

Abstract

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| Title: Exploring identity conflicts at the workplace: foreign employees in the Tyrolean hospitality industry | |
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Abstract:

The present thesis explores the identity experiences of foreign employees working in Tyrol's hospitality industry, a region where traditional symbols such as clothing and language are central to creating an authentic guest experience. While these cultural codes contribute to the region's tourism appeal, they can generate identity conflicts for employees whose backgrounds differ from local traditions. The study investigates how foreign workers navigate this pressure and how identity conflicts emerge and develop in response to authenticity expectations in the workplace.

To examine these dynamics, the study adopts a qualitative approach based on twelve semi-structured interviews with foreign hospitality employees in Tyrol. The data was analysed using a combination of deductive and inductive thematic analysis, allowing for both theoretical grounding and the emergence of new insights from the field. The analysis was guided by Elsbach's Identification Narrative Theory, which helped to categorize identification narratives and explore their relationship with experienced conflicts.

Findings reveal two key influences on identity conflict: (1) the degree to which employees base their self-concept on cultural heritage, and (2) the level of identity regulation by the organization, particularly in relation to rigid rules and authenticity performance expectations. A reciprocal relationship emerged between identity conflict and the type of identification narrative adopted, indicating that narratives are not only shaped by conflict but can also generate or intensify it. Supportive and flexible organizational environments were shown to foster more constructive identity negotiation processes.

Overall, the study emphasizes that identity in culturally coded work environments is characterized by fluidity and shaped by interaction, expectation, and self-positioning. Foreign employees are particularly vulnerable to conflicts rooted in cultural differences when authenticity is narrowly defined. Promoting flexibility and open dialogue within organizational frameworks enables effective conflict management, fostering enhanced alignment and a more conducive environment for communication.

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