

Exploring Identity Conflicts at the Workplace: Foreign Employees in the Tyrolean Hospitality Industry

Status Quo & Problem Statement

In Tyrol's tourism sector, foreign workers represent 64% of hospitality employees (WKÖ, 2025), challenging businesses to deliver an authentic alpine experience amidst cultural diversity and staff shortages. The growing reliance on foreign labour introduces complexities, as cultural proximity significantly shapes guests' perception of authenticity (Ferjanić Hodak et al., 2019). This research explores how foreign employees negotiate their personal and professional identities within this culturally coded environment and examines resulting identity conflicts.

Research Questions

Q1:

In what ways do identity conflicts arise among foreign employees in the Tyrolean hospitality industry, and how do they manifest within the four identification categories?

Q2:

How do foreign hospitality workers negotiate their identity in response to workplace expectations of authenticity in Tyrol?

Research Goals

This study aims to:

- Identify types of identity conflicts experienced by foreign employees in the Tyrolean hospitality.
- Explore the connection between identity conflicts and Elsbach's (1999) identification narratives.
- Understand the processes and influencing factors of identity work among foreign employees.
- Analyze how authenticity expectations in Tyrol impact foreign employees' processes of identity work.

Theoretical Background

- Identification Narrative Framework by Elsbach (1999) providing four categories for organizational identification.
- Performing authenticity (Zhu, 2012) as a catalyst for identity work and expectation to perform it as a form of identity regulation.
- Interplay of self-identity, identity regulation and Identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002): Employees actively negotiate tensions between personal identity and authenticity expectations, influencing identity conflicts.

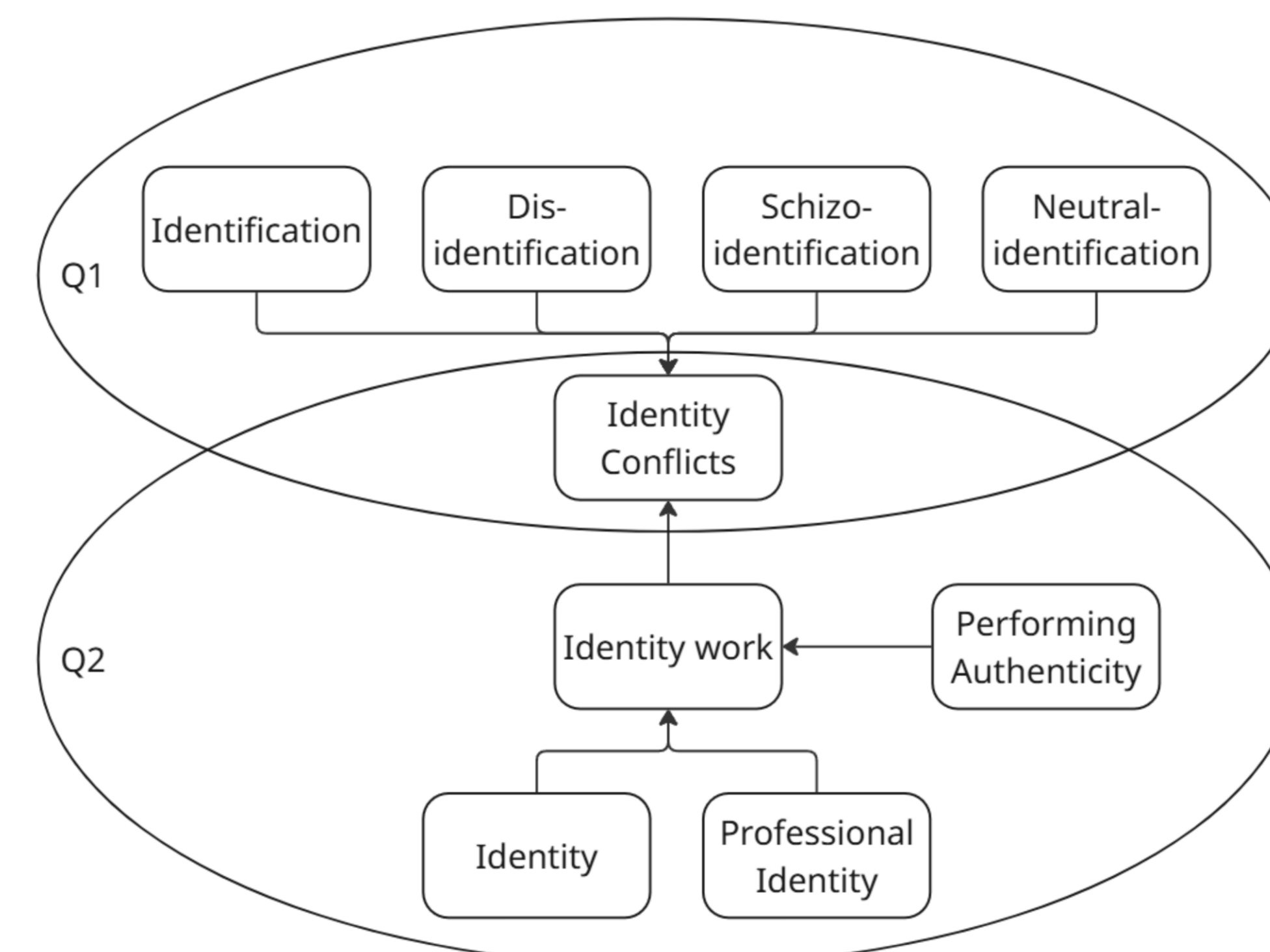


Figure 1.: Illustration of Research Questions within Theory

Empirical Research

Research design:

- Qualitative Research
- 12 semi-structured Interviews
- Interview guide based on deductive category system

Interviewees:

- Foreign hospitality workers in Tyrol
- front-facing roles like reception or service

Data Analysis:

Mixed deductive and inductive thematic analysis.

Key Findings

FINDINGS Q1

- **Eight distinct conflict types** were found, not limited to cultural background alone.
- Identity conflicts appear across **all four identification narratives**.
- A **reciprocal relationship** exists: identity conflicts both shape and are shaped by identification narratives.

Cultural	Non-cultural
Not fitting in	Professionalism vs. Personal Integrity
Conflicting Cultural Values	Over-Identification Spillover
Personality-Role Conflict	Ethical Value Conflict
	Work-Life Imbalance
	Work Intrusion into Free Time

Table 1.: Eight Types of Identity Conflicts

FINDINGS Q2

- Identity work is shaped by (1) the **degree to which employees base their self-concept on cultural heritage**, and (2) the **level of organizational identity regulation**, especially through rigid authenticity expectations.
- **Language and traditional symbols** (e.g., Tracht) mediate authenticity performance and belonging.

Findings highlight that authenticity in multicultural workplaces must be co-constructed, not imposed.

References

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