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# "What is wrong with you?": Culturally-Shaped Interpretations of Professional Identity in International Organizations

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by

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“Differences simply act as a yarn of curiosity unravelling until we get to the other side”

— Ciore Taylor

Abstract

This study argues that globalization is an organizational communication process, which embodies the constant tension between homogenization and uniqueness of cultures in the global business context. The tension of globalization emerges through intercultural communication processes between professionals with different symbolic understandings and taken-for-granted assumptions of what it means to be a professional and act professionally. In order to navigate these different understandings, professionals need to negotiate "boundary tensions" or different assumptions about the "right way" to be a professional. Extending the conversation on identity, this study argues that all the different fragments of identities interact in the discursive mediation and performance of professional identity in intercultural and globalized organizations. Professional Identity therefore is a picture puzzled together by many fragments of identities and performed in context.

*Keywords*: Globalization, Intercultural (Organizational) Communication, Identity, Communication Theory of Identity, Professional Identity, Boundary Object, Tension

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## Introduction

In the age of globalization, the number of worldwide expatriates – people living and working outside their own country – amounted to around 66.2 million, with a growth rate of 5.6% since 2013 (Finaccord, 2020). It is estimated that by 2021, the number of expatriates will reach about 87.5 million worldwide[1] (Finaccord, 2020). Globalization is a phenomenon that cannot be stopped, but rather will develop even further in the future. In the business world, the effects of globalization can be sharply felt when people from different backgrounds with varying culturally-shaped understandings of what it means to be a professional and work professionally, collide in international, multicultural teams (Levitt, 2019, p. 326). Professional identity becomes visible as a different symbolic understanding of what it means to be a professional.

The collision of these symbolic understandings influences people to recognize their own socio-cultural differences. In order to continue organizing and avoid professional identity fragmentation (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Akkerman & Bakker, 2011), people need to negotiate these symbolic meanings and cross their own symbolic identity boundaries to collaboratively create a new professional identity. Globalization is thus an opportunity to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions of professionalism through the observation of intercultural interaction between performances of professional identities from different national cultures. This does not only concern global players and big organizations, but also medium-sized and small enterprises, which will eventually also be affected by the processes of globalization.

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[1] estimated before COVID-19

Intercultural communication is key to successfully navigate the different cultural assumptions of professional identity. Through intercultural interaction between individuals from dissimilar cultural backgrounds, professionals will engage in the complexities of overcoming communication barriers between these cultures (Young Yun, 2021; Aneas & Sandín, 2009, p.2) in order to continue organizing. This research seeks to establish what different cultural assumptions shape the professional identity as a type of social identity, what impacts they have in the work environment, how they are communicated by professionals across cultural boundaries in globalized business contexts, and how differences in professional identity performances potentially create new meanings for what "counts" as a professional.

## Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the economy hard over the last two years. It was projected that the pandemic would be the "nail in the coffin for the current era of globalization" (Legrain, 2020). In fact, many predicted that there would be a reversion back to regionalization (Taylor, 2020), a 13-32% decline in merchandise trade (World Trade Organization, 2020), 44-80% reduction of international airline passengers (Bureau, A.T., 2020), and a drop in foreign direct investment by 30-40% (UNCTAD, 2020; Altman, 2020; Altman & Bastian, 2020). However, recent research has shown that instead of the projected overall collapse of globalization, the only change was in the area of people flow (Altman & Bastian[2], 2021, p.1). In fact, the overall support

[2] Altman & Bastian, DHL Global Connectedness Index measures globalization based on data from trade, capital, information, and people flow

of globalization is high (Ipsos & World Economic Forum[3], 2021). In a worldwide study conducted in early 2021, 19,017 respondents[4] were questioned whether their country should open up more to the world in 2021 and the global average resulted in a positive disposition towards globalization. Seventy five percent of the participants responded with "agree," twenty percent responded "neither/don't know," while only five percent responded with "disagree" (Ipsos & World Economic Forum, 2021). In other words, globalization may fluctuate, but people expect that it is a normal part of our organizational experience today (James, 2021).

## Intercultural (Organizational) Communication in an Era of Globalization

Economic globalization creates a more inter-connected world with far-reaching impacts on international trade, economic growth, labor markets, and foreign investment ("Economic Globalisation – Overview," European Commission, n.d.). Globalization, however, is not an object, but a "process of creating networks of connections among actors at multi-continental distances, mediated through a variety of flows including people, information and ideas, capital and goods" (Szmigiera, 2021). This thesis explores globalization as an organizational communication process that spans space and time. Globalization from a communication perspective is a continuous, fluid, dynamic, and complex process that involves "the interpretation of sameness and difference – or, […] the interpretation of universalism and particularism" (Robertson & Khondker, 1998, p. 28). In business as well as in communication studies, both

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[3] Worldwide conducted survey by global market researcher Ipsos and the World Economic Forum about the percentage of people, who think their country should open up more to the world in 2021, organized by country

[4] Surveyed age: 16-64; 18-64 (USA and Canada)

advocates and critics of globalization have emerged. On one hand are those who interpret globalization and the formation of a more universal world as means to share economic interests and values to ultimately create a stable, interconnected global society. On the other hand, critics see globalization as an all-consuming force that destroys uniqueness and differences (Mumby & Kuhn, 2019, p. 334). As Stohl (2001) argues, in globalization the tension arises when "the environment and technical pressures on contemporary organizations to become more and more similar clash with the proprietary pull of cultural identifications, traditional values, and conventional practices of social life" (p. 326). In other words, the process of globalization is the embodiment of the "constant tension between homogenization and marking the uniqueness of local cultures" (Mumby & Kuhn, 2019, p. 334). I argue that the embodiment of this tension emerges through intercultural communication processes between professionals, who come to realize that their symbolic understandings of what it means to be a professional are completely different. As individuals work together (globalizing), they are engaging in intercultural communication when their different, culturally-shaped meanings for the right way to be professional come into conflict, creating a "dynamic push-pull tension between diversity and unity" (Levitt, 2019, p. 326). In order to continue organizing, professionals must navigate this tension and this new consciousness of difference in cultural identifications. These are moments of uncertainty created by globalization that require the embodied negotiation of meaning.

In recent years, the range of intercultural communication has expanded from research of simple communication patterns across different cultural groups to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic nature of communication patterns in the globalized world (Cheney & Munshi, 2017; Martin, Nakayama & Flores, 1998). Organizational communication scholars argue there is an urgent need to understand diverse macro cultures and their impact on everyday microlevel interactions between people of different cultures (Broadfoot & Munshi, 2014). The dynamic nature of intercultural communication on a microlevel responds to this call by focusing on the symbolic communication patterns by participants working with others from different cultures.

Focusing on intercultural communication as participants globalize, provides insight into the ways in which people embody and negotiate the tension between the organizational pressure to become more similar with the "proprietary pull of cultural identifications" (Stohl, 2001, p. 326). In other words, the embodied tension of globalization is a tension between the macro-organizational pressure to become similar in an organizational culture and the micro interactions between people with culturally-shaped local identities. In intercultural micro interactions, when people become aware of meanings and ways of doing things that contradict their identifications, this consciousness presents a choice in how to continue to communicate. People will be pulled to identify with their own socialized, culturally-influenced identity, with their organizational or corporate cultural identity, and to engage with another's cultural identity. Organizational members will have to consciously acknowledge and engage with other organizational members' diversity (Shenoy-Packer, 2017). Research on this cultural diversity in teams – summarized by Stahl, Maznevski, Voight, & Jonsen (2010) – has shown that it can be seen as a "double-edged sword" (Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008, p. 118, as cited by Levitt, 2019, p. 327), both an "asset and a liability" (Stahl et al., 2010, p. 705, as cited by Levitt, 2019, p. 331).

The complexity of globalization as an embodiment of tension created during micro intercultural communication moments between two or more individuals who become conscious of different cultural identifications of the "right way" to move forward, forces the individuals to re-negotiate their own culturally-shaped professional identities to create a shared hybrid identity (Jameson, 2007). In these moments, members embody globalization-as-tension when they interact in ways that pull them to identify with macro-organizational similarities and their own cultural identifications. This study aims to examine how professionals consciously consider their micro negotiations of the symbolic tension and the communication processes that they consider appropriate to continue to work together.

## The Many Dimensions of Identities

As with most concepts, it is not easy to define identity with one overall universally true definition – different scholars have found various ways to describe it, both simple and complicated. Scott, Corman, & Cheney (1998) conceive identity as "a structure, or a set of rules and resources enacted by members in activity" (p. 147). Allen (2010) argues, identity refers to "an individual and/or collective aspect of being" (p.11). Yet, this does not mean identity is simply based upon how people see themselves, but how they understand themselves in relation to others. Cregan (2012) takes up Allen's idea and broadens the definition of identity as "the sense of 'self' or personhood that is constructed within a social complex. It may be perceived solely in terms of the individual, it may be perceived in terms of group – or other – relations, but it is inevitably caught up in the interplay of our own and others' perceptions of the self' (Identity, 2012). In other words, people's identities are not only formed by them individually, but are always shaped by the social groups in which they engage. Expectations, relationship ties to this group, and conditioning in line with the group's values all play a part in how identity is formed. In an intercultural organization, when individuals' different culturally-shaped symbolic understandings of professionalism and professional identity differ, identities are called into question and each individual's professional sense of self is called into question and is in tension with another person's sense of professional self.

Kuhn (2006) synthesizes this idea further and argues that the concept of identity is a "concept of the self, reflexively and discursively understood by the self" in context and in relationship to others (p.1340). This means our understandings of identities – including professional identities – are a mental conception that has been shaped through communication (discourse), drawn upon in context, and reflexively performed through discourse. Thus, from this perspective, identity is not a stationary, unchangeable essence (Poole & McPhee, 2004, p.181). Rather, identities change over time as people gain experience and are subjected to different outside influences (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). Every person discursively emphasizes certain aspects of their own identity in different situations or changes in identities as they interpret and interact within different environments. Scott et al. (1998) describes how we all have identity types such as "student" or "mother" that have been socialized to include deeply held assumptions about the right way to perform these identities. However, how one performs their identity through discursive moves depends solely on the interpretation of the situation. Instead of viewing identity as fixed and stationary, identity is a "structure of resources (our beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge; our work experience; our knowledge about ourselves) and rules (norms, routines, and habits that characterize us) that people can draw on when they interact in social situations" (Poole & McPhee, 2004, p.181).

This idea of identity structures was developed further by Kuhn & Nelson (2002), who argue identities are "structural" in that identity is not only the medium or interpretive frame for discursive acts, but also its outcome of discursive acts. This means that identities are socially constructed, culturally-informed constructs that organizational members draw upon and perform in context with others. However, when the situation arises that introduces different social constructions for identity types, people tend to prioritize one identity type over another in order to “go on” performing identity and organizing. In these choice moments, people create new meanings for identities, including for “professional” as an identity type (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Nelson-Marsh, 2006). What stands out as something to consider, is how “professional” is a structural identity that is both discursive medium and discursive outcome of intercultural acts when globally organizing. Further, this study considers how professional identities are discursive mediums and outcomes under construction between people with different symbolic understandings of the “right” way to be a professional.

When it comes to identity, and ultimately the question of how professional identity is negotiated through micro intercultural interactions, researchers suggest at least four variations of identities are in play: personal identity, social identity, organizational identity, and cultural identity (Allen, 2010; Mumby & Kuhn, 2019; Eger, 2021, Hall & Du Gay, 2006; Kim, 2007). I argue each of the four variations of identity play a significant and influential role in how professional identity is ultimately performed.

The personal identity every human being possesses is the way they see themselves or as Allen (2010) puts it: “one’s sense of self in terms of variables such as personal traits” (p. 11). These personal traits are, for example, the “sense” one has of themselves and the ways in which they would describe themselves – such as “outgoing” or “funny.” These traits are interpreted by each individual and influence how they describe themselves to others. Although this part of a human’s identity is referred to as “personal,” it is subjected to the society in which individuals grew up and the socialization experiences of each individual. Due to the fact that all humans have a different amalgamation of experiences from childhood to adulthood, our personal identities are socially-shaped, but also unique and individual (Allen, 2010).

Social identities contrast to the unique amalgam of meanings someone attributes to their own personal identity. Social identities are socially constructed identity categories or types with social constructions that are shared across a society. Similar to the conception of identities as types (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002), Allen (2010) develops the concept of social identity as an identity category with stereotyped and often prejudicial symbolic meanings and expectations for behavior. For example, “student” is a social identity category with stereotypical symbolic understandings that not only shape how an individual performs this identity in context but is also a social identity category for a group. This is a relatively neutral identity category. However, other social identity categories such as race, gender, ability, or sexuality are social identity categories that matter because they are socially constructed with symbolic meanings of the privilege dominant groups have at the expense of nondominant groups (Allen, 2010). For example, “woman” is a social identity category with symbolic meanings and expectations for the “right way” to perform this identity socially. When social identity categories are no longer neutral and are constructed with discriminatory meanings, they also come with behavioral expectations by the dominant identity categories. For example, to be a woman in a professional setting is not a neutral social identity, but includes assumptions and beliefs socialized into the collective consciousness that organizing is gendered and masculine in its gender assumptions. Professional, then, may not be a neutral social identity type when performed by a woman, a different race, by anyone disabled, or by someone with a nondominant sexual orientation (Poole & McPhee, 2004).

To further clarify social identity, Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) theorists, like Allen (2010), argue identity is defined as “a joining point between the individual and the society, and communication is the link that allows this intersection to occur” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010, p.

103). Scholars of this theory see identity as a form of "code," which defines a person's membership to various groups or communities. This code consists of "symbols (e.g., certain kinds of clothing or possessions), words (self-descriptions or things you commonly say), and the meaning that you and others ascribe to these things" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010, p.103).

Additionally, identity is something fluid and emergent, an "ongoing story we tell about ourselves" (Freud, 2001, p. 336; as cited by Silva & Sias, 2010, p. 146), while simultaneously being stationary to a certain degree. A person has a so-called "core identity," similar to a personal identity, that will not change, at least not too much, while the other parts of this identity undergo emergent processes (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010, p. 103). Therefore, this study aims to understand how micro interactions act as "codes" of discursive symbols that, when performed differently, introduce a moment where individuals become aware of not only neutral differences in social constructions, but also non-neutral social constructions.

How do these moments appear in globalized contexts? According to CTI, a person's "sense of identity" is what is formed by what they have learned and internalized – the so-called "subject self." These learned meanings are then projected onto other people whenever they communicate. The latter process is referred to as what creates the "ascribed self" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010, p. 103) or other people's external perception of a person. In other words, every individuals' sense of identity consists of their learned and internalized meanings (subject self), which are projected onto others in every communication process and subsequently create the ascribed self (p. 103). With every social interaction, individuals internalize other individuals' views and actions, while simultaneously showing their own sense of identity. In globalized contexts the differences between what is perceived as one's own identity and the other person's identity during micro interactions are apparent, introducing significant moments of awareness.

As each individual performs and communicates their own identity, they project this identity onto their communication partner, who in turn does the same. This results in a clash of different identities and subsequent tensions.

These two dimensions – personal and ascribed – interact in a series of four layers or tiers that emerge in interaction in different situations: personal, enactment, relational, and communal.

The **personal** layer consisting of one's sense of oneself within a social situation. It refers to a person's own concept of themselves. The **enactment** layer refers to other people's insights about oneself based on what one does, what one has, and how one acts. This layer can be defined as performed or projected identity. The **relational** layer defines who a person is in relation to other individuals. Here, identity is not strictly individual but rather attached to the relationship itself. The **communal** layer is attached to a larger group or culture. One's own identity is formed and ultimately created predominantly by larger community. (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010, p. 103). All four layers are important to understand other people's identity performances. Although different cultures emphasize different layers – for example, in Asian cultures the communal layer plays a more prominent role in forming the identities of members of their social group than Western cultures – all four layers are ever present and interpenetrated. It is ultimately impossible to separate one layer from the other; a person's own concept of self will always be tied to the relations this person has. These four, interdependent dimensions all play a significant role in the performance and re-formation (and potential transformation) of social identity categories.

There are two other important influences in identity performances that matter for intercultural communication in global organizational contexts: Organizational identity and cultural identity. Over the last century, organizations have shifted from a more localized, agrarian economy to a globalized, knowledge-work economy (Mumby & Kuhn, 2019). Organizations act not only as sources of income, but also as "key sites of human identity formation in modern society" (Mumby & Kuhn, 2019, p.53). Several scholars such as Beech (2011), Wrzesniewski, LoBuglio, Dutton & Berg (2013), and Kuhn (2006) have long since realized that organizations are not merely places of work, but simultaneously function as sites "for the creation of personal identity" (Mumby & Kuhn, 2019, p.53). As with the previously discussed categories of identity, a relationship between personal, social, and organizational identity can be found.

Organizational identity has a rather broad scope of interpretation. Some of the most important work on organizational identity has been conducted in the 1960s by the so-called "French School of Identity," which worked not only on a clear definition of the concept of corporate identity but also on a "robust theory and an adapted methodology" (Moingeon & Ramanantsoa, 1997, p.383). For the French School, organizational identity is a "set of interdependent characteristics of the organization that give it specificity, stability, and coherence" (Larçon & Reitter, 1979, p. 43). One could call it a core identity or organizational backbone.

Researchers such as Dutton & Dukerich (1991), Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994), Gray (1986), and Kennedy (1977) took up this initial concept and added the idea of organizational identity not only being the backbone of an organization, but also a concept related to the idea of the corporate/ organizational image, as it addresses the employees' own perception of their organization (Moingeon & Ramanantsoa, 1997, p.385).

Another scholar – Eger (2021) – takes the idea of organizational identity to a different level and instead of only talking about organizational identity as a whole, distinguishes the concept into two sub-concepts, playing together – "organizational identity" and "organizational identification". The former refers to how members of an organization think of and communicate "who they believe they are as an organization" (p.255). Additionally, the communication practices through which employees' beliefs and sense of belonging are constructed and sustained, play a major role of organizational identity (p.255). Organizational identification, the "extent to which an organizational member shares and expresses the organization's values and decision premises" (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987, as cited by Silva & Sias, 2010, p. 145), in this research acts as a process where individuals draw meaning about who they are and how they may make decisions that benefit organizations because of their identification (Eger, 2021, pp. 255-256). This research moves beyond focusing simply on describing identity but engages the relationship between identity and identification as it involves organizations. Identity, then, is a "conceptual advance over corporate culture because it permits researchers to explain in more depth the dynamics of organizations" (Moingeon & Ramanantsoa, 1997, p. 385). Instead of only being lifeless figures re-enacting corporate culture, employees play a vital role in forming and advancing the organization's essence/identity, which gives them the power to ultimately initiate and perform changes when confronted with other people's symbolic understandings of professional identity to create a new hybrid identity to work together. On the other hand, the classical research on culture is necessary to provide a "detailed description of the way an organization works" (Moingeon & Ramanantsoa, 1997, p. 385).

All forms of identity are strongly linked with one another, each aspect influencing the others as well as being influenced by the others. Including organizational identity explores how people's identities (as discursively mediated and performed) emerge at work – influenced by an organizations' own identity. As Mumby & Kuhn (2019) state, "Our relationship to work shapes our identities as well as our sense of how meaningful our lives are" (p. 357).

In a globalized organization in which intercultural communication engages and transforms identity, one must consider cultural identity. The afore mentioned Communication

Theory of Identity (CTI) follows the premise of identity being "in large measure cultural, and peoples of the world vary in how they construe themselves" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010, p. 102). A person's cultural identity – how people group up in their countries and cultures – shapes the values, beliefs, and assumptions about the right way to perform identities-in-context.

For example, in Asian countries, where the wellbeing and success of the collective plays a way bigger role than the individual member, a person's identity is naturally formed by this ideal. Therefore, people from this cultural background may think and act in a communal and collectivistic way (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010, p. 102). On the other hand, in Western societies, the individual plays the biggest role. People from this background form their identity completely different than people from Asian societies. Here "identity is understood as individual, and one sees the self in opposition to, or as different from, other identities" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010, p. 102).

Researcher Stella Ting-Toomey took up the idea of socially constructed and influenced identity and broadened the concept with a special focus on identity being negotiated in interaction with people in a cross-cultural setting. She suggests that "identities, or self-reflective images, are created through negotiation whenever we assert, modify, or challenge our own or other's self-identifications" (as cited in Littlejohn & Foss, 2010, p. 104). In short, when people within globalized organizational settings interact, they are drawing from personal, social, organizational, and cultural identifications or interpretative frames to guide how to interact. Identity negotiation is always a complex process then, but is made more complex when people from different cultures draw from different, taken-for-granted social constructions and expectations for how to interact professionally. This study extends the conversation on identity to argue that all these different fragments of identities interact in the discursive mediation and performance of professional identity in intercultural and globalized organizations. Some aspects may play a bigger role than others, but nevertheless, professional identity is a picture puzzled together by many fragments of identities and performed in context.

**Professional Identity as a Boundary Object**

After defining the basics of what identity is, the next question naturally is: why examine conceptions of professionalism and aim to understand "professional" as an identity category? As Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) describe, professionalism is a set of "unacknowledged cultural assumptions" with "multiple, ambiguous, and often conflicted meanings of the term" (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007, p. 147). This means not only that professionalism is something often subconsciously perceived but can also frequently be misinterpreted or understood. Additionally, professionalism is also tied to a society and its cultures, norms, and values (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007). Therefore, it is always subjective as well as subjected to others during interaction. In this study, the focus on professional identity aims to explore how the unacknowledged assumptions of identity become visible when interacting with others with different assumptions about what it means to be a professional.

Many scholars explore what makes for a "good" professional. For example, Nygren & Stigbrand (2014) identify different values and traits "good" and "professional" journalists should have. Among them are, for example sincerity, accuracy, a sense of justice, a talent of stimulating new ideas etc. (pp. 849-850). These traits are important and professional for journalists but might not be the same for other areas of work. Others argue that to be professional in non-profit organizations contrasts to classical profit-oriented organizations. A good non-profit professional identifies with the "social, philosophical, moral, or religious values of their founders and supporters" and will be "guided by and promote higher values in their work" (Barge & Hackett, 2003, p. 35; see also Jeavons, 1992, pp. 404, 407). Therefore, to be considered professional in the nonprofit sector, a higher degree of morality and honesty is expected of a professional identity. Nygren & Stigbrand (2014) suggest professional identity is not only one dimension but consists of many. It has both an internal and an external dimension. The internal dimension regards "questions about how individuals look at themselves" (Nygren & Stigbrand, 2014, p. 843) and puts its focus on the assessment of what types of competences, character traits, and values are important for the individual to be considered professional (p. 843).

Much of the work on professional identity described above assumes there are universal traits, qualities, or competencies that constitute this identity. However, this approach would require that researchers provide a taxonomic list of all of the correct traits, qualities, and competencies within all different organizational contexts. Professional identity is much more complicated than the acquisition of traits, values, or competencies (Wiles, 2013, p. 864). Rather, professional identity is a constructed social category or a "collective sense to convey the identity of the profession" and a process "in which each individual comes to have a sense of themselves" (Wiles, 2013, p. 865).

Professional identity – the view of what it means being part of a profession – is a combination of personal, social, organizational, and cultural identity categories. Professional identity is different than organizational identity because it has to do more with the type of work, and less to do with the organization. Every profession has its own rules and regulations, all influenced by where they come from, how they have been formed, and what is expected from them. For example, to "be" a journalist, academic, lawyer, doctor, or teacher, is to identify with not only how to do the work, but with the symbolic sense discursively created and performed when organizing.

In global organizations when two different, taken-for-granted understandings of professional identity collide, there is a moment of consciousness and clarity that offers the opportunity to more deeply understand how identities are discursively performed and transformed. In other words, professional identity in the globalized workplace becomes visible as a symbolic understanding of the culturally-shaped self. As such it serves as a boundary object – a construct or artifact that emerges when at least two different organizational identities collide when organizing and working together (Nelson-Marsh, 2017), adding to Star & Griesemer (1989), who define boundary object as

> both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. They are weakly structured in common use and become strongly structured in individual-site use (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p.297, as cited in Nelson-Marsh, 2017).

Existing research on boundary objects typically emphasize how a boundary object is thought of as an **idea** or **artifact/construct** with different interpretations, that emerge when at least two of these different interpretations collide in micro interactions and the boundaries are talked “into existence” (Nelson-Marsh, 2017, p.10) by participants. These boundaries are symbolic, socio-cultural differences “leading to discontinuity in action or interaction” (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011, p. 133). When these two dissimilar symbolic boundaries collide against each other, they become visible. Expanding the idea of boundary object being an artifact or idea, this research adds professional identity as a boundary object, that emerges in micro interactions between (at least) two professionals with dissimilar interpretations of what it means to be a professional that requires the formation of a shared understanding. In order to move forward, both people need to explore, interculturally, their different understandings in order to eventually coordinate their actions and patterns of behavior to construct a new and collectively understood symbolic meaning of professionality – a hybrid professional identity (Nelson-Marsh, 2017; Jameson, 2007).

In this moment, professionals engage in intercultural boundary crossing. These moments are impactful, and likely to become significant moments for individuals (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011, p. 132). Due to the world's increasing globalization, the symbolic boundary crossing experience provides a rich opportunity to understand how people make sense of, and transform, a professional identity as an identity category. This study therefore asks the following research question:

**Research Question**

**RQ1: How does professional identity emerge as a boundary object in intercultural communication in international organizations.**

## Methods

To investigate this research question, this study engaged qualitative research methods. This study focused on collecting the accounts of professionals regarding moments when they became aware that another has a different understanding of how to perform professionalism. Qualitative methods focus on "people's careful consideration of the ways in which their past experiences, points of view, and roles impact their actions with, and interpretations of, any particular interaction or context" (Tracy, 2019, p.2). Listening to participants as they described the moments they became aware of the deep, symbolic differences in professional identity involves not only surface descriptions. Rather, there is a need to investigate the small discursive cues and codes participants utilize that inform how they navigate professional identities as a boundary object.

This study, therefore, engaged professionals across different organizations in conversations about the moment they realized their different understandings of professional identities and how they recount how they developed a new understanding with others in order to continue organizing. The data collection and analysis focused on the discursive tools such as language modalities used as participants construct new meanings for professional identity. The goal was to analyze what language was used to describe working with others from different cultures within an organization and their contrasting symbolic understandings of professionalism. The aim was to examine how professional identity is lived, communicated, and experienced in globalized organizations.

**Research Participants**

Participants in this study included knowledge workers across industries – including Oil & Gas, IT, Automobile, Chemical, Consulting, Navigation & Technology etc.– of different organizations working with international colleagues and customers. The participants were found using convenient sampling and the snowball sampling or chain-referral-sampling technique and were recruited through email. This study involved 19 professionals, 5 female and 14 male, working in globalized contexts. The participants can be roughly divided into two age groups: (1) ages between 27 and 39, and (2) ages between 47 and 67[5]; as well as into two groups regarding

[5] More than half of the participants fall into the second age group

their time within their respective organization: (1) less than 15 years, and (2) more than 15 years. Furthermore, one participant identified as US-American, one as South African-Indian, and one as Croatian-German, while the other 16 participants can be identified as German.

In order to qualify for this study, participants met three criteria: (1) they work in a non-production-based position, (2) they work in a globally operating organization, and (3) they work closely with colleagues and customers from different countries.

While participant-observation methods would have been ideal in studying identity performance and negotiation, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ensuing restrictions to conduct research on-site, and the new alternative of home office, this research was conducted according to health and social distancing standards. Therefore, two qualitative methods were used that did not require to engage in-person, unless otherwise requested by the participants.

First, semi-structured interviews focused on eliciting accounts from participants about their professional identity as it emerges at work. These interviews took mainly place online through a secure Zoom link, only two participants preferred to meet in-person. Second, document collection focused on organizational documents that include organizational identity information (such as mission statement websites or press releases, for example). All research methods described above aim to understand the role professional identity plays in the professional setting of organizations in the global business world.

## Data Collection Methods

### Semi-Structured Interviews

The main data collection method for this study was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to be more flexible with questions, follow-up questions and probes, than structured or highly structured interviews. A semi-structured interview is, both as data collection strategy as well as an independent research method, used in order to “ascertain participants’ perspective regarding an experience pertaining to the research topic” (McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p. 1). So, in other words, the goal of semi-structured interviews is to gain an understanding or inter-view of participants’ subjective responses regarding their own lived experiences (Tracy, 2019).

Semi-structured interviews are semi-standardized interviews, conducted by using an interview guide, which is comprised of already predetermined, open-ended “primary questions” (McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p.4) and followed by probes, with the goal to “elicit unstructured responses and generate discussions” (McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p.4). Although, these questions should typically be asked of each interviewee in the same systematic order and manner, the interviewer is given the freedom to slightly bend the rules and diverge from the script (McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p.4). This variability needs to be done within in certain limits and always needs to focus on the replicability aspect of the semi-structured interviews. While the questions might not be 100% the same in the way they are phrased, they still need to be rephrased in a way to convey an equivalence of meaning for all interviewees and elicit for the topic relevant information/ clarification (McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p. 5; Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013; Denzin, 1989).

Additional to the relative freedom in which the questions are asked, another important aspect of semi-structured interviews were probes. These probes may be scripted to appear after certain questions, or unscripted and thus arising in an improvisational manner within the flow of the dialog/ discussion/ interview. Probes were intended for the purpose of broadening and elaborating participants' initial responses to questions (Berg, 1989, p. 5).

Although, semi-structured interviews do have this rather detailed interview guide, these open-ended interview questions focus on the responses of participants and allows them to freely respond to them, while the researcher has room to probe the participants' responses. This mix of structure in form of interview guide and flexibility in the responses is what constitutes the semi-structured aspect of qualitative interviewing. While giving relevance to the topic, semi-structured interviews manage to also remain responsive to each participant (Bartholomew, Henderson, & Marcia, 2000; McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p.1).

This study conducted descriptive/divergent semi-structured interviews, with the goal to contrast different perspectives of different groups of "knowers" (McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p. 4). Epistemologically, this type of interview "privileges the knower and seeks to discern their contrasting perspectives and experiences" (p.4). Known research of this type of semi-structured interviews are *Essences and Imperatives: An Investigation of Technology in Childbirth* (Kornelson, 2005), *Attitudes toward postmenopausal long—term hormonal therapy* (Kolip, Hoefling-Engels, & Schmacke, 2009), and *More than adding a T: American lesbian and gay activists' attitudes towards transgender inclusion* (Stone, 2009) (as cited by McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p. 4).

Semi-structured interviews have many advantages, especially for topics in which participants' experiences and own views on things play a vital role. By using this style of interviewing, the researcher has more leeway to stimulate a discussion rather than dictating it and can grant the participants enough time to give voice to their individual viewpoints "without the constraints of scripted questions" (Tracy, 2019, p.158). This type of research method provided the researcher with descriptive summaries, in-depth insights into the minds of participants, and knowledge – either by confirming or correcting already existing knowledge or discovering new knowledge (McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p. 10).

In this study, each participant took part in one semi-structured interview, which lasted for approximately one hour. The goal was to elicit accounts from participants about their professional identity as it emerges at work through personal stories and experiences from their past. I was mainly interested in understanding the roles different aspects of identity (personal, social, cultural, and organizational) played in the formation and communication of professional identity within and across cultures at work. I was also interested in moments of tension or contrast between different interpretations of the "right way" to be a professional.

**Document Collection**

The second research method is document collection and will focus on organizational documents that include organizational identity information, such as mission statement websites, advertisements, agendas, and press releases (Bowen, 2009, pp. 27-28). Document analysis as a research method is an iterative process, which combines elements of both **content analysis** and **thematic analysis** (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). As a research method, it is especially useful for conducting qualitative research for the review or evaluation of documents – printed and electronic (Bowen, p. 27) – in order to produce rich descriptions of a specific phenomenon (Bowen, 2009, p. 29; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994) within an organization. Documents in an organization function as "social facts"[6] (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997, p. 47) or "collective thoughts and shared expectations that influence individual actions" (Herzog, 2022, Abstract), which have been "produced, shared, and used in socially organized ways" within the organization (Bowen, 2009, p.27).

Document analysis is seldomly used as a stand-alone research method but rather in combination with other qualitative research methods to avoid one-sided research. Rather than relying only on one research method, researchers are prompted to draw upon at least two different sources of information and seek "convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources and methods" (Bowen, 2009, p.28), such as interviews or participant and non-participant observation (Yin, 1994; Bowen, 2009, p. 28). The combination of data is a means to provide the research "a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility" (Eisner, 1991, p. 110) and supports the researcher's study findings against any form of "accusation that a study's findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's bias (Bowen, 2009, p. 28; Patton, 1990). In other words, combination of these two methods served not only as a way to guard the researcher against their own biased and probably one-sided approach to a phenomenon but also as a means to guard against other's biases towards the outcomes of the respective study by providing a more diverse accumulation of information.

Organizational documents served five specific functions. First, they provided data on "the context within which research participants operate – a case of text providing context" (Bowen, 2009, p. 29). In this role, they often served as means to witness past events by providing background information and historical facts and insights. As such, they helped the researcher to

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[6] Originally defined by French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917)

better understand where specific issues or phenomena come from and how they have developed the way they can be perceived in the present. This way, the researcher could use this data to better understand and contextualize information gathered during other research methods, such as interviews (Bowen, 2009, p. 29-30). Second, any information found in organizational documents served as a means to generate important questions that need to be asked in interviews to get a more thorough insight on experiences to better understand the researched phenomenon (Bowen, 2009, p.30). Third, documents and the information (and insights gathered from them) were used to provide supplementary data for researchers to broaden knowledge about the company and the context (Bowen, 2009, p. 30). Fourth, as documentation is vital for any organization, analyzing documents offered a way of tracking the organizations change and development over the years (Bowen, 2009, p. 30). Fifth, document analysis served as a means to "verify or corroborate evidence found from other sources" (Bowen, 2009, p. 30) such as semi-structured interviews (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000; Bowen, 2009, p.30).

Although document analysis did prove to be helpful, an overreliance on documents should be avoided and this research method should not be used as the sole data collection method for qualitative research. Nevertheless, it did serve as a way to expand other research methods such as semi-structured interviews and supported the researcher in finding connections, the roots and histories of the phenomenon researched. As such it was a valuable addition to this research.

## Data Analysis Methods

### Primary and Axial Coding Cycles

Data was analyzed using a combination of primary and secondary cycle coding, followed by a further advanced analysis to make sense and interpret the findings, following Tracy's iterative grounded analysis approach. Tracy (2019) describes this variation of analysis as alternating “between emic, or emergent, readings of the data and an etic use of existing models, explanations, and theories” (p.209). Rather than already deciding on what the researcher was trying to prove, this method allows the researcher more freedom to reflexively “visit and revisit the data, connects empirical materials to emerging insights, and progressively refines his/her focus and understandings” (p. 210). Yet, the researcher also then iteratively used concepts from the literature review to aid in interpreting and synthesizing the data into categories and themes.

**Primary Cycle Coding**

The first step after acquiring data – whether through interviews, observations or the likes – was to assign codes by “naming a segment of data as a code” (Tracy, 2019, p. 214), this was done both in German and English, depending on the participants’ preferred language used throughout the interviews. A code is a word or short phrase that captures the essence of what is going on in that segment of data (Tracy, 2019). Assigning codes helped the researcher to identify main topics or ingredients within the data, which afterwards can be combined to create the researcher’s own and unique interpretation of what has been found. Tracy (2019) determines several “primary coding domains,” for example specific behaviors, acts, or activities; routines and rituals; rules, ideologies, and structures; ways of being etc. (p.215). Data analysis for this study included first, reading line by line transcribed interview transcripts from each participant. Codes were then assigned to segments of data based on the action occurring in the data as well as the meaning for feeling for that same section of data. For example, code for actions were assigned next to the transcription line in the left-hand margin while codes that identify the meaning for the same transcription section were assigned in the right-hand margin.

**Secondary Cycle Coding: Axial Coding and Hierarchical Coding**

After gathering these descriptive first-level codes, all codes were written on a post-it and placed on a whiteboard, again in both German and English. All post-its were then categorized together based on similarities. Once all codes have been assigned to a category, the category was named. This secondary cycle, also called “axial” or “hierarchical” coding, involved “consulting past theories, selecting and synthesizing the most significant, interesting, or frequent codes, and assembling the initial codes into a working skeleton” (Tracy, 2019, p. 214). Second-level codes are more focused, critically examined as well as organized, synthesized, and categorized into, “interpretive concepts” (Tracey, 2019, p.225). Contrary to the very simple primary coding, in this stage of the coding process interpretations and identification of rules, patterns, etc. were included. It is not merely a collection of codes anymore but already the beginning of making sense of what has been observed.

Axial coding or “the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding” (Tracy, 2019, p.226), is a way of identifying patterns of codes within the data that have been “broken apart” during the first cycle of coding. By “hierarchically” grouping or weaving together various of theses codes into “umbrella categories” (p. 226) that make sense to the researcher, new ways of interpretation and analysis can be created, influenced by the researcher’s own subjective understanding and sensemaking. In hierarchal coding, these groups or umbrella categories become themes and the categories of codes under the umbrella act as dimensions or characteristics of the themes.

Combining primary and secondary coding, the researcher gradually makes sense of their findings. Different ways of analyzing ultimately create more focused and analytic codes, which subsequently will be used as grounded foundation for the significant findings from this project.

For this research 19 participants were interviewed, leading to a combined interview time of approximately 20 hours and around 420 pages of transcript. The interviews as well as the coding cycle were done both in English and German. Therefore, every used German quote as well as words used etc. were translated/ transliterated into English for the following findings section. Every translated/transliterated quote can be found in its original, German form in the endnotes section.

## Findings

This qualitative study aimed to explore how individuals made sense of different symbolic interpretations of professional identities in globalized organizational contexts. The study specifically investigated the following research question: *How does professional identity emerge as a boundary object in intercultural communication in international organizations?* This study found that "professional identity" emerged as a boundary object when participants identified with different subjective meanings of the "right way" to be professional, and, that participants aimed to reify their interpretations through different discursive modes. This study also found that different interpretations of the professional identity as a boundary object led to boundary tensions between professionals, particularly between participants from different nationalities. Different aspects of communication arose throughout the interviews, illuminating these different – sometimes latent – tensions within participants' recounted interactions with other professionals.

The research uncovered two main themes that illustrated how professional identity emerged as a boundary object between intercultural organizational members: ”What is wrong with you people?,”and I am right, because I fit in. Each of these themes illustrated how professional identity emerged as a boundary object and the discursive modalities that sustained different interpretations of professionalism leading to boundary tensions. These discursive modes included sarcastic mocking, passive aggressive remarks, critiques of expertise, culturally-focused jibes, teasing, and more. The boundary tensions held in place discursive moves included interpretative frames of the right and wrong way to be a professional including authenticity-inauthenticity, forthright-deceptive, expertise-incompetence,....

**"What is wrong with you people?"**

Throughout the interviews, the participants often positioned themselves against their colleagues by claiming their own behavior, way of doing things, and personal symbolic understanding of professionalism was superior to that of "them" or "others." A forming of ingroups and outgroups could be detected in every interview. Although, not all of the tensions that emerged were negative, an underlying sense of frustration was detected in most personal accounts suggesting that their different interpretations of the right and wrong way to perform as a professional in the organization was a regularly faced obstacle in intercultural interactions. Participants showed varied recollections that ranged from mere annoyance over minor things to sarcastic mocking of "the other" and passive aggression to outright, culturally-focused critique and even cutting remarks/insults. In the following section, I describe three of the common communicative mechanisms through which participants illustrated both frustration and the interpretations of the "other" that created this frustration: "Made with pride in the USA," "Playing the German", and Mocking the "other".

*"Made with pride in the USA"*

A recurring topic throughout the interviews was the heated atmosphere between colleagues from Germany and the United States of America. Feelings of annoyance and frustration, mostly on the German side were voiced by sarcastically mocking their US-American colleagues' way of behaving and sense of professionalism. In particular, German colleagues critiqued Americans for a lack of worldliness coupled with false pride and false friendliness. Americans were viewed as inexperienced and inauthentic in contrast or tension with German's diversity of global experiences and authenticity in interactions.

For example, while talking about working with her American colleagues, Pauline introduced them with "they work in Kansas, in the middle of nowhere […] in a brown office building, partly without windows."[i] Maria used a similar introductory critique in her story about her first meeting with American colleagues in the USA years ago, by describing "all colleagues in America having no passport […] never been out of their State, let alone in Europe"[ii] and living in their own "microcosmos." In a rather recent situation, Pauline criticizes her colleagues handling, or rather the lack thereof, of the war in Ukraine[7] with "as long as it does not really concern me or really affects me or I am not yet close to a topic, it is often not relevant for me."[iii] Jason also had a similar encounter with his US-American colleagues and their lack of understanding for regional issues, leading to misunderstandings and tension in an international team setting. So, "although the intention was very admirable" it still created tension and was an "example of, how [your] good intentions can still [be]…create the wrong impression." Many participants perceived this lack of global awareness as arrogant behavior of "lost touch with reality". Lukas mockingly refers to it as a sort of US-American motto, "we are the world leader, and we know everything…how it has to be done."[iv]

Another point of critique is that, for Germans, Americans lacked work ethos and trustworthiness because they are inauthentic and do not stay true to what was agreed upon. Eliza voices this annoyance in her line of work by stating that "tensions arise sometimes with our

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[7] At the time of the interview, the war in Ukraine has started about two to three weeks prior

Americans…US Americans, who sometimes do not stick to agreements or implement their own ideas, without coordinating it with us [headquarters]."[v] Katherine recounts a situation, where she and her colleagues in the US worked on a solution for a problem in their American location with a European supplier. As the solution did work, it was expected to then go with the European supplier, who provided the solution but instead,

> the end of the song[8] was they [Americans] said: „Yes, yes wonderful idea! Will do!." But they didn't buy from the local suppliers. They bought expensive in [the] USA. It cost more money and they used American suppliers. The European [supplier] worked out the solution with us and the American one was used…Made with pride in the USA[vi]

This tension between German authenticity and American inauthenticity emerged often in the interviews as participants recounted stories of intercultural interaction between the two nationalities. This tension emerged so often, that Lukas even referred to it as a "classic […] with Americans," who seem to be "very optimistic and positive" but do not really stick with their word.

When it comes to finding solutions for problems, Maria does praise the US American way of doing things as "pulling something out of the hat" but she also criticizes it as, even though this does often fix the problem, it is only a "quick fix," something that does only help in the short term but not in the long run. Katherine referred to her fellow manager colleagues as "boys," who "do not know what is going on in their plant" and rather "fly over everything…because somebody will eventually do it [the job]"[vii]. Quentin furthermore criticizes

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[8] Literal translation of the German version of idiom "the end of the story"

the rather flashy way of conducting oneself and how people – in his case suppliers – "sell everything as gold."

As participants described their frustrations, they illustrate underlying tensions caused by different interpretations of the right way *to be* a professional tied to national identity (German vs. American). Participants were not conscious of the meanings that created this tension, but of the patterns or norms that they felt were irritating, annoying, and unprofessional. German participants criticized the way US-Americans seem to have "lost touch with reality" and not being interested in what is going on outside their own "bubble." Participants' use of sarcasm and cutting remarks illustrated their frustration over the arising tensions between themselves and "the other" over what is considered (by them) as professional.

*"Playing the German"*

German participants also illustrated an identification of the professional identity as tied to German nationality when describing clashes with professionals from other nationalities. Although nearly all German participants at one point or the other admitted their "Germanness" in this study, nearly half of the German participants in the study voiced clear favoritism of their "German, professional identity." Most of those participants who clearly voiced favoritism were of an older generation of interviewees, who did not grow-up in the same interculturally oriented societal environment.

For example, Ivy, who has been working in her company for over 25 years in a managing position, recalled a moment in which she experienced a "culture shock," while interacting with an international customer from Taiwan. Although she was familiar with negotiations, she fell into her usual German modus operandi and collided with the customer by openly disagreeing in front of their employees. Instead of going with the other person's hierarchically oriented culture, she was “playing the German,” which ultimately lead to a “certain damage” due to the customer “loosing face […] which was evidently way more serious [for him] than for us [Germany][viii]”. In this situation, Ivy’s enacting of a German professional identity created a cultural shock or a realized boundary tension between the right and wrong way to lead: Fallible versus infallible leadership.

Quentin had a similar story about one of his German colleagues clashing with a Japanese colleague who “reported there to someone who did not know this, I say Japanese custom, how to deal with your boss as an employee....and [the boss] full throttle played the German [...] which of course was badly received on both sides"[ix]. The German boss misinterpreted his Japanese employee’s way of working and interacting with people of higher status, by only focusing on his own interpretation of professionalism and subsequently evaluated his employee’s work negatively. This caused confusion, as the Japanese colleague had been among the best employees within the company for years, before moving to Germany and working under this particular boss. Quentin recalls his colleague’s bad evaluation as “a bit suspicious”, as

> from my international cooperation with him I would have thought, this is a great colleague and great employee, very resourceful, also very very diligent…quickly familiarizes himself with various topics […] and that somehow did not come across there [in the evaluation] at all. And the end of the song[9] is: In Japan there is simply a different culture than in Germany and they are really very different. Especially when it comes to the relationship between superiors and employees. It's contrary. So, really 180 degrees different. And you have to understand that.[x]

Katherine clarifies what “full throttle play[ing] the German” means when she recalls that her work goal was always to get the end goal done and how she would “ice-cold pound the table”

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[9] Literal translation of the German version of idiom “the end of the story”

to get things done. Her work credo was “I have a goal in mind, that has to be achieved. Stop, full-stop, finish![xi]” For colleagues in other countries, this nonnegotiable push to get the job done, whether negotiating or dealing with a boss, clashed with Asian cultures that prioritized relationships first. The fact that the interactions between the Germans and the Asians in these examples resulted in negative experiences, highlighted a different set of interpretations about the “right” way to engage professionally.

Acting within their own culturally-shaped comfort zone of being straightforward and open with critique as well as openly offering input on how to do things differently – in some of the cases in the German and “better way” – the German participants subconsciously forced their own understandings of professionalism onto their international colleagues and customers, establishing their own professional understanding as a boundary object and creating space for tensions. In the same way, although only perceived through a secondary viewpoint provided by the German participants, their counterparts did the same by prioritizing their own unique, culturally-shaped understanding of professionalism over that of “the other.” This prioritization of participants cultural understanding was illustrated by juxtaposing their own culture against “the other culture.”

*Mocking the “other”*

Boundary tensions between different cultures emerged when different symbolic understanding of “right way” to be professional were discussed. Yet, boundary tensions also emerged between colleagues from different departments, with different mother tongues, and from different locations, highlighting that navigating the symbolic boundary between different understandings of professionalism was not only tied to national culture, but to positions within an organization as well. Words used during the interviews, when recollections of tensions arose, were: “us,” “them,” “headquarter,” “mothership”/mother company,” “troublemaker”/” obstructionist,” “boys,” “young folks,” etc.

In one instance, Alicia, who works in procurement for an Austrian company, recounts a moment of tension, where she sent an email with recommendations and notes – clearly labeled as for the eyes of the department only – about a supplier contract to one of her colleagues in a different department. Yet her colleague, who “live[s] in a different world,” simply copied and pasted her email and sent it to the supplier without editing. Clearly annoyed, Alicia recounts her initial reaction of “What is wrong with *you* people?”. Being asked about her feelings and behavior in this particular instance, she stated “this has happened to me so many times, that it doesn’t make me angry anymore. I just laughed…and I sent it to my boss, and I sent a smiley face, and he sent back two smiley faces…and yeah…that’s it. I just laughed it off”. Although Alicia seems to have acquired a sense of resignation about the different “levels of professionalism” and treating these instances as a joke, she still followed her recount up with a mocking visualization of the type of male colleague she encountered as someone working in the same position “for the last 20 years […] eating their ‘Leberkäsesemmel[10]’ somewhere.”

Although, eating Leberkäse is not reserved to a specific “class” of people, the way Alicia used this symbolic depiction of another professional in a different department within her organization insinuates a person simple of mind (not necessarily dumb), who doesn’t really care anymore. This is a discursive move that questions the competence and expertise of colleagues in different departments. Similarly, Katherine and Maria referred to others as “Jungs[11]” or “junge

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[10] **Leberkäse**: type of meatloaf typically found in parts of Germany (especially prominent in Bavaria), Austria, and Switzerland; **Leberkäsesemmel**: dinner roll filled with slices of this meatloaf

[11] Jungs = Boys

Leute,[12]" while Hugh dismissively mentions the "Silicon Valley Boys" [and their new ideas]. Pauline mocks her older colleagues' aversion to permanently changing to a hybrid model of online conference tools and in-person conferences, even after Covid-19, with "the spirit would get lost." Pauline stated her own favoritism of moving online part-time to better the workflow by avoiding long in-person meetings as superior by mocking her older colleagues' aversion of moving online part-time due to them favoring being in a physical space to interact. In each instance, mocking other colleagues in different positions or departments highlighted there was a tension between expertise versus incompetence.

Lukas highlights this tension further when describing a board member who wanted a product to be completed. However, Lukas found and repaired a bug in the system and customers wanted to continue with this particular product. Both parties had different approaches, according to Lukas the board member focused on "I have made a decision and will stick with it," while Lukas focused upon his view that he has "learned something new." In Lukas' description, his decision to stick with something and following through, kept the product useful and desirable for customers. However, he describes how this approach resulted in the board member having a personal vendetta against him. According to Lukas, the other person started to "place stones in the way"[13], whenever possible to spoil the sale of this product. Lukas recalls the example with humor as he rolled his eyes and stated "what an idiot".

In all of the examples above, colleagues recount disdain for colleagues in different departments or positions. In each case, a common tension between expertise and incompetence

[12] Junge Leute = young people
[13] Literal translation of the German version of the idiom "putting obstacles in somebody's way"

emerges as participants' accounts of others challenge what it means for their colleagues to be a professional. In other words, when recounting a situation, participants' understanding of professionalism collided with a colleague's understanding and behavior. Through mockery, participants accentuate how badly they believe their colleagues are doing their jobs and how this incompetent behavior collides with "us" or the "in-group's" understanding of professional identity. As Norman summarized, his colleague not only "stepped into the grease-pot"[14] but they "three times jumped into the grease-pot with start-up,"[xii] meaning they "put their food in their mouth with force…three times".

This constant and often somewhat hidden mocking of others can be found throughout every single interview. Most interviewees didn't even seem to notice their use of sarcasm and ways of belittling their colleagues. It seems that for participants mocking or mockingly joking about other colleagues is their way of dealing with these constant tensions and collisions of understandings in micro interactions and an easier response than really trying to get behind the reason of emerging tensions.

In order to navigate difficulties and moments of tension with their international and also national colleagues, interviewees referenced different approaches implemented by their organizations and themselves as leaders. These approaches assume firstly a general, often unspoken expectation of open communication within teams and between leaders of departments. Additionally, Norman references his organizations yearly, global three days long meeting including workshops, in which intercultural problems and tension points get the chance to be

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[14] Literal translation of the German version of the idiom "to put one's foot in one's mouth"

talked through by leaders. In one of these meetings, they came up with their own culture-featured booklet, in which

> […] for twelve months we had a country saying every month, what is different with them and what needs to be considered. And then we did it as a special print, because it's a topic that comes back again and again and we then said... Well, so this booklet, of course that also changes, but this booklet just for basic understanding, we have that made[xiii]

Furthermore, the idea of a "four eye principle," through which different approaches should be protected from being shut down, was introduced by Norman. Jumping on the wagon of culture focused approaches, Quentin and Bjorn talked about cultural trainings for locations about "wie ticken Deutsche"/ "How do Germans work/function", to help expats getting used to working in Germany. On the other hand, they also referenced workshops "zu international Kulturen"/workshops "about international cultures" being offered for German expats being sent overseas to other locations.

On a more personal level, Katherine, Ivy, Bjorn, and Maria reference "Gruppenroutinen," meetings outside of work or without the objective of getting work done, to get to know people better. These include inviting the whole team to a "Brotzeit[15]," a "Weißwurstfrühstück[16]," or having a beer together after work to create personal contacts with the employees, to get to know them outside their position at work. Despite these programs, the boundary tensions between professional identities from different nationalities and different parts of the company continued. The findings below explicate one reason why.

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[15] Brotzeit = light meal or tea break; literally translated to "Bread time." A Brotzeit is something very German and includes bread, cold lunchmeats, pickled cucumbers, and cheese

[16] "Weißwurstfrühstück" = very popular Bavarian breakfast made up of Bavarian white sausage, pretzel, sweet mustard, and sometimes wheat beer

**I am right, because I fit in**

Throughout the interview process, participants showed a need to – more or less openly – position themselves and their own symbolic professional understandings within their respective organizations. As participants referenced their identifications as an individual with their overall profession, they also described how this identification caused them to "fit" within their organizational culture. The individual vs cultural professional identifications were discursively described through acts of personal praise and discussions of "fit" vs. "getting sacked." A second tension emerged as participants described the need to "fit" or integrate, they also described how their organizations embraced differences. The tension between shared culture vs. differentiated culture were both viewed as necessary. However, participants highlighted that while their organizations embraced the need to dissent, and had programs to do so, that it was necessary to cope (with humor) to the lack of actual change and to the "way things are done." In other words, professionals' stories below discursively create how they believe their individual identity and professional identity integrate with their organizational culture as well as the reality of consensus over dissensus. Overall, as participants emphasized the importance of being a piece of the cultural whole, they also simultaneously reinforced their position within their professional life and subverted any possible critique against their own symbolic understandings of professionalism.

*"I fit right in" – being a piece of the whole*

The idea of an individual being the right kind of professional tied with the fit of this person with the right organizational culture was a recurring topic many participants referenced while describing their careers. Jason drew a connection between his personal identity and his profession when he described his corporate communication work, referencing who he was as a "communication professional." As he stated,

> So, I think you are of a personality, or a character, or whatever it is that drives you and that there is a reason why, when you…you know, do that, or whether you do Myers Briggs or whatever the other personality sort of tests are…there is a reason why, roughly, not 100%, but to a great percentage, you find people of certain professions linked to certain characteristics and personality types

Here he claims that personality and character are tied to professions. He underlined his claim, by sharing some general insights he had gathered on this topic throughout his career in communication. Not only does it seem to be the case that most people search for jobs and companies that "fit" with their characters, but there are also those, who "have ended up in the wrong profession, for what is suited to them…their natural abilities and preferences. And these people are often not happy with what they do, and it takes a lot more out of them to…do their jobs". In other words, when your personal identity and character do not fit your profession, then you experience sadness and "it takes a lot more out of them."

Others similarly noted the connection between personal identity and the requirement that it must align with the professional work one does. As Finn describes, "Well, I think, in the end, you know, it's a job, and…you know…you got to be true to yourself […] in the end…you have to wake up with yourself every morning". While Ivy, who is close to retirement, stated "today I would say that if that doesn't work, as my values are, then I have to draw the consequences and leave"[xiv] and how in her interactions with colleagues and employees, she would always "deal with people as sensibly as I would at home". Quentin matter-of-fact stated "I am, who I am…And I can't be another supervisor here in the company […] as I am a person at home or at the football club"[xv]. Maria seconds this motion with "I do believe that in the company, I am the [Maria], that I am!"[xvi].

Participants explained further that the alignment between personal and professional identity became clear when joining a company. When talking about his onboarding process with his current organization, Jason additionally claimed “as I went through the process, I immediately clicked with the people, who were interviewing me”. Here, Jason highlights that his personal identity as a professional is socially performed. When the personal and professional identity align with an organizational culture, an individual will “click” with colleagues. This mindset towards personal professional identity and work/organization and personality fit is seconded by Norman, who was referenced “sliding” into his job and how it is a “natural fit,” as well as Pauline, who calls it an “an absolute fit and we fit together well, otherwise I can't do this job. Because I have no desire to do a job just to earn bucks, it [job] has to challenge and fulfill me”[xvii]. Others stated that what attracted them to an organization is that “it meant something” to them and “that everything that I found when I started looking [into the organization], spoke to me on a very personal level…”. Jason stated that at the beginning of working for his organization there was a “wave of happiness” and “honeymoon feeling”, leading to him creating a rather strong attachment to his organization. Sara also referenced how her own personality and professional motto (“say what you do, do what you say”) fit in with her organization’s mottos of “the status quo is not good enough”. She added excitedly, “I fit right in!!”, showing a very strong sense of identification with her company.

When asked how participants’ professional identity might influence their interaction with other colleagues who differed in their professional identity, Norman stated,

> Not so much the identity of the company, but that is also very strongly my [identity]. I mean, of course, that is mutually dependent. Since I have built up this team, of course much of my understanding "how to do good quality PR" has also passed into the company’s DNA. But if I personally don't feel comfortable doing it this way and say, "I can't answer for it to myself," then I wouldn't do that either.

> And if some boss were to say, "You have to do this.”.. then I would say, "Yes, sorry... then the position is no longer for me, then I find another one.” I have had this self-image not only since the shortage of skilled workers [...] I always knew that I would get another job. So, I think it's just important that you can stand behind it[xviii]

Norman highlights several important connections in the above quote. First, he notes that his identity and the identity of the company are “mutually dependent” and rely upon each other. He equates the mutual relationship and influence on the professional work he does when stating that doing quality work has passed into the DNA of the company as well. He then highlights that if he couldn’t “answer for it to myself” or if he was not able to do it his way, he would leave the company. In other words, he establishes that being told to do something would challenge his personal/professional identity and he would reinforce a boundary by finding another job because it is “important that you can stand behind” your work.

This need to find a fit between an individual’s professional identity and organizational identity was a recurring topic throughout the interviews. Some of the participants did in fact create their own positions within the company, infusing more of their individual professional identity into “the company’s DNA.” Identifying with their organization to a certain degree seems to be very important to professionals through all the different industries in order to continue working. Professionals referenced their influence on their organizations with their own understandings of professionalism and work ethos, while also being simultaneously influenced by these organizations they are part of, mostly without realizing it. This two-way relationship can be seen in the way participants recalled how those “who do not fit in” need to go – either by going on their own or by “being sacked” – mostly following moments of tension, in which different understandings of professionalism clashed and resulted in frustration.

To bolster support and confidence in their personal professional identity, participants highlighted their own accomplishments and expertise, not as a brag, but as evidence of a quality professional identity and evidence against critique for how they contribute to the DNA of a company. For example, participants commonly referenced their educational and work achievements stating, “having done my MBA”, “what I learned from my MBA”, “when I was doing my management degree”, having a “Masters and PhD….”. Others referenced their expertise and experience in a company as evidence. For example, “I have always been good in […]”,“I defined my own role in the company anyway,[xix]”,“I have set up the position a bit as it is.[xx]” Education and expertise such as advanced degrees and creating a position establishes participants’ authority in justifying the “right” way to be a professional. When this matches with an organizational cultural fit participants feel that this fit is the correct and symbolic meaning for professionalism such as quality, knowledge, values, and integrity that simultaneously justifies their position and prevents criticism. In the interviews participants referenced their behavior in situations of tension and friction. It was important to the majority of participants, even if it is subconsciously done, to defend their own position in front of others, to forgo potential criticism against themselves. This phenomenon of sticking to their own personal interpretations of professionalism while simultaneously justifying their own clashing behavior towards other professionals’ interpretations, by claiming a “fit” with their organization, simply re-enacting a shared understanding of professionalism between themselves and their organization, is rather problematic in an intercultural setting. Instead of consciously searching for/addressing the root of moments of tension between dissimilar interpretations of professionalism, participants resort to claiming their own behavior as fitting with their interpretation of the organization’s culture and thus above criticism and need for change.

## Discussion

This research aimed to explore how professional identity emerges as a fluidly performed boundary object through globalized, intercultural communication processes between professionals in international organizations. This research has found professional identity as an interplay between (predominantly) nationalized professional identity and professionals' individual interpretation and justification of this nationalized professional identity in context, while communicating and globalizing with others, creating boundary tensions. The study found that boundary tensions were common dialectical tensions between different polarizing interpretations of the right way to perform the professional identity, making this identity a boundary object. However, participants did not find common ground regarding this boundary object identity and, in fact, sustained the boundary object through different discursive modalities. Participants also referenced their expertise, knowledge, accomplishments, and fit as justification that bolstered their interpretations of the right way to perform as a professional.

The two themes that emerged from the data in answer to this research question expand the already existing knowledge about boundary objects, identity, and tension, by adding another pixel to the larger picture of professional identity and international teamwork dynamics research in globalized businesses. I claim that additional to the already existing research, a boundary object is not just an artifact or an idea, but the symbolic understanding of what it means to be professional and thus professional identity as an identity category itself is a boundary object. This research highlights several theoretical and practical implications for recognizing, interpreting, and researching professional identity as boundary objects in moments of tension. This section discusses how the key takeaways from the study relate to existing literature, the limitations of the study, directions for future research, and the “so what” of it all in the bigger picture of intercultural cooperation and teamwork.

**Professional identity as boundary tension**.

While it is possible to see the results of the study as negative, this study actually illustrates potential opportunities for change and innovation in intercultural organizations by identifying the professional identity as a boundary object, the different discursive modalities through which this boundary object emerges, and common boundary tensions. In particular, identifying common boundary tensions is significant because when participants experience frustrations and perform these tensions discursively, there is the potential that these are moments of realization and prompt a space to navigate the “right way to do it.” Moments of tension were particularly visible in recounts of interactions between members of different nationalities but can also be found in interactions between professionals of the same nationality. The professional identity serves as an ideological belief system performed as a boundary object when in conflict with others’ culturally-shaped interpretation and performance of what is considered “professional.” This adds to the idea that Stohl (2001) and Mumby & Kuhn (2019) suggest in that globalizing with professionals from different nationalities embodies the constant tension between professionals’ homogenization and marking of uniqueness of cultures. As participants described frustrations with other professionals with sarcasm and mocking, these moments highlighted different common tensions such as inauthenticity and authenticity that provide a nuanced understanding of the different dimensions of the homogenization-uniqueness tension in intercultural organizations. All participants referenced different perceptions on what is considered “professional,” often in stark contrast to their respective colleagues’ professional identity in recollected moments of tension, supporting existing literature on the complex, ambiguous, and social-construct nature of identity and professionalism by scholars such as Kuhn and Nelson (2002), Cheney & Ashcraft (2007), Freud (2001), Littlejohn & Foss (2010), and Nygren & Stigbrand (2014). Additionally, findings support Wiles (2013) claim that professional identity is more than simply the acquisition of traits, values, or competencies, but a constructed social category and process “in which each individual comes to have a sense of themselves” (p. 865). These moments of tension, where different, symbolic understandings of professional identity clash together, made visible dissimilar symbolic boundaries.

Although, participants did recognize differences in their interpretation of professional identity, when realizing socio-cultural differences leading to moments of tension, they did not (or sometimes only scarcely) engage in intercultural boundary crossing (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). Many participants did reference their own awareness of differences and the need to navigate these dissimilar, symbolic understandings, yet a true navigation/ negotiation process towards a shared, hybrid professional identity could not be detected, as all participants resorted to their own individual professional identity being the “right one.” Many participants did admit other’s professional identity having its positive sides, yet all defended and favored their own professional identity over that of others and went justified their own understandings over others by referencing expertise, advanced degrees, and cultural fit. Those, who did not fit into the mold were discredited through sarcasm, cutting remarks, made fun of etc. Instead of creating a true hybrid identity (Jameson, 2007), each participant showed clear favoritism towards their own individual understanding of professionalism.

**Tension as opportunities.** Tensions in globalization are moments in which “the environment and technical pressures on contemporary organizations to become more and more similar clash with the proprietary pull of cultural identifications, traditional values, and conventional practices of social life" (Stohl, 2001, p. 326), embodying "the constant tension between homogenization and marking the uniqueness of local culture" (Mumby & Kuhn, 2019, p. 334). The data show that this tension emerges in intercultural communication processes between professionals from dissimilar cultural backgrounds and unique, individual interpretations of nationalized professional identities. These moments of tension have a primarily negative connotation in existing research. Yet, data shows that there are opportunities arising from these moments. One of the first responses detected in participants' recounts to different interpretations throughout intercultural communication processes, was a feeling of threat. In these instances, the boundary of professional's interpretation of their nationalized professional identity, became both an obstacle and a wall. Participants referenced feelings of annoyance and frustration throughout these encounters, keeping them from navigating tensions in order not to be slowed down. Contrary to Jameson (2007) research on creating a shared hybrid identity in moments of tension, participants preferred their own interpretation over that of others, sticking with being right about their interpretation instead of actively negotiating a shared understanding, ultimately creating an atmosphere of frustration. Yet, moments of tensions should not solely be seen as something negative, but opportunities to evolve.

From a practical perspective, these of frustration could act as cues that a boundary tension is in play and presents a "tension moment" or opportunity moment to engage in discussion about different interpretations. The goal of these discussions would not be to develop homogenization of one perspective over another, but to innovate a new understanding that privileges the diversity that each colleague brings to the profession. In other words, different does not equal bad, rather difference provides a rich context for innovation and collaboration

(Allen, 2010). Getting to the roots of tensions between professionals, provides researchers and professionals with tools to generate practical support to better navigate boundary tensions.

**Pressure to comply**. The findings in this study highlighted the problematic nature of "cultural fit" in intercultural organizations. Participants' discussion of cultural fit acted as justification for a homogenized professional identity within the organizational culture. For anyone whose personal and professional identity did not alight or integrate with the organizational culture, the option was to "get sacked" or to leave the organization. This finding highlights that anyone who might not "fit" would feel pressure to act and behave in the "appropriate way" and alter their own culturally-shaped understanding of being professional (Stohl, 2001). In order to continue working and avoid what Hermans & Hermans-Konopka (2010) and Akkerman & Bakker (2011) refer to as "professional identity fragmentation," professionals seek to find ways to identify with their own organizations. Many participants referenced how a strong sense of organizational identity (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994; Gray, 1986) and organizational identification (Eger, 2021) are vital to working in their respective organizations. Those not in line with their organization as well as their superiors symbolic understanding of being professional, will either be gone or go themselves with time, as pressure to comply with the "status quo" – which can change from department to department as well as from superior to superior – ultimately force them to reconsider their position. This more or less apparent pressure to comply or "fit in" is important to focus on in studying professional identity tensions in international settings, as it has a large influence on how well teams work together. Most participants were not even fully aware of this pressure to comply.

## Limitations

This research, although conducted thoroughly over the span of a year, only shows a pixel in the bigger picture of the studied phenomenon. Limitations include the diversity of participants, the global Covid-19 pandemic and its health/ social distancing regulations, and the international nature of this study.

**Participants:** Due to the nature of selecting participants (snowball sampling), diversity was heavily limited to 14 male identifying and only 5 female identifying participants, most of which can be described as white. Out of 19 participants only one was US-American, one South African-Indian, and one identified as Croatian-German, while the other 16 participants can be identified as German or Central European. The large portion of German participants accentuated the national identification. Further research with other nationalities would aid in understanding if other cultures demonstrated the same propensity for national identification. Furthermore, more diversity in the selection of organizations in terms of location, industry, and size would aid in researching professional identity as a boundary tension across and within different cultures.

**Covid-19:** The still ongoing pandemic and the safety restrictions in place throughout most of the research process, limited data collection to interviews mainly on Zoom; only two interviews were conducted in-person at the request of the interviewees. Safety measures further prohibited shadowing participants safely while they worked. Several, initially planned interviews needed to be either postponed or foregone completely due to Covid-related illness of participants or an excess of work for participants due to needing to take over for ill colleagues. Although, most Zoom interviews went smoothly, several participants faced technical or internet problem, as many used different conference tools at work and weren’t either equipped with the right hardware (missing camera, non or badly functioning microphone/headsets/ headphones, etc.) or unsure of how to properly use Zoom.

**Language:** To accommodate both German and English-speaking participants, all interviews were conducted in either language, depending on the participants' own preference. Going back and forth between two different languages, one being the researcher's native tongue (German), had its own difficulties. Although the interviewer is fluent in both languages and all interviewed German professionals also speak English, mixing up words and terms occasionally occurred on both sides. This resulted in a sometimes interesting mix of German and English, referred to as "Denglish[17]" or "Germerican". This back and forth between two languages could be strongly felt during both coding cycles and in writing the findings section in this research, as notes, codes, and quotes had to be translated. Many idioms used by German participants had to be furthermore transliterated for a better understanding. Some of the meaning and symbolism in the quotes may have been lost in the translation/transliteration processes or may be harder for non-German speakers to understand in their translated/transliterated form.

Certain intricacies of the German language, such as the use of the "formal you" ("Sie") to signify respect and hierarchy, may have also been lost. In the German language, there are two ways of addressing a single person, either by using "Du" (you) or "Sie" (you). The former is the informal version, which is used for people of a similar age or younger and people, who are known to the speaker. The latter is the formal version, often used for people older, higher in hierarchy or unknown to the speaker. In Germany, it is custom to address others – especially older people, bosses, colleagues etc. – with "Sie" at first to show respect and only after a mutual

[17] Denglish = Mix of German and English

agreement of referring to each other by first name, the informal you is used. A form of celebratory declaration the likes of “Sag du zu mir” / “You can call me you” is quite common and often signifies a step up in interpersonal relationships.

## Conclusion

This study focusses on how globalization—as an organizational communication process—embodies the constant tension of professionals between “being a part of” and “being unique” in the global business context and how these tensions play out in intercultural communication processes and micro interactions between professionals with different culturally-shaped symbolic understandings and taken-for-granted assumptions of what it means to be professional.

The study found that boundary tensions in intercultural communication were common dialectical tensions between different polarizing interpretations of the right way to perform culturally-shaped professional identity, making this identity a boundary object. However, participants did not find common ground regarding this boundary object identity in order to create a shared hybrid professional identity to continue working, but, in fact, sustained the boundary object as a boundary tension through different discursive modalities, such as sarcasm, mocking, jibes, and references of their own expertise, knowledge, accomplishments, and fit as justification to reinforce their individual interpretations as the right way to perform as a professional. Adding to Kim (2017) statement of how “the forces of globalization diminish traditional group boundaries, the desire for ethnic rootedness and belonging continues to render a deeply unsettling social landscape around the world. “Diversity” or “multiculturalism” embraced in many societies has become as much a point of tension and contention, as it is a cause célèbre." (p. 1-2).

Although, the overall mindset towards intercultural communication and teamwork was seen as rather positive, participants' recollections of the underlying frustration in moments of tension shows how much work still needs to be done and gives reason to expand the discussion of professional identity as a boundary object in the globalized business world, to support and establish intercultural and interethnic communication as necessary means, in order to create ways of successful globalized cooperation.

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[i] „Die meisten Kolleginnen und Kollegen arbeiten nach wie vor in Kansas im Nirgendwo […] also, die sitzen da in ihrem braunen Bürogebäude, teilweise ohne Fenster.“

[ii] „[…] die sämtlichen Kollegen in Amerika keinen Reisepass hatten […] die war noch nie außerhalb ihres Bundesstaates, geschweige denn in Europa.“

[iii] „Solange es einen noch nicht so richtig betrifft oder wirklich betroffen macht oder ich noch keine Nähe zu einem Thema habe, ist es für mich oft nicht relevant.“

iv „Das ist bei uns schon weit verbreitet. Nach dem Motto ‚Wir sind die Weltmacht und wir wissen es alles, wie es besser geht‘.“

[v] „Spannungen gibt es manchmal mit unseren Amerikanern, also US-Amerikanern, die manchmal sich nicht an Vereinbarungen halten oder eigene Ideen umsetzen, ohne das mit uns abzustimmen.“

[vi] “Das Ende vom Lied war, dass sie [Amerikaner] gesagt haben „Ja, ja, wunderbare Idee! Machen wir.” Aber sie haben nicht bei den hiesigen Lieferanten gekauft. Sie haben teuer gekauft in [den] USA. Es hat mehr Geld gekostet und sie haben amerikanische Lieferanten benutzt. Der europäische [Lieferant] hat mit uns die Lösung erarbeitet und den amerikanischen haben sie benutzt…*Made with pride in the USA.*“

[vii] “Ich sehe es in den USA oft drüben, da wechseln die Jungs so schnell, dass du sagst „Eh, ihr könnt doch gar nicht wissen, was in eurer Anlage los ist.” Das sind so die Manager, die oben drüber fliegen…und irgendeiner wird’s schon machen.“

[viii] „Aber letztendlich war da schon ein gewisser Schaden, weil der hatte sein Gesicht verloren. Das ist offenbar viel schlimmer als bei uns […].“

[ix] „[japanischer Kollege] hat dort an jemanden berichtet, der diese, ich sage mal japanische Gepflogenheit, wie man als Mitarbeiter mit seinem Chef umgeh, nicht kannte…und [der Chef] da Vollgas den Deutschen hat raushängen lassen […] das kam natürlich auf beiden Seiten schlecht an.“

[x] „Und das war ein bisschen suspekt, dass der immer so schlecht ist. Und eigentlich aus meiner internationalen Zusammenarbeit mit ihm hätte ich gedacht, das ist ein super Kollege und super Mitarbeiter, sehr findig, sehr sehr fleißig auch, arbeitet sich in verschiedenste Themen

schnell ein […] und das kam irgendwie dort gar nicht so rüber. Und [das] Ende vom Lied ist: In Japan gibt es einfach eine andere Kultur als in Deutschland und die sind wirklich sehr unterschiedlich. Gerade was das Verhältnis Vorgesetzte zu Mitarbeiter angeht. Es ist konträr. Also wirklich 180 Grad unterschiedlich. Und das muss man verstehen."

[xi] „Dann habe ich ein Ziel vor Augen, das muss geschafft werden. Schluss, aus, Ende."

[xii] „[…] und die ist dann auch dreimal so mit Anlauf in [den] Fettnapf gesprungen."

[xiii] Also da hatten wir zwölf Monate lang jeden Monat ein Land, das gesagt hat, was bei ihnen anders ist und was man beachten muss. Und haben das dann auch als Sonderdruck gemacht, weil es ist ein Thema, was immer wiederkommt und wir dann gesagt haben…Gut, also dieses Booklet, natürlich ändert sich das auch, aber dieses Booklet mal nur so zum Grundverständnis, das lassen wir ausfertigen."

[xiv] „[…] heute würde ich sagen, wenn das nicht funktioniert, so wie meine Wertvorstellungen sind, dann muss ich die Konsequenzen ziehen und wieder gehen."

[xv] „Ich bin halt, wer ich bin. Und ich kann nicht ein anderer Vorgesetzter hier in der Firma sein […] als ich auch eine Person zu Hause bin oder beim Fußballklub […]."

[xvi] „Also ich glaube schon, dass ich in der Firma der [Name] bin, der ich bin."

[xvii] „[…] es ist ein absoluter Fit und wir passen gut zusammen, sonst kann ich diesen Job nicht machen. Denn ich habe keinen Bock, einen Job zu machen, nur um Kohle zu verdienen, sondern das muss mich fordern und erfüllen."

[xviii] „Weniger die Identität der Firma, sondern das aus sehr stark meine [Identität]. Ich meine, natürlich bedingt das einander. Da ich die dieses Team mit aufgebaut habe, ist natürlich viel von meinem Verständnis „wie macht man qualitativ gute PR" auch in die Firmen DNS übergegangen. Aber wenn ich mich persönlich damit nicht wohlfühle, das so zu machen und sage „Ich kann das, ich kann es vor mir nicht verantworten", dann würde ich das nicht machen. Und wenn da jetzt irgendein Chef sagen würde, „Du musst das aber machen", dann würde ich sagen „Ja, sorry, dann ist die Stelle nichts mehr für mich, dann finde ich auch eine andere". Also das Selbstverständnis habe ich nicht erst seit Fachkräftemangel […] ich wusste immer, dass ich nen

anderen Job kriege. Also da finde ich, ist es halt wichtig, dass man dahinterstehen kann, was man tut.“

[xix] „[…] ich habe mir ja sowieso in der Firma meine eigene Rolle definiert.“

[xx] „[…] ich habe mir die Stellung ein bisschen so eingerichtet, wie sie ist.“