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A Black-Box yet To Be Opened: Multi-level Processes During Migrants' Organizational Socialization

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Abstract

Migrants entering a new country also search for belonging. Through employment, migrants work in organizations and experience socialization in these new contexts. Thereby, organizations offer migrants a wide range of possibilities for identification and are thus places to regain a sense of belonging. We rely on prior research showing what migrants experience during the process of organizational socialization to organizational identification, more specifically through (a) sense-making which (b) provides self-esteem and self-enhancement, and (c) reduces uncertainty. Furthermore, we also investigate the interplay of various in-groups (multiple cultures) and levels (micro, meso, macro) that migrants identify with. Consequently, we follow a cross-level approach to identity in and beyond organizations and combine migration, organizational, and intercultural research. Based on a qualitative interview study in Germany, we highlight how positive organizational identification results not only in companies' workforce retention but also in migrants' increased societal identification. Moreover, we emphasize the important role German colleagues play in the socialization process across various levels. They serve as socialization agents being individual interaction partners and team members, but also representatives of professional cultures and of the German society. In sum, our research yields important theoretical and practical implications. We provide interesting avenues for future research to uncover the complex interrelationships in more detail, open up the black-box of organizational socialization, and rely on interdisciplinarity in a complementary way. Human Resources Management could consider identification as a multi-layered opportunity, recognize the potentials of migrants' identification, and thus strive for the sustainable development of their competencies.

Keywords Organizational identification · Organizational socialization · Interdisciplinarity · Migrant · Multiple cultures · Multi-level approach

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Introduction

Migrants add value to organizations through alternative perspectives and problem-solving strategies. This is based on their different socialization backgrounds, e.g., differing education, language, and cultural knowledge (Hajro et al., 2017; Page, 2007). In turn, the employing organizations provide (financial) security and are also places for personal and professional development, new learning opportunities, and intercultural encounter (Louis, 1980; Reichers, 1987). Consequently, migrants and organizations are equally interested in *organizational socialization*: For migrants, socialization is the key to successful navigation in organizations in order to overcome uncertainty and stress and develop a sense of belonging (Saks & Gruman, 2012). For organizations, it is the sustainable access to migrants' personal and structural resources (Cerdin et al., 2013; Hajro et al., 2017; Tung, 2016) because a meaningful work context can also be considered pivotal to migrants' motivation to stay in the host country and contribute to the organization's competitive advantage (Abrams & de Moura, 2001; Abrams et al., 1998; Brickson, 2013; Van Dick et al., 2004).

The increasing importance of international migrants in organizations (Guo & Al Ariss, 2015; Ortlieb & Weiss, 2020) has led to a growing body of research on this group of internationally mobile individuals. Research has mainly concentrated on macro-economic and macro-political analysis and transnational concepts or micro level issues, such as migrants' motivation, status, and individual career paths (Al Ariss et al., 2012; Crowley-Henry et al., 2018; Zikic, 2014; Zikic et al., 2010). Other studies focus on organizational meso level and their recruitment, integration, and development of migrants' capital from an HRM perspective (Saunders & Nieto, 2014; Zikic, 2015).

However, current research on organizational socialization rarely *links* the implied micro-meso level processes to the wider social and socio-cultural context (for an exception see Alaraj et al., 2019; Syed, 2008). This is surprising because organizations, their cultures, and identities are embedded in (Granovetter, 1985; Heidenreich, 2012) and discursively co-constructed by their socio-cultural environments (Dyer et al., 2018; Glynn & Watkiss, 2012). This is why we want to shed light on the social dynamics between these levels of analysis and postulate that the two realms—the organization and society—cannot be approached separately (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013).

Consequently, we address two identified promising research opportunities in migration research (Hajro et al., 2021): integrating different levels of analysis and breaking away from disciplinary closure. This paper puts the isolated foci of research into relation. We provide a contextualized overview of organizational socialization, which is particularly relevant for migrants, as they still have to find their place in the organization. Therefore, we call for a larger research agenda and strive to investigate how migrants perceive organizational socialization and develop a sense of belonging via identification with the organization. We introduce the concept of multiple cultures (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004), i.e., several cultures within and transcending the organization (e.g., sub-organizational, but

also trans- and supra-organizational), forming different in-groups for migrants to identify with. In line with this, we aim to understand how the micro-meso processes within the organization are connected to macro level processes of migrants and their motivation to remain in the organization. The explicit focus we adopt on the multi-level interrelation from the migrants' perspective counteracts rigid paradigmatic and (disciplinary) one-sided categories of socialization and identification (He & Brown, 2013). Instead, this focus opens the "black-box" of organizational socialization and applies a reciprocal overall process contributing to migration and organizational studies while especially cross-cutting intercultural studies.

Accordingly, our research questions (RQ) are the following:

RQ1: What do migrants experience during the process of organizational socialization to organizational identification?

RQ2: Which levels (micro, meso, macro) and multiple cultures are affected and how do they interact?

In the next section, we present our theoretical framework on how organizational socialization leads to organizational identification and how multiple cultures are a key concept to better understand interrelated processes of identification that even reach societal identification. It follows the description of our research design and sample as well as the presentation of our findings. The paper closes with a discussion of our findings and gives implications for further research, and practical and theoretical implications, as well as limitations of our paper. A conclusion finishes the paper.

Organizational Socialization and Identification via Multiple Cultures

In order to grasp the interconnectedness of the different levels, this paper draws on the multi-level social identity approach. According to this approach, social identity is the individual's knowledge about belonging to certain social groups and attributing high (emotional) importance to this group membership (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Along with these elements, Cornelissen et al. (2007, p. 5) claim that "when people perceive themselves to share group membership with another person in [an organizational] context they not only expect to agree with that person on issues relevant to their shared identity but are also motivated to strive actively to reach agreement and to coordinate behavior in relation to those issues."

Migrants, having left their original context of socialization, are de-socialized and their cultural and social affiliations are weakened. They lack the opportunity for meaningful behavior (Esser, 1980). Consequently, they need to regain social belonging and orientation as well as stability in the new environment to interact and behave meaningfully. This is achieved through *organizational socialization* which refers to the process of introducing individuals to the organization and its distinctive characteristics (its culture, working practices, rules, stakeholders, etc.), transforming them from organizational outsiders to effective members (Chao et al., 1994; Tharenou & Kulik, 2020; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

In order to understand the transformation from outsiders to insiders, it is important to consider migrants' perception of this process. During organizational socialization, migrants increasingly identify with the organization because organizations "offer" possibilities to become part of various in-groups. The term *organizational identification* refers to the embeddedness of an organizational member in the relevant surrounding identities: Individuals want to understand who they are, who or what (other people and, for example, organizations) they are dealing with, and how they are connected. Ultimately, individuals then make sense of the social landscape that surrounds them (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashforth et al., 2008).

One mechanism that explains *how* the process from organizational socialization to organizational identification takes place is (a) sense-making (Ashforth et al., 2008); two other mechanisms related to *why* this identification takes place and thus implying basic human motivations that lead to *positive* organizational identification comprise (b) motivation for self-enhancement and self-esteem; and (c) uncertainty reduction (Brickson, 2013; Hogg & Terry, 2000).

In what follows, the three mechanisms are explained in more detail (see Table 1 for an overview) to better understand the analytical steps and corresponding conclusions in the result section:

- a) Research on "processes of sense-making [...] grapples to explain how people in organizations when confronted by discrepant events seek processually to negotiate and sustain meanings which permit coordinated rational action" (Brown et al., 2014, p. 273). The confrontation with organizationally alien structures, practices, symbols, and behavior as well as culturally alien host country colleagues might initially lead to a questioning of and pose a threat to migrants' social identity, a loss of orientation and belonging. The *sense-making* process gives migrants meaning to their experience in the new environment.
- b) *Self-enhancement*, similar to Brickson's (2013) concept of *self-esteem*, refers to "evaluatively positive social identity" (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 124). Migrants who are new to national and organizational contexts might strive to achieve positive group distinction within their organization, thus working to align behavior, meaning systems, values, practices, etc. with those that are organizationally accepted.

Table 1 Mechanisms leading to organizational identification

Identification mechanism/motive	Example
<i>Sense-making</i>	Learning and incorporation of practices, symbols, and behaviors based on organizational identity helps members making sense of their environment (Ashforth et al., 2008)
<i>Self-enhancement/self-esteem</i>	Sense of belonging to the organization is evaluated as improving members' self-perception/self-esteem (Brickson, 2013; Hogg & Terry, 2000)
<i>Uncertainty reduction</i>	Organizational identification as a sense of belonging reduces members' uncertainty regarding behavior, practices, values, norms, etc. (Hogg & Terry, 2000)

- c) *Uncertainty reduction* concerns the “need to reduce subjective uncertainty about one’s perception, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors” (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 124). The perceived salience of the socio-cultural aspects of an organization that reflects the host country might be a source of conflict for migrants’ national and cultural identity (Jameson, 2007) and make them uncertain about how to behave, what is right, and what is wrong. Therefore, the socio-cultural influence on the organization can be deemed crucial for migrants’ (dis-)identification within organizations. Migrants in their situation as a socio-demographic minority (Brewer, 1996; Brewer et al., 1999) might develop a stronger need to reduce uncertainty and thus strive for integrative social identities.

Migrants’ identification via these mechanisms proceeds through increasing belonging to different in-groups. We can equate the different in-groups with *multiple cultures*, which not only are given within and by the organization but also transcend organizational boundaries. Thus, multiple cultures can also be used to explain the impact of identification on society through the organization which will be shown in the following.

Sackmann and Phillips (2004, p. 378) acknowledge that “organizations may be home to, and carriers of several cultures”—multiple cultures—which might serve as identificatory platforms for their members (for an overview, see Table 2). Those levels of identity can be sub-organizational (e.g., a work team), organizational (e.g., the local plant or subsidiary), trans-organizational (e.g., a profession), or supra-organizational (e.g., the geographic region, location of the organization). This is to say that migrants can either build up a sense of belonging based on the building of in-groups with individual colleagues and groups of colleagues, for example, in project teams (“I am part of the BMW project group”), departments (“I belong to the certification department”), or informal groups (“Five of my colleagues and I form the company’s trail running team”). Or migrants can build up a relation to more abstract entities

Table 2 Multiple cultures within and beyond the organization (mainly based on Sackmann & Phillips, 2004)

	Sub-organizational Elements and interaction within the organization	Organizational Elements coming from the organization	Trans-organizational Elements which can be found in different organizations	Supra-organizational Elements leading to the wider context, e.g., the region or society
Example	Hierarchy Role Work group/team	Organizational culture Organizational practices and values Type of organization (SME; start-up; multinational; or social enterprise etc.)	Professions/occupational group Project-based or product-based networks	Industry Economic region Regional/societal particularities: values, practices, behavior, language
Research level	Micro level elements	Meso level elements	Beyond/in-between meso level elements	Macro level elements

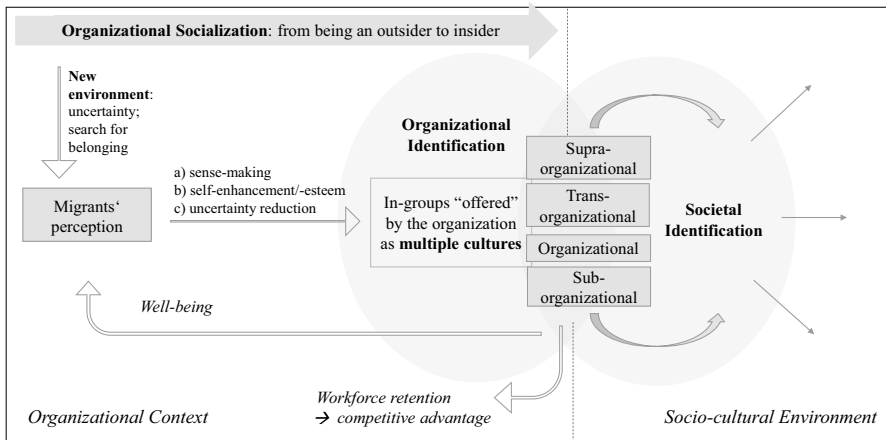


Fig. 1 Research model: processes and effects of organizational socialization

offered by their employers, such as the organization per se (“I am proud to work for BMW”), their occupation (“I am an automotive engineer”), or the branch (“I work in the IT business”).

Members can thus draw on a variety of resources in constructing their identity on various levels in their organization (Cornelissen et al., 2007). Consequently, institutional elements of the organization (meso level) and the internal dynamics of the organizations themselves (meso-micro level) can serve as *platforms* that migrants identify with. Similarly, in-groups/multiple cultures may be externally focused on the socio-cultural environment in which the organization is embedded (macro level). Providing “a source for defining, refining, and committing to deeply held values” (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 337), organizational identification has been found to be one of the main resources for *social identity* (Brickson, 2013; Hogg & Terry, 2000, 2001). Foreman and Whetten (2002, p. 619) call organizational identification a “subtype of social identification.”

Finally, in the organizational context, the literature highlights the successful identification with the organization (and society) as a convincing predictor for employee turnover (intentions) (Abrams et al., 1998; Mael & Ashforth, 1995).

Figure 1 illustrates the overarching idea of these processes.

Research Design

In order to find out what migrants experience during organizational socialization and corresponding identification, as well as the interactions between levels, we chose to conduct a qualitative interview study with 18 migrant interviewees. Based on interviews, insights into the perception and thus the lifeworld of the interviewees can be obtained (Flick, 2009). This corresponds to our research questions. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview guide allows for possibilities of asking follow-up questions and getting examples to ultimately understand the processes from the

interviewees' point of view. For us, the interviewees or individuals in general perceive socio-cultural reality in different ways within their own interpretive framework and therefore give their social reality certain meanings (Romani et al., 2011). This is especially true for culture and identity, as these are under a constant flow of interpretation (Cooley, 2010; Mead, 1934) through discursive (Alvesson, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) and material reproduction (Carlile et al., 2013) and adaptation to frames of reference (Goffman, 1959).

Accordingly, we situate ourselves in emic and interpretative research; i.e., we search for possible interpretations and social constructions of realities from the point of view of the respondents and include the context of the study (d'Iribarne, 2009; Headland et al., 1990; Romani et al., 2011). Therefore, we briefly discuss the organizational context, the sample, and the data analysis in the following sections.

Research Context

The attraction and retention of highly skilled migrants are important for national economies and their organizations in fighting a shrinking labor force. This applies in particular to Germany. Nearly 60% of German SMEs, also called the German *Mittelstand* (Logue et al., 2015), are struggling to fill positions for qualified personnel. Thus, an increasing number of SMEs are dependent on the retention of skilled migrants in order to tackle the long-term issues of demographic change (OECD, 2018). SMEs carry an enormous significance for the German economy in terms of employment, export, innovation, and quality of products. They are of great macroeconomic relevance: At the end of 2018, SMEs employed 31.7 million people out of 45.1 million people working in Germany (KfW, 2019).

We conducted interviews with eight companies in a regional area of the German state of Baden-Württemberg, characterized by a high density of SMEs that are leaders of their field in the global market, so-called Hidden Champions (Simon, 1996, 2009). Hidden Champions are among the top enterprises within their business sectors and operate internationally. Many of these Hidden Champions are family-owned businesses and all of them are largely unknown (hence "hidden"), despite their success (hence "champions"). They increasingly recruit highly skilled personnel from the international migrant workforce. As these companies are situated in regional areas and smaller cities, they have difficulty competing with prominently situated enterprises in metropolitan areas, mostly because they naturally record a higher number of migrant populations. The largest city in the region where we conducted interviews has only 33,000 inhabitants, while most of the employing companies are surrounded by cities and villages with no more than 15,000 inhabitants.

Within this regional context, migrants do not have a large array of chances to make social contacts or join migrant communities, nor are there extensive structural conditions facilitating migrants' settlement. Lacking these opportunities in their social lives, migrants might need to rely more intensively on their employing organizations.

Research Sample and Method

Sampling followed a theoretical sampling approach to the field, in order to collect a first impression of issues and topics in interviewees' lifeworlds which centered around migration and labor (Flick, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We conducted and analyzed 18 interviews (see Table 3). Thirteen of the interviewees were men and five were women, all aged from 24 to 53. Countries of origin comprised Bosnia, England, Greece, Italy, Portugal, New Zealand, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, and Tunisia. The duration of stay in Germany ranged from 7 months to 14 years, while the duration of employment in Germany ranged from one month to 13 years. Every interviewee held at least a bachelor's degree and the highest qualification possessed was a Ph.D. Fields included economics, business administration, marketing, informatics, engineering (software, wood, electronics), law, and music—skilled migrants are thus defined as those with a tertiary education level (Kuvik, 2012; Rottas & Givens, 2015).

The duration of the problem-centered interviews (Myers, 2009) ranged from 45 to 150 min. Interview questions explored individual motivation to migrate, perception of the workplace, perception of collaboration among colleagues, perception of the role of the organization in the socialization process, and the connection to the host society. Interview partners were given the freedom to speak freely and to narrate relevant experiences and perceptions. Interviewees' narrative passages were followed

Table 3 Overview of migrant interview partners (*refusal to provide further information)

No (inter-view partner, IP)	Origin	Qualification	Gender	Stay in Germany (in years)	Employed in Germany (in years)
1	New Zealand	B.Sc. Business IT	M	3	2
2	Greece	PhD Informatics	M	2	2
3	England	M.Sc. Economics	M	1	6 months
4	Spain	Dipl. Ing. (Electrical Engineer)	M	2	8 months
5	Spain	LL.M	M	7 months	1 month
6	Italy	M.Sc. Ing	M	3	2
7	Spain	Music pedagogue	F	4	2
8	Spain	B.Sc. Marketing/PR	F	4	3
9	Spain	Dipl. Ing	M	6	3
10	Spain	Dipl. Business Administration	M	14	13
11	Portugal	Dipl. Ing. (Wood Engineer)	M	2	3 months
12	Spain	Dipl. Ing. (Electrical Engineer)	M	3	3 months
13	Spain	Dipl. Ing	M	2	1
14	Slovakia	Dipl. Teaching	F	6	5
15	Tunisia	B.Sc. Informatics	M	13	4
16	Bosnia	Dipl. Business Administration Tourism	F	7	5
17	Russia	Dipl. Business Administration	M	-*	-*
18	Spain	Dipl. Business Informatics	F	3	3

up by two phases of questions regarding the correct understanding of narrated events and the theory-guided interests of the interviewer (Myers, 2009).

Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed using simplified transcription rules. Data analysis and coding were conducted with the data analysis software MaxQDA (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). In a first reading, transcripts were coded openly to figure out key areas (elements at micro, meso, and macro levels were identified). We then proceeded deductively and started with the mechanisms that lead to organizational identification that were discussed above and listed in Table 1. We further analyzed the preselected interview excerpts regarding these categories and deductively associated multiple cultures with the interview statements (organizational, sub-, trans-, and supra-organizational). We then inductively added categories that seemed relevant for the multi-level identification process (see findings, e.g., colleagues, onboarding measures, teams, professional culture, knowledge). Afterwards, we coded axially, followed by a cross reading of codes and transcripts among the three authors of the paper. Our iterative research process was thus of deductive and inductive nature (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019; Miles et al., 2014), with the aim of subjecting the researchers' interpretations to reflective and intersectional validation.

Findings: Opening the Black-Box of Organizational Socialization

The following data analysis is structured according to the selected mechanisms leading to organizational identification mentioned above (see Table 1). We demonstrate which elements the interviewees mentioned and thus perceived in response to our questions about their organizational socialization (RQ1). Consequently, we show the identification with the multiple cultures, as well as the different level interactions (RQ2). These insights are summarized in a table for each subchapter.

Situating the Self Through Sense-Making

The process of sense-making plays an important role for migrants in integrating and conforming with their organization. This is clarified by our interviewees who were able to make sense of organizational socialization practices. According to the interviewees, organizations attaching great importance to structuring and institutionally managing the onboarding process of new employees foster organization-specific knowledge transfer, and facilitate the clarity of assigned organizational positions, roles, behavioral guidelines, and activities. This evokes a sense of belonging for newcomers. Institutionalized onboarding measures are for example a joint introductory event (Interview partner (IP) 15; IP16; IP17), the presentation of new employees to the existing staff in the company's internal staff magazine, company-wide meetings or self-evaluation, and feedback instruments in connection with regular feedback meetings and courses in the German language to promote the language skills of the migrants (IP14).

[SME 1] tends to organize everything. Of course, there are also guidelines for hours, for work instructions and job descriptions, where everything is documented to some extent. [...] And actually that is not bad [...] one has clear frameworks. You can really refer to them. Okay, of course you talk to your colleagues: ‘How do you do this or that’ or whatever. But [...] the general line is there. (IP17)

Without information about their own role in the organization and an understanding of how processes work in the company, migrants would not be able to find their places and (occupational) identities in the new context. Sense-making, therefore, helps newcomers to position themselves in everyday work routines and organizational structures and to act meaningfully in their job and with their colleagues.

In line with this, the following interviewee verifies appreciation of expertise knowledge of colleagues (sub-organizational) providing information about structures, roles, and tasks and consequently enabling him to orientate himself in the new (working) environment:

When I need information on something from the operative side I go talk to my foreman. They can explain everything to me. That’s a big advantage here. Because those people work here since the beginning of their careers, since their apprenticeship. (IP4)

Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) additionally argue that people construct narratives about themselves as they “tell a story about how they came to do what they do for a living.” (p. 150), which allows them to define their identity and weave past and present experiences into their repertoire of self. For example:

I’ve always worked in the office and the laboratory. Now I work with my hands [temporarily]. I like that. I think that is important for an engineer, to know how everything works. [...] For example, now, I am actually manufacturing parts and that is important for me. (IP11)

This, again, supports migrants to make sense of their position in their new context and have a feeling of coherence, allowing them to act meaningfully and gain acceptance from host country colleagues.

Table 4 summarizes the beforementioned findings.

Resources of Self-esteem and Self-enhancement

The motivation for *self-enhancement* and the goal of gaining *self-esteem* were strong indicators for identity building. Individuals who felt that they were able to foster their self-esteem, enhance their self-confidence, or further their professional knowledge showed thereby a strong identification with their organization and were satisfied with their lives abroad.

[...] So now I work with my colleagues and I am kind of an in-house consultant here. [...] My professional knowledge plays a very important role here. (IP4)

Table 4 Overview of the findings with regard to sense-making (“(C)” referring to colleagues and “(M)” referring to migrants)

	<i>RQ1</i> : Perceived elements	<i>RQ2</i> : Identification with in-groups (multiple cultures) and perceived results	<i>RQ2</i> : Level interaction
Situating the self through sense-making	<p>Institutional leadership/organizational onboarding</p> <p>Expertise knowledge of colleagues</p> <p>Migrants’ narratives</p>	<p>-Organizational Transfer of organization-specific knowledge; facilitate the clarity of assigned organizational positions, roles, and activities</p> <p>-Sub-organizational (C) Understanding structures, roles, and tasks</p> <p>-Sub-organizational (M) Combine past and present experiences—find their place in the organization</p>	<p>Meso → Micro (M) link: Organizationally driven process of sense-making (migrants with passive part); institutionalized information absorbed by migrants</p> <p>Micro (C) → Micro (M) link: Colleagues provide insights into the organization (active); migrants absorb them (passive)</p> <p>Micro (M) → Micro (M) link: For migrants themselves and from within themselves, former and current experiences are compared to make sense of the new job</p>

Knowledge about structures, occupational roles, and tasks assists migrants to get started and gain occupational self-confidence. This makes it easier for them to be accepted in in-group organizational profession collectives. Furthermore, the role played by organizational collectives is illustrated by the following interviewee, who, when asked whether he felt comfortable in Germany or intended to change jobs or move back to his country of origin, answered as follows:

No, time runs fast and that means I enjoy it. And every day I am learning new things. Right in the beginning, one of the guys in the production line asked me to assist them with a little problem. [...] Those are experienced guys there, working 30 or 40 years at least in the production, they know everything. And then they ask ME. I really enjoy that! That makes me happy. [...] Every day I wake up with a smile. (IP3)

The statement shows that the respect that is paid to migrants in their job by their colleagues with regard to their job expertise advances their self-esteem and comfort. It also indicates that professional knowledge or technical knowledge can work as a mediator between migrants and host country nationals. The knowledge which the interviewee above brought into his work enabled him to gain some status among the long-standing staff of the company. This is an example of where common professional or occupational identities—“the guys in the production line” seeking professional advice—seem to override national or cultural differences and work as mediating and integrative forces (Albert et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2006; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). Moreover, these organizational profession collectives are a major resource for migrants’ well-being and identification with the organization, the team, or the department—underlining the idea of multiple cultures.

The role or the function of the organization as a mere “provider of work” is also an important resource for self-esteem or self-enhancement:

Actually working [for this company] gave me that feeling, that... I mean I wanted to come here and do all those things, which I have already done by now and this feeling, this pride, I have that now, and that changes everything. [...] Self-esteem, yes. The way I did that, I can also do other things [...] And in that moment, when they gave me a permanent contract I got this feeling of “OK, I did it!” That was my goal and I did it [...] now I can stay. (IP9)

The feeling expressed here shows that being able to fulfill everything that is required from a migrant by a company in a different country provides them with an enormous amount of self-esteem for their life abroad and backs up their decision to migrate. This positive effect is a relation between the individual and the organization per se (micro-meso link) (Brickson, 2013). It seems that the opportunity of self-enhancement is a central link for migrants between their identification and their intention to stay, as the following quote emphasize. When asked whether and for what reason he felt connected to or he identified with his employer, the interviewee responded:

Because [what I do] now is important for me, not only that I am learning, but actually doing something, too. And I think I am constantly getting better and

that is important for me. I think to learn and those things that you have learned, that is important for me [...] My idea is to stay as long as possible with that company [...] maybe become the boss one day (laughs). (IP11)

The quote shows that migrants can feel strongly about their employers if employers offer them the opportunity to enhance their job skills, increase their self-esteem, and feel valued by their organization. This strengthens migrants' feeling of belonging and emotional attachment to the organization. For example, equal treatment of migrants' backgrounds and associated education and training biographies are positively emphasized and appreciated. This integrating attitude of the organization provokes staff recognition and equality among employees, which is further intensified by opportunities for employee participation, co-determination, and responsibilities in the organization (IP17).

Another individual who showed a strong attachment to his employer ("I stay because of my job [...]and] the working environment" (IP6)) expressed an intense sense of belonging in his department, based on the integrative work of his colleagues:

So normally when you receive a question you don't answer direct, you go back to your colleague: "What do you think about this?" You make some sort of pool, and I think this is the main reason why we created a good team spirit [...] we are little bit like the policemen in the company so there is a strong working culture in the certification department [...]. And so this is transmitted from the older colleagues to the newer colleagues and this created a good spirit. (IP6)

Although in the company for less than 6 months, this interviewee already represents a strong "we" narrative, having developed a collective identity of himself and his colleagues as the "policemen in the company"—a sub-organizational level of identity regarding multiple cultures in organizations. The quote demonstrates again that the host country colleagues play an integrative role in providing migrants with job-related information and thus introducing newcomers into their in-group (Toh & DeNisi, 2007), e.g., a function they perform as a team. The appreciation and trust in migrants' skills increase migrant's commitment and their self-esteem. The continued reference to colleagues seems to be an indication of intense identification:

I have this other group of friends in my company and we meet once a month. And they are Germans, most of them. And this group always helped a lot. (IP8)

So I think the company plays a big role. You spend most of your time here in the company working with your colleagues [...]. And that can affect me here every day and [I] see the things that are normal here in Germany. (IP14)

These quotes, again, underline the integrative role of organizations and colleagues in building a sense of belonging, but as well, the identification seems to have a greater impact: Interviewees' responses emphasize the societal identification, e.g., "[I] see the things that are normal here in Germany."

Table 5 summarizes the beforementioned findings.

Table 5 Overview of the findings with regard to self-esteem and self-enhancement (“C”), referring to colleagues and (“M”), referring to migrants)

	<i>RQ1</i> : Perceived elements	<i>RQ2</i> : Identification with in-groups (multiple cultures) and perceived results	<i>RQ3</i> : Level interaction
Resources of self-esteem and self-enhancement	Organizational profession collectives: Learning new skills; developing and showing own expertise knowledge	-Trans-organizational Feeling of being needed; gain acceptance and respect from colleagues—well-being; stay in the company	Beyond Meso → Micro (M) link: Former professional knowledge combined with developed knowledge in the new context provides migrants with self-esteem Micro (C) ↔ Micro (M) link: Knowledge is further developed by interacting with colleagues—active interaction between migrants and colleagues (colleagues help, accept, and learn themselves from the interaction; migrants get help, show skills, and feel accepted) Meso → Micro (M) link: Passively, the organizational setting gives meaning to migrants
Organization as “provider of work”;	Opportunities of self-enhancement	-Organizational Having a purpose, achieve something; self-development; feel valued by the organization; emotional attachment; stay in the company	Meso → Micro (M) link: If the organization strives for equal treatment of all employees, migrants are enabled to change and move things forward; this is giving them self-esteem
Integrative organization: Equality among employees	Integrative organization: Equality among employees	-Organizational Opportunities for employee participation, co-determination, and responsibilities	Micro (C) ↔ Micro (M) link: Having a good team spirit makes migrants feel committed and trust so that they give the best for their team
Integrative function of colleagues/team/a function that a team takes (“policemen”)	Integrative function of colleagues/team/a function that a team takes (“policemen”)	-Sub-organizational (C) -Supra-organizational “We” feeling; commitment; getting to know German culture	Micro (C) ↔ M) Macro link: Getting closer in their teams, experiencing team support, and mixing private and work relationships mean getting to know German colleagues better and consequently getting to know German values and practices better (independent of the organization)

Resources of Stability and Uncertainty Reduction

Another central aspect of migrants' organizational identification through socialization is the idea of gaining a sense of belonging by providing migrants with *stability* and *reducing uncertainty*:

But [the job] helped me. That's exactly the point, that was the stability, my job, the people who I was with every day, that was my spot where... everything else kept changing, but that was my fixed spot, what I always had. And the relationship to my colleagues [...] they also work with me, and this relationship helps me. Not only the friends I had outside [the company], but the fact that I had people at work with who I have a good relationship, friends [...] We did stuff together after work. That, in the beginning was the most important thing for me. (IP9)

This statement touches on roles and communities in organizations that trigger organizational identification. It illustrates that migrants who move to another country, where they are uprooted and without a social safety net, strive for social integration into host country groups which they find in the organizational environment. One interviewee mentioned in particular the formation of friendships among colleagues developing into a group of friends and even described them as "like a family" (IP3). Thus, a stay planned for a short time was turned into a permanent one. Again, this creation of social networks within the organization furthers the overall identification of migrants with the host country's society as it is inherently interconnected with the learning of cultural and social behaviors, value orientations, and meaning systems (Heckmann, 2005; Heckmann & Schnapper, 2003). The quote shows core characteristics of a narrow formulation of identification and social identity: while the interviewee has a cognitive awareness that he belongs to a certain group of people within the organization, he values that group as an important part of his life in the host country, and points to the interaction with that group beyond organizational borders. As Toh and DeNisi (2007) mention, in this way host country nationals represent integrative instances by opening up closed social groups and integrating migrants socially and culturally (Esser, 2001).

Others have referred to the organization itself as provider of stability and uncertainty reduction:

This company is good, because we have some stability, we start at the same time and stop at the same time every day, we don't work on weekends. There are many people with a permanent contract. And you always have work, that is good. I feel safe here. I am not afraid. I have a lot of [foreign] friends and they might have better jobs than me, or a better position. But they are always afraid [of losing their job]. And I am not afraid. (IP8)

Seeing the organization as place of identification is inherently important to migrants. Having left behind most of their social and economic safety nets, stable employment provides them with security, not only financially but also with regard to

their daily structure, giving them the sense of stability and belonging to the group of employed people, and thus “belonging to the majority of the society” (IP8).

Therefore, uncertainty reduction is positively highlighted when the organizational culture of the company is sensitive to employees. For example, conscious recruitment and qualification possibilities for migrant workers were emphasized (IP17). Consequently, a respective organizational corporate culture can be the key to familiarity and uncertainty reduction. This extends beyond qualification opportunities into a more informal realm. For example, a motto like “We don’t just work together, we cook, eat, laugh, talk to each other—in short: our colleagues are important to us” (source: SMEs website) represents a company’s familiarity and awareness to not only formally but informally “guide” the socialization process. Informal practices may include sociable meetings that are typical for the region, e.g., eating roasted pork together, celebrating at the regional folk festival, or hiking in the region (source: SMEs Facebook presence). In this way, the company as a social system creates a strong integrative force via regional aspects, which not only reduces uncertainties but also promotes familiarization with the new culture beyond the organization in relation to society.

In line with this, as mentioned above, colleagues are important anchor points in work, which may be the center of social life for migrant newcomers transmitting working practices and behaviors. Consequently, colleagues can also be part of informal socialization practices as socialization measures can be *informal* mentoring programs to convey the company’s own processes and requirements.

I had a [mentor] from the team. If I had a question about the programs or the structure of the company, he helped me. (IP18)

Finally, the socialization strategies (formal or informal) help to better understand each other and therefore to prevent culture-based exclusion within the organization.

When identification with the employer and job satisfaction is high, migrants feel strong stability and perceive their organization to be a strong background, supporting their decision to migrate. This interviewee’s situation clearly shows the significance of identification with the employer as he adds:

It is hard to go back when everything runs that smoothly. How could I go back to Spain [...] and leave this good work here? [...] I would not go back. (IP12)

Table 6 summarizes the beforementioned findings.

Discussion

In this paper, first, we aimed to answer the question of what migrants’ experience during the process of organizational socialization to organizational identification. Second, we also asked about the levels and multiple cultures involved, and how these interact. We contribute to the research by showing that the perceived organizational identification can be structured beyond the conventional construct of an

Table 6 Overview of the findings with regard to uncertainty reduction (“(C)” referring to colleagues and “(M)” referring to migrants)

	<i>RQ1</i> : Perceived elements	<i>RQ2</i> : Identification with in-groups (multiple cultures) and perceived results	<i>RQ2</i> : Level interaction
Resources of stability and uncertainty reduction	Colleagues as constants in life (organization as family; after-work activities, etc.)	<p>-Sub-organizational (C and M) -Supra-organizational Learning not only organizational processes but also cultural and social behaviors, value orientations, and meaning systems</p>	<p>Micro (C) ⇔ Micro (M) link: Interaction with colleagues brings trust and fun; combining work and private relationships; the atmosphere is more relaxed, migrants are less afraid of doing something wrong, and they dare to ask more questions and take responsibilities. Migrants may be more flexible and creative</p> <p>Micro (C⇔M) → Macro link: Experiencing a “safe home” and a social network raises the confidence to stay and thus the motivation to get to know German values and practices better (independent of the organization)</p>
	Organizations as provider of stability	<p>-Organizational -Supra-organizational Sense of security with a contract and fair work hours; salary secondary</p>	<p>Meso → Micro (M) link: Organizations as places of economic security and routines which provide migrants with a safe environment</p> <p>Meso → Micro (M) → Macro link: Being employed in a company raises the feeling of identification with the working German society</p>
	Integrative organizational corporate culture: Sensitivity to migrants; onboarding practices	<p>-Organizational -Supra-organizational Sensitive recruitment, training possibilities, mentoring programs, and organized after-work activities create familiarity</p> <p>-Sub-organizational Colleagues provide information about processes and structures; becoming friends</p>	<p>Meso → Micro (M) link: Migrants get the feeling of being cared for; opportunity to be an active part of the organization—this reduces uncertainty</p> <p>Meso → Micro (C⇔M) → Macro link: Institutionalized formal or informal onboarding practices (mentoring, after-work activities, social events) lead to a better understanding of not only the organization but also the environment (region, society in general). Therefore, uncertainty is reduced</p>

organization based on multiple cultures. Thus, it becomes apparent that the process is a multi-level phenomenon. The most striking aspects are presented again below:

First, the various mechanisms leading to identification with the employing organization create the necessary cognitive, emotional, and evaluative bond. Thus, migrants achieve orientation and certainty concerning behavior, norms, and practices, and develop a sense of belonging. All these aspects make them feel comfortable in their new life, facilitate their social and cultural identification (Glynn & Watkins, 2012; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013), and back up their decision not to move to another country (Abrams et al., 1998).

Second, the interviewees emphasize the important role colleagues play in the process of identification. Daily interaction with colleagues enables individuals to build and expand social capital—the networks and relationships that people have access to and can rely on (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). It creates a sense of identity, security, trust, orientation, and access to multiple resources (Adedeji, 2019; Nonino, 2013). The role of colleagues as *socialization agents* (Klein & Heuser, 2008) goes far beyond the technical framework of socialization: “Supervisors and coworkers are the ones who bring organizational values to life through their actions” (Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012, p. 16). As seen in the interviews, through interaction, colleagues convey societal values and norms to migrants, making it easier for them to identify with the new society—the supra-organizational level. This enables meaningful action in both realms (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013), not only creating social identities with in-groups within the organizational realm (Toh & DeNisi, 2007) but also promoting integration on the “outside” into the societal realm. Local colleagues, therefore, serve as resources for social networks (Korte, 2010; Nelson & Quick, 1991), professional and organizational knowledge (e.g., Major, 1995; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993), and socio-cultural knowledge (Fisher, 1985).

Third, the former also applies to the organization: the findings demonstrate the impact that identification with the organization has on *social* identification. What at first seems to influence only organizational identification has important effects on migrants’ social identification. The emerging understanding of structures and processes through institutionalized onboarding events makes migrants feel comfortable in the new organizational context and this increases their motivation to stay and thus to identify with the society—the supra-organizational level (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013; Toh & DeNisi, 2007). For example, self-confidence and the feeling of acceptance in the organization lead to increased motivation for further organizational identification (“become the boss one day” (IP11)), and at the same time, it leads to a lower probability of leaving the country (Abrams et al., 1998). Onboarding events may let migrants get to know regional values and particularities; mentor–mentee interaction will directly or indirectly teach them how to act in the new environment. These aspects show the importance of active organizational involvement to have migrants identify with the organization and sustainably keep them in the company. Moreover, migrants with a fixed contract feel accepted by society, and this also creates a more worrisless and institutionally supported social identification process.

In sum, our paper is innovative because it applies a cross-level approach to identity in organizations that disassemble general knowledge about identity in multiple

cultures, thus extending insights into interaction across macro, meso, and micro levels (Cornelissen et al., 2007; Kreiner et al., 2006). We follow the idea that organizational and extra-organizational realms are interconnected; thus, especially in the context of (skilled) labor migration, organizations play a decisive role in individuals' choices and lives in the host society. While empirical research on identity in organizations abounds (e.g., Pratt, 2012), it is scarce on intercultural settings and the effect of organizational on societal identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1995; Van Dick et al., 2004)—even though it touches on migrants' needs and vulnerabilities. We fill this research gap.

Future Research

With this paper, we aim to give an overview of the many interconnected identification processes, and accordingly, we desire to give an incentive for deeper research into the individual-level interactions in order to open the black-box completely. For example, as interviewees frequently mentioned “colleagues,” the role of host country nationals as socializing agents should be addressed more in detail by future research (Toh & DeNisi, 2007) focusing on the spillover effects from work into non-work realms.

Socialization within organizations is an intercultural process of identity building with the migrants' employing organization (meso-micro level) on the one hand and their colleagues, the host country nationals (micro level), on the other hand. In terms of organizations, more attention could be paid to onboarding strategies. What effects do informal and formal measures have on the socialization and thus identification of migrants (organizationally and socially)? Are there different contexts (industries, types of organizations (start-up, SME, MNE, etc.)) or types of migrants (persecuted, economic refugees, self-initiated expatriates, etc.) on which the measures have different effects?

With regard to intercultural interaction between migrants and host country nationals, future research should shed light on the *negotiation* of identity between migrants and host country nationals within organizational contexts, the effects for both, and the implications for identification, in-group/out-group formation, and shared social identities. The intercultural dimension of identity negotiation prescribes a processual and dynamic understanding of micro level negotiations of common meaning and practices (Brannen & Salk, 2000; Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011). This might be a promising field of research for the identification of migrants with host country contexts. Identity formation will have a reciprocal influence on host country nationals' self-concept when migrants join their team, department, or organization. Therefore, future research should aim for empirical investigation of identity co-construction, i.e., the individuals' combination of an emerging “interculture” of meanings and practices (Brannen & Salk, 2000) with cognitive and evaluative attachment to the organization.

In addition, the potential of migrants should be further explored as soon as they identify with and feel a sense of belonging to the organization and to society.

Through the socialization in two (or more) cultures and, therefore, the possession of a specific combination of linguistic and (inter)cultural skills, as well as a wider pool of perspectives, migrants offer constructive problem-solving strategies and may thus become a success factor for companies (Barmeyer & Davoine, 2019).

Practical Implications

The beforementioned resources migrants bring into the company may provide the company with a competitive advantage. As we show in this paper, the organization can influence and even strengthen migrants' identification with the organization and society, leading to the retention of skilled personnel and counteracting labor shortage—crucial aspects for strategic HRM.

Organizations, and especially the HR department, should be aware that they provide resources for migrant workers that go beyond the dimensions of financial security and professional development; they represent a real social responsibility. Syed (2008) argues that especially companies and the HR departments play a critical role in developing and implementing work routines and structures which are socially integrative for migrants. The transmission of information about organizational structures and practices enables migrants to start constructing their self-narrative and offer orientation with regard to their new environment. This helps them gain stability and self-confidence, as they start to feel part of the host organization and host country.

The organization's onboarding offering should be context-specific. In any case, a mix of formal but also informal measures could be taken to combine free space and structure in order to enable migrants to develop a strong sense of identification across the different levels. Colleagues should come into closer contact with their newcomers; joint activities, teambuilding measures, or even mentoring programs may be assessed for migrants' effectiveness. In sum, these organizational measures will result in a higher identification and thus retention of labor. Consequently, the organization achieves development of the migrants' resources and competencies for the organization and the well-being of the migrants themselves.

Further Research Implication

In addition to the above-mentioned possible starting points for future research, we would like to point out once again the importance of interdisciplinarity. In our theoretical framework, we combine migration, organizational, and intercultural research. (1) We look at migrants and their socialization, so we situate ourselves in migration studies. Migrants have a harder time than German newcomers in German organizations because they are also privately torn out of their familiar context and have to completely reorient themselves. Our results are relevant for this stream of research because it is often focused on one isolated research level; in this paper, we look at the interaction of levels. (2) We also touch on organizational research, because the processes we focus on start within the organization. The organization is the

direct context that provides identification possibilities for migrants. We dismantle the conventional concept of organizations and introduce a new dynamic perspective on identification. Considering organizations as conventional, bounded framing, much of the current research focuses “inward” on the organization (Ashforth, et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2015). But, since all members of an organization differ along with a multitude of variables, for example, previous experience, personality, goals and needs, level of knowledge, and competencies (Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012), topics within the organization relate not only to the organization. As Farias (2017, p. 775) puts it:

...instead of reducing the issues of symbolic boundaries to processes of exclusion/inclusion, we need to explore their unstable and porous nature, in order to better comprehend how an idioculture is shaped and negotiated in day-to-day interactions.

(3) Intercultural research enables us to exactly do what Farias (2017) is suggesting: we implement the framework of multiple cultures, which allows us to break down and look at the construct of organization and the process of socialization in a more small-scale way. What is interesting about our results is that we can show multiple cultures in and around the conventional organization. These help us to understand parallel identifications with in-groups. So that on different levels the mechanisms from socialization to identification become clear. In particular, the supra-organizational in-group enables migrants to find their way into the broader social context, which would not be revealed without dissolving the boundaries of an organization.

In sum, interdisciplinarity and sensitivity to different research paradigms (Grosskopf & Barmeyer, 2021) may create complementarities and synergies for findings. It is thus possible to gain a more comprehensive picture of the problem or the phenomena in question and to gain insights that would not have been obtained with concepts from only one research direction. Therefore, we call for more interdisciplinary and multi-paradigmatic research, especially since the literature on organizational identification is classified as rather uniformly functionalist due to the dominance of social identity theory (He & Brown, 2013), and thus, it may be one-sided.

Limitations

Several limitations apply to our article. Firstly, the sample only includes positive examples of international migrants with respect to organizational identification. Although this can also be considered to back up our argument, research should also consider negative identification or dis-identification (Humphreys & Brown, 2002), including the idea of identity imposition (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and the failure to create in-group feeling or a sense of belonging, and the respective result for organizational identification (cf. also Anteby, 2013; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). Further investigation could determine how far a lack of identification and the missing of in-groups lead to separation or segregation within the organizational as well as the societal realm for migrants.

Secondly, our aim was to give an *overview* of possible level interactions. Nevertheless, our sample is small and partially unbalanced (number of years of employment, gender, and geographical origin). Qualitative studies, as described above, could look at the individual level interactions in more detail and expand and synthesize them through ethnographic studies (Eberle & Maeder, 2011) based on a more balanced sample. On the other hand, the generalizability of the results can be extended by quantitative studies. Thus, the findings could be adapted to different contexts and evaluated by adaptive questionnaire surveys.

Thirdly, the paper has only taken a snapshot of migrants' perceived identification and their needs regarding the organization. As socialization is a long-term process for migrants, this limits the results of our study. A longitudinal approach would mirror the actual process and dynamics of socialization and identification accurately and would be able to investigate changes over time with regard to changing processes of identification and identity building as well as intercultural processes of identity negotiation.

Lastly, in order to develop a more comprehensive study design, the perspectives of the employer, the host country nationals (see, e.g., Van Riemsdijk et al., 2015), and expert interviewees would allow even more conclusions to be drawn. This would result in comparable multiple cases (SMEs in the regional environment) with sub-areas (Yin, 2009).

Conclusion

The organizational role for the socialization of migrants is important, as organizations are the most crucial places where migrants spend considerable time and where they are exposed to multiple cultures. Organizational socialization and the resulting identification lead to a sense of belonging, increased self-esteem, and reduced uncertainty. The result is an identification with multiple cultures in the organization which reaches trans-organizational and societal levels. This in turn leads to migrants' sense of well-being and motivation to remain in the organization and society. Consequently, the organizations maintain sustainable resources, and the investment in migrants' development is even more meaningful.

In this paper, we have been able to show different level interactions and we have connected views across disciplines, allowing insight into the black-box of organizational socialization and its effects. Therefore, our paper advances a cross-level approach to identity in and beyond organizations and highlights the benefits of interdisciplinarity. At the same time, we call on further research to proceed and to develop this direction. In this way, we can achieve a constructive understanding of foreign labor in society, reduce professional and private discrimination against them, and achieve complementarity in living together.

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Declarations

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