to work itself and self-improvement plans. More importantly, dispatching and host organizations should strengthen cooperation, using mutual supervision and constraints to prevent either party’s dereliction of duty.

4.2 Self-Defense and Protection: Identity Defense

Identity defense is a self-defense and protection mechanism triggered when dispatched employees face dual organizational identity embarrassment, including identity creation, identity isolation, identity rumination, and identity comparison. These strategies free dispatched employees from the conventional strong

relationships they should establish with organizations under regular employment [43], instead adjusting dual organizational identity expectation-experience inconsistency to escape identity embarrassment dilemmas, enabling the two organizational identities to temporarily complement each other and constitute a relatively complete dispatched employee organizational identity, embodying dispatched employees' wisdom in adapting to disadvantaged workplace environments.

Theoretically, previous individual-level dual identity management strategies often fall on a segmentation-integration continuum [29][34][47][46][48], belonging to inter-identity management strategies. However, in labor dispatch contexts, considering dual organizational identity management strategies under traditional segmentation-integration thinking has limitations. The main reason is that complementary identities need to maintain independence while playing respective roles to complement each other and generate synergy. This requires identity management strategies to treat both identities as a whole, neither completely segmenting nor integrating them. Segmentation destroys integrity and synergy, while integration blurs identity boundaries [28] and destroys specific roles under independence [3]. This study constructs identity management strategies from more detailed perspectives of attention control and explanation valence, belonging to intra-organizational identity management.

Practically, dispatching and host organizations can assist dispatched employees in beneficial identity defense. For example, when dispatching agencies have higher discourse power, for employees hoping to work long-term through labor dispatch, dispatching agencies should assist them in identity creation to help reshape identity. When host organizations have higher discourse power, they should pay attention to dispatched employees' emotional states and help with psychological counseling to avoid identity rumination.

4.3 How to Retain Dispatched Employees? Synergistic Effects of Dual Identity with Complementary Structure

This study unfolds the synergistic effects of dual organizational identity with complementary structure, which differ from those of the other three structures. Under independent structure, positive synergy mainly results from positive resource spillover [35], while in labor dispatch contexts, it results from functional complementarity of dual organizational identity. Under overlapping structure, positive synergy can be achieved through identity integration [28][48], while complementary dual organizational identity's positive synergy naturally emerges when both identities play their specific roles. Under nested structure, synergy results from means-ends relationships between high- and low-level identities promoting each other [5][6]. Complementary dual organizational identity synergy results from the holistic effect of dual organizational identity integrity.

In reality, "how to retain dispatched employees" is an urgent problem for most dispatching agencies. Based on this study's findings, we recommend that for

valuable dispatched employees, dispatching agencies should value establishing and maintaining social exchange-based relationships with them, promoting host organizations to build social exchange relationships with dispatched employees.

5.1 Research Contributions

First, the paper proposes that dispatched employees' dual organizational identity has complementary and dynamic characteristics, and re-understanding these characteristics is the prerequisite for discussing dispatched employees' organizational identity. Moreover, complementary dual organizational identity differs from independent, overlapping, and nested relationships in previous dual identity research, theoretically expanding dual identity structural relationships. Additionally, this study unfolds the interaction between complementary and dynamic dual organizational identity, interpreting positive synergy based on social exchange and negative synergy based on economic exchange, enriching dual identity research.

Second, this study expands identity work research. Focusing on the micro individual level, it inductively refines two concepts—"dual organizational identity embarrassment" and "dual organizational identity defense"—to explain identity problems and management strategies generated by complementary and dynamic dual organizational identity. On one hand, dual organizational identity embarrassment describes a new identity problem—the "dilemma" psychological state—different from identity problems triggered by other dual identity structures. On the other hand, the four defense strategies' premise is treating dispatched employees' dual organizational identity as a whole, while previous dual identity management research mainly focuses on inter-identity management strategies [17][25], typically generated under segmentation-integration thinking, which doesn't apply to complementary dual identity. This study constructs identity management strategies from more detailed new perspectives of attention control and explanation valence, enriching identity management research.

Third, the study constructs the "Dynamic Development Model of Dispatched Employees' Dual Organizational Identity," enriching organizational socialization theory. Previous research suggests newcomers' identities form and develop through interpersonal interaction and organizational socialization, with identification being an important outcome of organizational socialization [7]. However, these studies mainly focus on identity formation and development across different levels within single organizations and interactions between different level identities, lacking research on how complementary and dynamic dual organizational identity is constructed and developed. This study's findings have reference value for identity problems and management strategies of other dual identities with complementary structures.

Finally, in practice, we discuss how dispatching and host organizations can assist dispatched employees in coping with identity embarrassment and using social exchange relationships to retain dispatched employees long-term. These

implications have practical significance for achieving win-win outcomes for three parties and promoting healthy labor dispatch development.

5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

First, this study depicts dispatched employees' dual organizational identity development through qualitative methods, explaining identity confusion and coping strategies. Do dual organizational identity embarrassment and defense strategies differ across individual characteristics or organizational contexts? For example, this study's respondents are mostly 20-35 years old, relatively young, not including dispatched employees aged 40+. Do older (40+) dispatched employees have lower dual organizational identity expectations? Do they experience lower identity embarrassment? Also, compared with employees without dispatch experience, do employees with rich dispatch experience experience lower identity embarrassment and possibility, and do they have strategy preferences? Furthermore, which industries' dispatched employees more easily achieve dual organizational identity realization, and are these industries more suitable for organizing production through labor dispatch? Future large-scale empirical surveys can further test and refine the theoretical model. Additionally, interviews revealed that dual organizational identity embarrassment also changes within individuals. Identity embarrassment is most prominent on the day specific events occur, gradually weakening over time and with identity defense strategy use. Future experience sampling methods can further explore this.

Second, exploration of dispatched employees' dual organizational identity dynamism is insufficient. For dispatched employees, dual organizational identity dynamism stems from dispatch assignment changes. What specific changes occur in dual organizational identity when entering new dispatch assignments? What are the key factors causing these changes? Future longitudinal designs can track employees with multiple dispatch experiences to more deeply explore dual organizational identity dynamic development. Additionally, this study focuses on regular-employment dispatch, where dispatched employees mainly do auxiliary and substitutive work at host organizations with relatively long dispatch durations. However, for temporary-employment or short-term dispatched employees, they work at host organizations for shorter periods (e.g., 1-3 months). For these employees, frequent job changes make dual organizational identity dynamism more prominent. However, they have relatively less contact with host organizations, making it difficult to establish deep self-organization connections in "emotion," "behavior," and "cognition," and their knowledge of host organizations may remain at the surface level. Thus, they may prefer to maintain weak ties with host organizations, which helps them quickly adapt to changing jobs [43][49]. For example, maintaining neutral identification with host organizations, consciously avoiding extreme attachment [50], requires more detailed identification 刻画 beyond simple high-low degree distinctions. Meanwhile, dispatched employees' knowledge and understanding of dispatching agencies may deepen with more completed dispatch assignments, gradually strength-

ening their organizational identification with dispatching agencies. Therefore, under this scenario, dispatched employees' dual organizational identity may develop a new pattern, representing a very worthwhile future research direction.

Third, future research can 借鉴 this study's theoretical model to further explore organizational identity of dispatched employees in other models. In reality, China's labor dispatch has multiple models, including temporary-employment dispatch, replacement dispatch, and overseas dispatch [18]. Although differences exist between models, the special nature of dispatched employees' dual organizational identity—complementarity and dynamism—remains the basic premise for exploring dispatched employees' organizational identity. Attention should be paid to differences and connections between different labor dispatch models. For example, “Belt and Road” construction has increased overseas dispatched employees, but cultural customs, language, geography, and other differences may make these employees' dual organizational identity problems more complex.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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