Organizational integration of highly skilled migrants? Social worlds as multiple cultures dismantling conventional framings

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Abstract

This paper examines the integration of highly skilled migrants into organizations. Whereas prior research has mainly focused on macro-economic and macro-political analysis, little is known about the dynamic process of organizational level integration. Applying Strauss' theory of social worlds and the concept of multiple cultures, we dismantle the boundaries of an organization describing the integration processes of migrants from the perspective of different social worlds that intersect an organization. We use social worlds which form around a core activity or context of action to describe different levels of cultures within an organization. Via multifaceted identification with these multiple cultures, we suggest that person–organization interaction and mutual intercultural learning processes with colleagues result in organizations conveying values, norms, behavior, language and social contacts that prove valuable and integrative, especially to newcomers. Based on three qualitative case studies in German SMEs, migrants' experiences during the integration process show the central role organizations play inhibiting previously overlooked multi-cultural social worlds which lead not only to their organizational integration, but to societal integration as well. Organizations thus contribute to different forms of integration. Consequently, this paper extends traditional integration perspectives at the national or transnational level of analysis by differentiating into multiple cultures that provide integrative knowledge both internally and beyond the organization. In particular, interaction with colleagues as socialization agents leads to integration. Theory and practice should draw conclusions from this to consider integration as a multilayered opportunity.

Keywords Highly skilled migrant · (Cultural) integration · Intercultural learning · Multiple cultures · Organizational socialization · Social worlds

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1 Introduction

Millions of people flee or leave their country voluntarily and are employed in a new country. These people with different social backgrounds can add value to organizations due to differing education, language, cultural knowledge, and other perspectives and problem-solving strategies (Hajro et al., 2017a, 2017b; Page, 2007; Useche et al., 2020). Employing organizations, in turn, are places of (financial) security but also places of development, intercultural encounter, identity building, and socialization (Lazarova et al., 2023; Nardon et al., 2021; Ortlieb et al., 2021). Migrants and organizations are equally interested in *organizational integration*. For migrants, integration is the key to successful navigation in organizations; for organizations, it is sustainable access to migrants' resources (Cerdin et al., 2014; Hajro et al., 2017a, 2017b; Tung, 2016). Our article shows the organizational integration process of highly skilled migrants, defined as those with a tertiary education level (Rottas et al., 2015). More specifically, we aim to show how multiple cultures at different levels of the organizational setting (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004) contribute to the organizational integration of highly skilled migrants on the basis of the *organizational socialization process*. We thus dismantle the conventional concept of organizations and introduce a new perspective on integration. To this end, our paper systematically addresses the following three research gaps.

First, the organizational integration of *qualified migrants* is less researched because it is often perceived as uncomplicated. Especially among research on refugees, there is primarily a problem focus on access and integration in the labor market, and thus on career building, leading to a so-called "skill paradox" (Dietz et al., 2015; Hajro et al., 2021), namely the lack of recognition of educational status and thus substandard employment (see also Guo et al., 2020; Szkudlarek et al., 2021) or also unequal power relations embedded in and influenced by macro-social contexts regarding organizational practices to socialize migrant employees, for example language barriers and discrimination (Knappert et al., 2023; Omanović & Langley, 2023). Immigration for humanitarian reasons and the associated legislation cause heated public debate, while EU internal migration and the immigration of highly skilled people from other countries fade into the background (Kuvik, 2012; Rottas et al., 2015). This creates a distorted perception in society and even in companies' human resources departments that migration processes of skilled people take place smoothly and 'silently'—therefore, it is less researched (Guo & Al Ariss, 2015; Hajro, 2017; van Riemsdijk et al., 2016). Focusing on integrating this type of labor force serves as a first research gap.

Second, workplace integration at the organizational level is an unexplored phenomenon (for a recent overview of different levels of analysis, see Hajro et al., 2021 or Tharenou & Kulik, 2020). A more specific examination of the limited research on the organizational labor migration of highly skilled employees reveals that in addition to a macro-economic and macro-political analysis of this migration, transnational concepts serve as heuristic tools for researching the reality of highly skilled migrants on a societal level (Beaverstock, 2005; Ho & Hatfield, 2011; Koser & Salt, 1997). Only a few attempts have been made to raise the

question of the integration of migrants from an organizational point of view, the so called *meso-level*. Hence researchers are now calling for a deeper investigation on this meso-level (Guo & Al Ariss, 2015; Hajro et al., 2019; Tharenou & Kulik, 2020; van Riemsdijk et al., 2016), which constitutes a second research gap.

> "Social science research has examined many aspects of migration and has advanced our understanding of migrant integration into evolving societies. In contrast, *research on migrants in the workforce remains underdeveloped* and consists primarily of individual level studies with limited work on how organizations manage migrant workers and on outcomes of migrant related practices (Hajro et al., 2021)". (Lazarova et al., 2023, p. 6)

The organizational focus on integration adopted in this paper provides the basis for future research, allowing theory but also practice (organization and migrants themselves) to foreground positive integration outcomes (Hajro et al., 2017a, 2017b; Zikic, 2015), e.g. migrants' potential for the organization and the exploration of its benefits (Butticè & Useche, 2022; Coda-Zabetta et al., 2022; Fang et al., 2013; Fitzsimmons et al., 2020; Hunt & Gauthier-Loiselle, 2010; Lazarova et al., 2023; Stahl et al., 2016; Szkudlarek et al., 2021).

Third, a more process-oriented, dynamic concept of integration is needed (see e.g. Grosskopf et al., 2022; Primecz et al., 2023). In evolving multicultural societies, the question of 'integration' is a subject of emerging interest when considering employment success, skill utilization, and careers (Al Ariss et al., 2013). A certain discussion and development can be observed in migration research regarding the concept of integration—searching for an equilibrium between striving for social unity and accepting the needs of minorities (Berry, 1990, 2005; Ward, 2008). Our intention is not to answer whether or to what extent migrants integrate the new culture into their own but rather to devote attention to the processes and interactions with the societal environment on the way from organizational outsider to insider. Especially the relationships with colleagues and thus mutual intercultural learning play a role that was rarely paid attention to in adaptation phases (Morillas & Romani, 2022; Tharenou & Kulik, 2020). By conducting qualitative interviews, migrants allow us to gain insight into their experiences (Ward, 2013). Consequently, we take a different approach than most studies which use the established concept of *national culture* and the ethnic dimension as core categories (Brettell et al., 2015; Favell, 2014). The continuing and largely overlooked simplification created by the latter approach represents an important third research gap this paper wants to address.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: in the next section we present our theoretical framework on how different social worlds in the form of multiple cultures dismantle the conventional framings of organizations followed by the research design. On the basis of three case studies, we then illustrate dynamic processes and interactions in these multiple cultures during migrant's organizational socialization. Surprisingly, we uncover integration mechanism reaching beyond the organization. The paper closes with a discussion of our findings and gives implications for further research. Besides the theoretical extension, we additionally derive useful insights for practitioners.

2 Conceptual frameworks

We use the theory of social worlds (Strauss, 1978) arguing that the integration of migrants into organizations happens through different "worlds" influencing the organization. We combine this theory with a multiple cultures approach as sets of basic assumptions commonly held by a group of people (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004). Before we go into this, we show the overall research context in which the conceptual frame is embedded.

2.1 Overall research context on integration theories and strategies

In the introduction to a special issue on global migrants in IB and management in the *Journal of World Business* Hajro et al. (2021) highlight that little previous research looks at organizational motivations, practices and processes for attracting, integrating and developing skilled migrants. Already in 2015 in a special issue in the *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Guo and Al Ariss (2015) underline the research gap on the role of organizations and human resource management in dealing with international migrants through their recruitment and selection processes, as well as their support mechanisms for cultural adaptation, in order to prevent human capital 'waste' (also known as 'brain waste') regarding migrants' careers (Guo & Al Ariss, 2015, p. 1291) (see also Omanović et al., 2022).

An exception is Zikic's (2015) study taking a human resource management perspective on the necessary organizational competence and knowledge of the need for migrant workers ('organizational knowing-why') and their subsequent appropriate recruitment and integration ('knowing-how' and 'knowing-whom') in order to enable migrants' career capital to be recruited, integrated and utilized. In line with this, Ortlieb and Sieben already pointed out five organizational integration strategies in 2013, where besides exclusion as a strategy for not recruiting migrants at all, or adding value through migrants' mere working capacity, also strategies come into play which concentrate on adding value through ethnic background, and especially the problem-solving abilities based on different perspectives that are essential for process and product innovations.

An enabling context factor is for example the organizational climate in managing acculturation in the workplace (Hajro et al., 2017b), which also Ortlieb and Knappert (2023) highlight as inclusive organizational culture. Moreover, they refer to the stage of workplace inclusion as dependent on a wider range of factors—national institutional, organizational and individual factors. As such, they promote the existence of an anti-discrimination law, a law on the bodies of employee representation, as well as internal dynamics of organizational actors' knowledge on how to promote diversity and inclusion, as well as the dissolution of a refugee category.

Nevertheless, Hajro et al. (2017b) indicate failures on the part of organizations to integrate migrants and, thus, to promote individual migrant competences. Ortlieb and Ressi (2022) identity beneficial organizational socialization practices but also tension creating practices, which they connect to musicology, and a polyrhythmic

socialisation. This is why Tharenou and Kulik (2020, p. 1156) search for "opportunities where organizations and managers might intervene to enable a successful socialization process and improve SMs' [skilled migrants] workplace experiences" and employ a three-phase socialization model of anticipatory socialization, accommodation, and adaptation.

Even though hardly any work since then has empirically focused on the potential of individuals in organizations (see, for example, research in multicultural individuals (Brannen & Thomas, 2010), a perspective has developed that increasingly takes the migrant point of view into account.

Cerdin et al. (2014) show that organizational integration policies can also have a *positive* impact on migrants' motivation to integrate. This constructive perspective is furthermore adopted by Lazarova et al. (2023), who, based on Nardon et al. (2021), emphasize the special role that organizations play in the identity construction of refugees in their new environment through support mechanisms (see also Hajro et al., 2019). Methodologically, Primecz et al. (2023) promote a method called narrative approach to examine how organizations shape migrant integration experiences and trajectories.

Increasingly, by including the meanings and perceptions of migrants, it is automatically no longer only the imposed organizational measures that are considered, which then have to be accepted and implemented by the migrants, but dynamics and interactions within the organization, for example with other employees and managers, embedded in the organizational framework and integration measures. These developments lead to an integration definition which is more interactive, and a "two-way process" meaning that not only migrants play the active part in integrating but also especially multiple other actors within the host country (Ortlieb & Knappert, 2023). This dynamization also leads us to the integration model we have created and explained below.

2.2 Integration into organizations: organizational socialization

Organizational socialization refers to *integrating individuals into an organization* and thus transforming them from organizational outsiders to effective members (Chao et al., 1994; van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Ortlieb and Knappert (2023) transfer Ager and Strangs (2008) societal integration conception to the workplace level, and define inclusion at work then as social connectivity, safety and stability, same "rights" and opportunities for advancement, and the feeling and behavior of an organizational citizen.

Throughout the organizational socialization process, which is meant to achieve the beforementioned status of inclusion, organization-*specific* knowledge is conveyed (van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In addition, the socialization process provides values, norms, patterns of action and thought symbols and beliefs, and corresponding legitimation structures to the individual (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Therefore, the entry is also a prompt for new learning, social negotiation, identity-building, and (cultural) integration processes in the organization (Grosskopf et al., 2022; Lazarova et al., 2023; Louis, 1980; Morillas & Romani, 2022; Nardon et al., 2021; Ortlieb

et al., 2021; Valenta, 2008) helping migrant entrants to overcome great uncertainty, stress and the search for belonging (Saks et al., 2012).

Considering organizations as conventional, bounded framing, much of the current research focus 'inwardly' on the organization (Ashforth et al., 2007). But, since all members of an organization differ along a multitude of variables—previous experience, personality, goals and needs, level of knowledge, and competencies (Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012)—topics within the organization relate not only to the organization. This is why we base our study on the theory of social worlds dismantling the boundaries of an organization and describing the integration processes from the perspective of different social worlds that intersect an organization.

2.3 Different social worlds within an organization

The understanding of organizations in this article is based on Strauss's (1978, 1984) theory of social worlds, which we use to underline the active, strategic, structural role of organizations in the integration process. The concept of social worlds has existed in sociological literature for many years (Hughes et al., 1950; Shibutani, 1955). For Strauss (1978), society, nation or state are chaotic, confusing entities, whereas every social world is a universe, a space of effective communication and interaction, constituting social structures that form around a core activity or context of action. Actions, interactions, and meanings are legitimized discursively and symbolically within social worlds and are defended against other social worlds or actors. Thus, discourses create and mark the boundaries of a social world. According to the social worlds' theory, formal organizations participate in a number of social worlds (Clarke, 1991, p. 131).

> "The particular power of the social worlds framework is that precisely because social worlds are "universes of discourse" the framework explicitly goes beyond "the usual sociological suspects"—conventional, highly bounded framings of collective actors such as organizations, institutions, and even social movements. These "suspects" are displaced in the social worlds framework by more open, fluidly bounded, yet discourse based forms of collective action." (Clarke et al., 2008, p. 116f.)

We therefore support the argument that organizations are embedded in a social context and organizational life is particularly shaped by its intersectionality with the environment Clarke et al., 2008; Strauss, 1984; Ortlieb & Knappert, 2023). Moreover, organizations differ from other social worlds in the form of commitment (i.e. formal membership). While in other social worlds a "participation without membership" exists, Clarke (1991, p. 130) sees an organization as a "membership with varying kinds of participation". These two organizational interaction dynamics, i.e. *outwardly* to the social environment and *within* the organization through "varying kinds of participation", lead us to the multiple cultures concept. This concept is explained below and offers useful points of analysis for presenting the organizations´ social worlds constellation and its influence on (cultural) integration processes.

2.4 Multiple cultures as social worlds

Organizations are crosscut by different social worlds, as Huysman and Elkjaer (2006, p. 3) emphasize: "In a social worlds understanding, organizations are arenas of coordinated collective actions in which social [sub]worlds emerge as a result of commitment to organizational activities." We extend this statement by arguing that social worlds also emerge *independently* of organizational activities. Organizations unite within themselves a plurality of cultures (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004) which can be seen as social worlds being "separate from each other, overlapping, super-imposed or nested, or interacting with each other" (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004, p. 378). These multiple cultures represent the separating, delimiting, or merging integrative effect of complex structures, depending on how they are perceived and used effectively by the organization. Through this multiple cultures' perspective, culture-oriented management research has departed from a priori-defined reference framework of national culture (Boyacıgiller et al., 2004).

Sackmann and Phillips (2004) assign four levels to the developing and co-existing cultural groups within organizational settings: sub-organizational, organizational, trans-organizational, and supra-organizational. Table 1 gives an overview of each level and corresponding examples along which possible cultural groups can form.

This possible plurality of cultures within and across organizations' boundaries constitutes social worlds of discourses, which influence the integration processes of a migrant into the organization. Multiple cultures form the extended basis of the organizational influence factors we propose for the socialization and thus integration of migrants. Depending on which levels of multiple cultures become visible in the organization, these form the dominant integration drivers for migrants. Consequently, perspectives on organizational integration are expanded. Figure 1 shows multiple cultures as existing or developing cultural groups at different levels that dismantle organizational boundaries representing outward and inward-directed social worlds. These contribute to the organizational integration process and consequently, to the acquisition of specific organizational knowledge.

3 Research design

In order to investigate the integrative effect of companies, we conducted a qualitative multi-case study based on the theoretical concepts elaborated in the former section. Our research is located in a tradition of qualitative-*interpretative research paradigm* (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Romani, 2008). Its goal is "to describe and explain in order to diagnose and understand" (Gioia & Pitre, 1990, p. 591). Therefore, observed phenomena rather than laws are represented (Geertz, 1973). Actors are thus (local) meaning-makers because they perceive socio-cultural reality in different ways within and due to their interpretive framework and therefore give their social reality certain meanings (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gertsen & Zølner, 2020). Research questions attempt to identify differences and similarities between the views of interest groups and thus describe and explain the meanings attributed to them from the perspective of the actors.

Table 1 Levels of multiple cultures in intercultural organizational and management research (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004, p. 378)

Level	Sub-organizational	Organizational	Trans-organizational	Supra-organizational
Exam-ple	Functional domain Duration of organizational affiliation/seniority (tenure) Hierarchy Role Plant site (production, administration, etc.) Work group/team	Organizational culture Single business Multinational enterprise Large corporation/holding Family enterprise Franchise Social enterprise Start-up	Professions/occupational group or guilds Unions Project-based or product-based networks Regional institutions	Regional particularities (e.g. language) Industry Economic region Ideology/religion

Fig. 1 Research framework

We also believe it is useful to reflect our methodology. In particular, we illustrate our research approach in terms of scientific paradigmatic positioning, because it explains the epistemological foundations of our research. Paradigmatic orientation not only influences methodology, but also has an effect on the research question, the interpretation and presentation of results, as well as the structure and style of a scientific article (Bonache, 2021). Using context-oriented case studies we situate ourselves in the social constructivist interpretive paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), which searches for possible sensemaking and social construction of realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) in order to understand processes and outcomes of cultural integration in organizations.

Table 2 gives an overview of the basic elements of our empirical approach.

3.1 Multiple case studies

We took a qualitative case study approach because our study design is particularly suitable for research from the perspective of the interpretive paradigm (Piekkari & Welch, 2011; Taylor & Søndergaard, 2017; Welch et al., 2011, 2022). Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p. 25) see case studies as "rich, empirical descriptions of particular instances of a phenomenon that are typically based on a variety of data sources." Especially, they emphasize multiple case studies:

> "Because case numbers are typically small, a few additional cases can significantly affect the quality of the emergent theory. […] adding three cases to a single-case study is modest in terms of numbers, but offers four times the analytic power." (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 27)

The selection of cases should not be entirely random (Yin, 2014). This paper employs an imitative replication logic to reinforce the findings with each additional case and to formulate the further development of organizational and integration theory approaches in a well-founded manner. It differs significantly from a 'conventional' sampling strategy, which aims to make representative statements about an entire population (e.g. of SMEs) based on a targeted selection of research objects through statistical inferences (Yin, 2014). The objective is not to consider all available variables in a statistically representative manner concerning the object

Table 2 Study design

Epistemology	Study design and research logic	Case selection and in-case sampling	Data collection	Data analysis
Interpretive paradigm	Multiple case studies Deductive theory framework and goal of inductive advancement	Replicating the analysis unit: three SMEs Criteria-based sampling of observation units (migrants, experts, documents)	Qualitative methods and data triangulation Problem-centered and expert interviews Document analyses	Reconstructive evaluation of individual cases Idiographically descriptive presentation of the results Case-oriented analysis and theory building

of investigation as "this would require an impossibly large number of cases" (Yin, 2014, p. 48). For this study, this would mean comparing sector, company size, ratio of national and international employees, location, degree of internationalization, origin, occupation and age of international employees, etc. in several case studies in order to be able to make statements about their theoretical relevance. Due to the level of detail in each individual case study, exact replications are hardly feasible. Therefore, the study considers various factors, including those common across all cases (such as size and employment of highly qualified migrants), as well as those that are unique to some cases (such as same industry, same growth of the organization, and age of the organization) or absent in other cases (such as nationalities of the highly skilled migrants and strategic orientation): "Nevertheless, the multiple-case sampling gives us confidence that our emerging theory is generic" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 34).

Our article focuses on the organizational socialization and integration process of highly skilled migrants in Bavarian internationalized small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the IT service sector and consulting sector, including multiple cultures as organizational context conditions. We selected three SMEs based on the following classification: First, they had to employ highly skilled migrants full-time, and, second, they had a maximum of 499 employees and an annual turnover of less than 50 million euros. The selection of companies was based on the principle of replication described above. Access to companies on the basis of the research question at hand was problematic, so that the actual selection of the three case study companies had to be more pragmatic. Of a total of 47 companies contacted that met the above criteria, only eight were initially prepared in principle to make themselves available for a full case study due to ethical, time and economic reasons. The subsequent selection of the three case studies was based on the exclusion of the other companies if organizations ultimately differed too much from the other case studies in terms of environment, approach, character and management and thus contradicted the logic of literal replication, or because the willingness of those responsible declined in the course of the research and a comparable depth of the case study could no longer be achieved. Nevertheless, the research objective is accomplished with these three cases, since multiple case studies in the sense of qualitative research achieve a higher level of abstraction, but do not aim at a generally valid grand theory by considering the respective organizational contexts. Table 3 gives an overview of the three SME cases.

Table 3 Overview of the selected case study SMEs

Case	Size	Founding year	Share of international employees	Turnover[a]	Industry	Location
SME 1	180	1984	45 (25%)	27,5 Mio. €	IT service	Bavaria
SME 2	490	1980	40 (8%)	~46 Mio. €	IT service	Bavaria
SME 3	45	2001	8 (17%)	~12 Mio. €	Consulting & Relocation	Bavaria

[a]According to the management's own statements, in relation to the entire company

Qualitative interviews serve as our central source of information. We conducted a total of 25 interviews in the beforementioned three companies in Germany (the following quotes from interviews were translated into English). Seven of the 25 interviews were *expert interviews* which were conducted at the beginning with German managing directors, staff with responsibilities in HR departments, and department heads (Table 4) to gain insights into technical, procedural and interpretative knowledge related to the specific professional or occupational field of action.

Following the expert interviews, *problem-centered interviews* were conducted with highly skilled migrants regarding their integration experiences (Table 5). In line with Primecz et al. (2023) we wanted to understand how organizations shape migrant's integration and socialization experiences through their own narratives. Whereas the definition of 'migrants' is widely discussed in the literature (for an overview, see Andresen et al., 2014; Guo & Al Ariss, 2015), our sample comprises *eighteen skilled migrants* whom we define as people with a tertiary education level (Kuvik, 2012; Rottas et al., 2015) and who have moved from one country to another for (in our case) taking up employment and settling for a certain period (Zikic et al., 2010).

In addition, throughout the research, we collected and viewed approximately 450 pages of company-related documents that provided information on the context conditions and processes of organizational integration under discussion: publicly accessible documents (e.g. homepages, company portraits, newspaper reports) were used as well as internal documents (e.g. brochures, Power Point presentations, job descriptions, handouts, flyers) that were made available to the researcher. The aim was to verify, support, compare and supplement the information from the interviews in order to give greater depth to the individual case study analyses, in the sense of triangulation, to include several perspectives in the process of gaining knowledge (Taylor & Søndergaard, 2017). This gave insight into corporate culture, personnel strategy and socialization structure or described the socialization process in terms of content or provided information.

3.2 Data analysis

Following the guidelines suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Miles et al. (2014), we followed an iterative process of preparing and analyzing the data,

Table 4 Overview of expert interviews

Case		Expert/function
SME 1	A	Member of the management board
	B	Head of public relations
SME 2	A	Management of the company
	B	Head of human resources
SME 3	A	Managing director
	B	Human resources department
	C	Department manager

Table 5 Overview of migrant interview partners

Case	No.	Origin	Qualification	Age	Gender	Work experience in years	Duration of stay in years
Migrant interview partners							
SME 1	1	Bosnia	Dipl. Business Administration Tourism	32	f	14	7
	2	Tunisia	B.Sc. Informatics	34	m	4	13
	3	Slovakia	Dipl. Teaching	31	f	10	5
	4	India	Promotion Informatics	42	m	17	15
	5	Ecuador	B.Sc. Business Informatics	32	m	2	13
	6	Bulgaria	B.Sc. Business Informatics	30	m	1.5	11
	7	USA	B.A. Film Studies	42	m	25	20
	8	Romania	B.Sc. Informatics	47	f	23	24
	9	Slovakia	Biology Teaching	35	f	9	12
	10	Russia	Dipl. Business Administration	–[a]	m	–[a]	–[a]
SME 2	1	Spain	B.Sc. Informatics	28	m	6	3
	2	Spain	Dipl. Business Informatics	29	f	6	3
	3	Spain	Dipl. Software Engineering	28	f	4	4
	4	Spain	Dipl. Software Engineering	30	f	4	4
	5	Spain	B.Sc. Communication Engineering	26	f	4	3
SME 3[b]	1	Lebanon	M.Sc. Computer Science	26	m	4	2
	2	India	M.Sc. Informatics	31	m	7	3
	3	New Zealand	B.Sc. Business IT	32	m	8	4

[a]Further information refused

[b]SME 3 did not reveal any significant new results; therefore, a theoretical saturation was reached, and no more interviews were conducted

including the constant comparison between the data and emerging theoretical constructs. We prepared the collected data for analysis and transcribed the audio files of all 25 interviews using the transcription software F5, according to a simple transcription system (Kuckartz et al., 2008). The transcripts and collected documents were then digitized and inserted into the computer-assisted coding and data analysis programme MaxQDA 2020, including documents, as well as analytical memos helping to connect individual codes (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019).

Further analysis followed a two-stage procedure proposed by Miles et al. (2014) and also Saldaña (2013), with a *first cycle* and a *second cycle* or *pattern coding*, as well as a subsequent case-specific and cross-case analysis. In the first phase (first cycle coding), we started by deductively coding the data material based on 'sensitizing concepts' (Blumer, 1954). In a second coding phase (second cycle coding), based on the method of 'axial coding'—in the sense of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a combination of inductive and deductive thinking—we developed correlations and patterns on the basis of the first coding phase and we then further

condensed, grouped and categorized the data (Saldaña, 2013). In doing so, the code system was more structured in terms of content and selectively processed so that irrelevant and secondary codes were sifted out. Table 6 displays an excerpt from our coding scheme:

4 Findings

This section presents the central findings of the three company case studies. It is based on our interlinked conceptual framework: the theory of social worlds and the multiple cultures approach. Answering our research question of how multiple cultures at different levels of the organizational setting contribute to the organizational integration of highly skilled migrants in the three cases. The different organizational context of each case influences the constellation of different multiple cultures in the socialization and cultural integration process. This is why we structured the findings based on the three SME cases. Following an interpretive logic, our aim was to gain new insights based on our pre-established framework, enriched with inductive realizations through migrants' narratives (Primecz et al., 2023) during the interview analysis. To illustrate this, we have attributed a *metaphor to each organization*. According to a qualitative-interpretive approach, the inductive construction of organizational metaphors (Gmür, 2006; Morgan, 1986), based on Max Webers ideal types (Weber, 1949), are seen as a thought experiment that does not aim to represent reality, but to provide a basis for comparison of different empirical observations. Organizational metaphors are social constructs that serves to focus on special characteristics (Barmeyer et al., 2019)—in our case to describe the peculiarities of the experienced organizational integration process by migrants.

The findings are summarized in Table 7.

4.1 SME 1—the employee-focused company

SME 1 can be considered an employee-focused company, due to the organizational culture strongly geared to participation and co-determination. In terms of the multiple cultures, SME 1 has integrative drivers mainly at *organizational* and *sub-organizational level*.

The organization attaches great importance to structuring and managing the integration process of new employees, which serves the purpose of organization-specific knowledge transfer and at the same time facilitates the perception of organizational positions, roles and activities. SME 1s´ institutionalized socialization measures are for example a joint introductory event ("New Hire", see e.g. SME1-2, 88; SME1-1, 144; SME1-10, 68), the presentation of new employees to the existing staff in the company's internal staff magazine (SME1-3, 76) and company-wide "all"-meetings (SME1-3, 76).

> "[SME1 1] tends to organize everything. Of course there are also guidelines for hours, for work instructions and job descriptions, where everything is documented to some extent. [...] And actually that is not bad [...] one has

Table 6 Coding scheme

Category	Sub-category	Sub-category	Codes
Organizational contextual conditions (ORGCON)	Human Resources Strategy (ORGCON-HR)	–	Responsible HR Industry-specific HR …
	Corporate culture (ORGCON-CC)	–	Organization as a social system Organization as a home …
	Organizational Sozialisation (ORGCON-OS)	Sozialisation structures (ORGKON-OS_STR)	Mentoring system Team reference …
		Institutionalized tactics (ORGCON-OS_INS)	–
		Individualized tactics (ORGCON-OS_IND)	–
		Missing/misguided socialization (ORGCON-OS_MO)	–
Integration processes (INT)	Integration within the company (INT-IN)	Sub-organizational level (INT-IN_SUB)	Integration in the team Professional specialisation …
		Organizational level (INT-IN_ORG)	Organizational context as cultural equaliser Negotiated work culture …
		Transorganizational level (INT-GER_TRA)	Vocational learning Professional identification …
	Integration through business (INT-GER)	Supra-organizational level (INT-GER_SUP)	Language competence Everyday practical knowledge …

Table 6 (continued)

Category	Sub-category	Sub-category	Codes
Integration effect (INTEFF)	Balance effect (INTEFF-BAL)	–	Occupation as stability Organization-specific identification …
	Surplus effect (INTEFF-SUR)	–	Learning manners and values Individual process of adaptation …
	Justification	–	"Participating in social life" System knowledge …

Table 7 Organizational socialization and multiple cultures in the three SME cases

Characteristics	SME 1	SME 2	SME 3
Organizational Metaphor	Employee-focused company	Egalitarian company	Adolescent start-up
Central socialization element	Familiar organizational culture	Strong team spirit (but partial group formation of Spaniards)	Pioneering spirit and openness
Organizations integration support	Institutionalized integration structures move into the background of informal collegial interaction and corporate culture	Institutionalized measures (1) Starting days (2) Value fans and feedback talks (3) German courses	Informal and demand orientated, no structured program
Mainly referred to	organization	Teams	Organization in the professional/industrial context
Dominant multiple culture level/ social worlds of integration	Organizational (organizational culture) sub-organizational (role, function and colleagues)	Sub-organizational (team, colleagues) Supra-organizational (national/regional particularities, e.g. language)	Trans-organizational (IT profession) Supra-organizational (regional practices, e.g. folk festivals)
Implicit socialization strategy	Co-determination Participation	Adaptation Assimilation	Ad hoc initiatives
Central socialization element	Familiar organizational culture	Strong team spirit (but partial group formation of Spaniards)	Pioneering spirit and openness
Intercultural learning	Mutual learning processes through open organizational culture	Guided adaptation of learning by the organization	Sporadic learning in parallel—international professional and local private—social worlds—especially via the profession

clear frameworks. You can really refer to them. Okay, of course you talk to your colleagues: 'How do you do this or that' or whatever. But [...] the general line is there." (SME1-10, 68–70)

Furthermore, the organizational culture and everyday life of the company pay attention to employees. Staff recognition, equal rights and familiarity are grounded in the culture of this *family-owned business* (SME1-10; organizational level). Based on a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitment, SME 1 opens job options for migrant skilled workers and makes further qualifications possible: "So in terms of training, […] that always worked out." (SME1-2, 50). Migrants' backgrounds and associated education and training biographies are deliberately treated equally and integrated into the company in the best possible way. The employees' opportunities for participation in the development of the company as well as in its successes and losses are positively emphasized. Further, co-determination and co-responsibility are expressions of appreciation. SME 1 thus provides a home for professional self-fulfillment and creates an employee identity for respective *roles* and *functions* (sub-organizational level). Furthermore, interviewees highlight the importance of collegial support:

"...You get to know it best through your work, your colleagues. It was a bit difficult at first, I must say. So many departments, who is responsible for what, etc. But I always had to ask.
Interviewer: [...] So you learn about the company best from your colleagues?
Yes, exactly." (SME1-1, 144–146)

The role of colleagues as socialization agents is particularly beneficial. Socialization processes are the prerequisite for learning practices and behaviors—intercultural learning is reinforced by the numerous social contact situations on a sub-organizational level. Purposeful orientation towards behavioral patterns and working methods through colleagues is necessary for migrant's organizational socialization, in order to become an effective member of the company. The incentive to be involved in this process stems from migrants' need for affiliation. SME 1 is often described by the interviewed migrants as a place of observation and learning:

"So I think the company plays a big role. You spend most of your time here in the company working with your colleagues. Actually, these are the people who influence me. And that can affect me here every day and [I] see the things that are normal here in Germany." (SME1-3, 152).

Consequently, the corporate culture of flat hierarchies and a strong organizational social fabric evokes a (working) atmosphere in which social interaction favours the integration process in the company:

"You [...] always have the feeling that you can turn to someone when you need something. I don't have the feeling that you are just a number. And you often get praise, which is good. From supervisor or from colleague, your work is appreciated." (SME1-1, 60)

"It is also the idea that [...] everyone can talk to each other, and I think that's good. [...] What is also good [...] is that every month there is an all meeting. [...] And at the end you can sit with them and have a beer. And that's just talk. So this is the concept. (SME1-4, 33)

In summary, integration processes take place within a positive working atmosphere (e.g. also SME1-2, 50, SME1-3, 46, SME1-9, 34), which is derived from the interaction of the corporate culture of employee focus and appreciation on the one hand and flat hierarchies designed for co-determination on the other hand. The emphasis on social interaction in everyday organizational life, which is characterized by collegial support and social events, is important. (Intercultural) mutual learning processes through the open organizational culture promote the mixing of migrant employees with German employees and thus enable integration processes within the organization.

4.2 SME 2—the egalitarian company

SME 2 endeavors to create and maintain an organizational culture of equal rights. There is a strong focus on teams within the organization (sub-organizational level) as well as on regional Bavarian events and culture (supra-organizational level).

SME 2´s unconditional equal treatment and integration of all new employees is explicitly emphasized: "Justice is the most important thing for us" (SME2-B, 31). Three institutionalized measures provide the migrants—as well as all new German employees—with aspects of organization-specific knowledge. These include joint starting days as an information event and organizational initiation rite, the 'value fan' (a self-evaluation and feedback instrument) as an organizational cultural artefact in connection with regular feedback meetings and German courses to promote the language skills of the migrants.

Concerning multiple cultures, migrant interviewees emphasize integration processes to be initiated on *sub-organizational* and *supra-organizational* levels representing the social worlds in SME 2. At sub-organizational level, the *team* has a central value, as it results in sustainable integration processes:

"I had a [mentor] from the team. If I had a question about the programs or the structure of the company, he helped me." (SME2-2, 90–97)
"Yes, we have two experts on the team. And yes, they help me so much. And they're good people. Yeah, they're important, first of all." (SME2-4, 130–132)
"And here, integration, always. For example: I come alone and I didn't know anybody. But still, my team mates accepted me and helped me and [said]: 'Hey [...], are you going for lunch?' for example or coffee break or something." (SME2-3, 124)

Teams are seen as the most important intercultural contact zones. The imparting of behavioral (e.g. SME2-1, 13–18, SME2-3, 28, SME2-2, 202), technical (e.g. SME2-1, 46, SME2-3, 75–80) and linguistic (e.g. SME2-1, 64, SME2-2, 43, SME2-3, 8) knowledge was especially mentioned. Furthermore, the team is

often described as dominant system of reference, helping to internalize the supra-organizational level:

"[I have] done many activities with my team. And also I learned about German traditions and team traditions. [...]. And here you learn [...] respect. [...] And I think I integrated [myself] better because I do a lot more activities. And I have several ways to speak German and everything." (SME2-1, 90-142).

Moreover, the supra-organizational level can be identified in national-inspired aspects, for example the before mentioned German language courses 10 h/week. Additionally, regional-inspired aspects are highlighted by the Bavarian company itself. For example, meeting rooms in the building are named after mountains (e.g. "Brotjackriegel", "Lusen") and rivers (e.g. "Inn", "Donau") in the region (Company Presentation SME2, 75) as well as the regional significance of beer drinking is taken up by a "Dienst-Abschluss-Bier" every Friday evening in the company's bistro. Migrants feel these close links to Bavaria:

"And [...] the employer did things, too. Team events and traditional things, Mai Dult [regional folk festival] and so on. There you get to know Bavarian culture. And we saw all that. And that was important. I think they are very concerned about integration." (SME2-4, 260-262)

"And [I didn't know] that Bavarian is spoken. [...] when I came here, I didn't understand anything and thought: 'Oh God, what is that? I have learned German, but I don't understand anything. Then I asked my work colleagues: 'Yes, that's Bavarian. So it's another language.' Now I've learned Bavarian. Thank God I can understand. And yes, I was able to develop well here and at work." (SME2-3, 8-12)

The Spanish national culture plays another important role in SME 2. The strategic decision to hire mainly skilled migrants from Spain has shaped the organization and can lead to an interesting segregation effect between the Spanish group of migrants and local German colleagues. Originally the idea of the management was to eliminate national cultural difference by recruiting migrants of only one nationality, also achieving a scale effect for the migrants' organizational socialization process. However, this strategy is problematic, promoting a supra-organizational culture that does not refer to the German national or Bavarian regional culture, but favors transnational living by maintaining a social world with reference to the Spanish society of origin:

"And I know the Spanish from [SME 2] because they are Spanish. We eat together... So it is difficult to speak German all the time. While eating, it's always better if I can speak Spanish and relax." (SME2-5, 209-213)

"... all Spaniards worked together for the first seven months. With the German course, we were in an intensive German course, we spent many hours together. So now we don't have a German course anymore, we have a normal day, [but] the contact is not so different. So I think we feel a bit like a little family with the Spanish." (SME2-1, 82)

In summary, similar to SME1, SME 2 shows on the one hand, the organization as a contact zone, a refuge and guide for intercultural learning processes, as well as a resource for social (albeit same-cultural) networks. On the other hand, SME 2 shows that the recruitment strategy—can have an influence on different facets of the supra-organization. Even if skilled migrants have built several networks thanks to on-boarding days and language courses, they strongly rely on their own ethnic—Spanish—network in the company. This is a distinguishing feature from SME 1 (and SME 3), since SME 2 is the only one to carry out a targeted recruitment of a nationally homogeneous migrant group.

4.3 SME 3—the adolescent start-up

Being the youngest company, SME 3 is limited in its experience of internationality and interculturality. When the interviews were conducted, the company was in the process of fixing its corporate culture: guidelines for action, standards and values of the organization were to be defined (SME3-A, 30). Regarding multiple cultures, SME 3 combines professional specific knowledge of the IT sector which is *trans-organizational* in nature with *supra-organizational* regional specifics having an influence on everyday life in the organization.

The company embraces the Bavarian slogan of *Laptop and Lederhose*, meaning the complementary combination of *high-tech* and *tradition*. First, according to the cosmopolitan, globalized IT industry, this German company uses many English expressions in everyday communication and is characterised by professional and qualification influences. Second, the influence of regional culture is important. Joint visits to folk festivals and roast pork meals are organized (Facebook presence SME3).

Starting with the slogans' *trans-organizational high-tech aspect*, the English language (common in the IT industry) will sooner or later become the "company language of choice" (SME3-A) and is the door-opener for migrants to feel comfortable in the organization:

> "I probably would have quit this job. Because I mean, there was a time when I was like: 'This sucks, I'm gonna quit.' But that was mostly because of language. I was really struggling with language. But that was really early on […]. I said this actually to [my colleagues]: 'I would not be here still if I wasn't able to work with you guys. Because we are able to talk in English. That was really important for me.' And I got along with them socially." (SME3-3, 140, 124)

Language is an issue in the organization. The following quotation shows possible segregation effects due to not learning the German language with an impact on life outside work:

> "At work, I do my job, I have interaction with them, they know me well. But I don't have real friends with them, outside of work. […] Only when we go to some Mai-Dult [regional folk festival] or something. With alcohol (laughing). […] And I think it is, because I don't speak German well and they speak Bayerisch a lot. I think most of the employees are from Bayern, so that's why. […]

when there is some event, always they want me to go there and to make me feel like home and not really far from them." (SME3-2, 30)

Due to the low degree of institutionalization of specific corporate cultural characteristics, SME 3 does not convey a strong corporate identity in a coordinated manner. Rather, it seems highly flexible in its processes of integration within the still manageable social structure (only 51 employees). The effect of the IT-industry related *professional profiling and qualification* comes to the foreground:

"Yeah, profession is important. Because actually I was not completely sure, about my profession. Because I got into engineering in India because my marks were good. And engineering provides a good career later on. So in that case I came into the field […]. But after coming here I decided to like my profession because I started liking my work." (SME3-1, 76)

The highly qualified migrants in SMEs 3 identify themselves through their work and thus generate professional and social self-esteem. This also makes visible that the migrants are offered professional identity and stability via the organizational link, whereby reputation, skills and the competences play an important role.

This organizational link is further stressed by a courteous and helpful socialization behavior of the German colleagues. They function as carriers of *traditional regional supra-organizational level* aspects which additionally drive the organizational integration. The interaction is also mainly oriented towards industry-related *content* and *technical topics* and is perceived by the migrants as an aid for work-related challenges and processes (cf. also SME3-2, 64):

"I would say the most important would be the social aspect. Like if I have a group of friends I can identify with. That would probably be the biggest thing. And for a long amount of time, I guess I don't have that, but for now I started to get that through colleagues and work […]. And yeah that's probably the biggest thing that made me feel more integrated. And I think that through that you learn that cultural side." (SME3-3, 122–124)

"The colleagues are very nice. I mean, because I didn't know much about the technology I was working with. So they helped a lot. […] They try their very best to communicate with me. […] Also there is not much work pressure. […] They try to make you feel comfortable. […] If you have the smallest of problems then they also help you." (SME3-1, 6–49)

Colleagues are important anchor points in work, which may be the center of social life for migrant newcomers transmitting working practices and behaviors. As the last quote shows, socialization measures in SMEs 3 are limited to an informal mentoring programme designed to convey the company's own processes and requirements. The early stage of development results in rather random and demand-oriented socialization measures (SME3-3, 60). This includes frequent sociable meetings, e.g. eating roasted pork together (typical for the region), celebrating at the regional folk festival, or hiking in the region (Facebook presence SME3). The company is therefore strongly emphasized as a social system and has a focus on the employees and their well-being within the company. The motto "We don't just work together, we cook,

eat, laugh, talk to each other—in short: our colleagues are important to us" (SME 4 | Career 3) is obviously lived in the company. The corporate cultures familiarity and its flexible design helps to prevent culture-based exclusion within the organization. Migrants evaluate SME 3 to be "[…] a very nice working home…" (SME3-1, 65).

In summary, informal, little structured and highly flexible integration processes in SME 3 are initiated on supra-organizational level, especially via colleagues, while trans-organizational profession and respective skills play an important role for intercultural learning. Therefore, the organization becomes a professional trans-organizational parallel space and the Bavarian slogan can be reinterpreted as 'Laptop *versus* Lederhose', 'high-tech versus tradition'.

Table 7 summarizes—according to the above-mentioned organizational metaphors (Barmeyer et al., 2019; Gmür, 2006; Morgan, 1986)—the findings answering our research question of how multiple cultures at different levels of the organizational setting ultimately contribute to the organizational integration of highly skilled migrants. The characteristics were established, deductively, through the pre-established concept and also emerged, inductively, through migrants narratives (Primecz et al., 2023).

Interestingly, we discovered yet another emphasis upon migrant narratives: The integration into the organization also facilitated *the integration into the German society*. To put it in another way, organizations are embedded in the social environment and thus, through organizational socialization they also convey values and cultural practices of the society to their (migrant) employees as a second look at quotes from the results section may illustrate (see Table 8).

On the basis of the three SMEs we briefly illustrate this unexpectedly often mentioned phenomenon, which corresponds Berger and Luckman's (1966, p. 89) "general knowledge" of institutionalized basic assumptions of interaction as an "all-encompassing frame of reference" of a society:

In SME 1 the integration processes into the German society happens especially through the organizational culture and colleagues as socialization agents. They transmit general knowledge relevant to everyday life in German society. They accelerate

Table 8 Societal integration through the organization

Case	Statements
SME 1	"So I think the company plays a big role. You spend most of your time here in the company working with your colleagues. Actually, these are the people who influence me. And that can affect me here every day and [I] see the things that are normal here in Germany." (SME1-3, 152)
SME 2	"[I have] done many activities with my team. And also I learned about German traditions and team traditions. […]. And here you learn […] respect. […] And I think I integrated [myself] better because I do a lot more activities. And I have several ways to speak German and everything." (SME2-1, 90–142)
SME 3	"[…] I would say the most important would be the social aspect. Like if I have a group of friends I can identify with. That would probably be the biggest thing. And for a long amount of time, I guess I don't have that, but for now I started to get that through colleagues and work […]. And yeah that's probably the biggest thing that made me feel more integrated. And I think that through that you learn that cultural side." (SME3-3, 122–124)

Table 9 Specific organizational knowledge extended by general knowledge (SME 1)

Organizational specific knowledge	Societal general knowledge
Colleagues	Social contacts
Organizational belonging	Values, norms and behaviour
Vocational learning: tasks and activities	Language learning
	Knowledge of the system

Table 10 Specific organizational knowledge extended by general knowledge (SME 2)

Organizational specific knowledge	Societal general knowledge
Team integration	Segregation in networks of the same culture through homogeneous recruitment
	Language learning
	Dialect learning
	Regional specifics
	Value system and norms of behaviour

the language learning process, transmit culturally specific behaviors, norms and values, as well as the orientation towards national-institutional structures and regional specifics. Consequently, societal general knowledge and legitimation structures are imparted beyond the specific knowledge of the organization. Table 9 shows the main drivers for acquisition of specific knowledge described within the findings and additionally displays the most striking integration-relevant aspects obtaining societal general knowledge.

In SME 2, sub- and supra-organizational level effects, such as colleagues and teams as well as language competences and knowledge of regional specificities are present. Thus, general knowledge is automatically transferred to migrant newcomers. At the same time, the Spanish grouping may have a negative impact on the general but even on the specific knowledge, so that this may hinder 'inwardly directed' integration as well as integration into the society and possibly, migrants remaining in the organization. As in the case of SME 1, Table 10 shows SME 2´s main organizational and societal integration drivers as well as the integration relevant aspects of general knowledge.

In SME 3, trans-organizational professional knowledge concerning the IT sector plays an important role for the migrants. Additionally, the role of colleagues as socialization agents for the supra-organizational integration becomes particularly clear. Through their willingness to provide region-specific general knowledge, they form an integrative bridge. Critical voices may raise due to the fact, that German language is substituted using English language in the organization. SME 3 may thus fail in the integration-relevant interaction with their migrants, since language, as a carrier of symbolic meaning and legitimation structures, is one of the most important types of general knowledge needed for the societal integration process. Consequently, intercultural learning in SME 3 does not necessarily include German language, which means an exclusion of further and more independent access to the

societal environment as well as to its general knowledge resources. Therefore, SME 3s' migrants may more easily access and identify with the trans-organizational IT labor market rather than the German SME 3 itself. Nevertheless, due to the companies predominantly regional (Bavarian) workforce taking their new colleagues to folk festivals regional supra-organizational culture is thus conveyed independent of language and balancing the beforementioned aspect. Moreover, since everyone is speaking English, this does not exclude inner-organizational network and friendship building, resulting in organizational but also societal integration (see Table 11).

5 Discussion and theoretical contribution

We close the before-mentioned research gaps by first indirectly showing that the integration of *highly skilled migrants* may be a complex process with different layers that are often overlooked but crucial for theory and practice. Second, we shed light on socialization and integration processes at the less-studied *organizational level* and demonstrate how different social worlds within organizations have an impact. Third, this leads to a *more dynamic concept of integration* based on social worlds as multiple cultures transcend the organizations as conventional framings. Moreover, it opens theory and practice to different perspectives influencing organizational integration—factors beyond national culture. Fourth, our approach reveals an unexpected focus of migrant narratives. Through organizational integration also, an *unintentional (cultural) integration into German society* takes place. The last three points are discussed below.

Our empirical study constitutes a first approach for analyzing and classifying the effects of organizational socialization and integration processes from a meso-analytical perspective, an aspect that has received little attention in previous research (Cerdin et al., 2014; Guo & Al Ariss, 2015; Hajro et al., 2021; Lazarova et al., 2023; Nardon et al., 2021). The paper shows how the integration concept of social worlds serve as an interface between integration and organizational research. In this respect, we contribute particularly by providing a basic theoretical bracket to the fraying field of labor migration research and to the integration of highly skilled migrants.

The focus on the meso-level in combination with different social worlds as multiple cultures makes it possible to loosen up the national structural integration research, which has been criticized in literature for being a simplification of multi-level intercultural integration processes (Caprar et al., 2015; Grosskopf et al., 2022; Primecz et al., 2023; Taras et al., 2009; Tung, 2008). As a consequence, the assumed

Table 11 Specific organizational knowledge extended by general knowledge (SME 3)

Organizational specific knowledge	Societal general knowledge
Vocational learning/activity	Linguistic segregation area
Vocational identity	Regional traditions and customs
Teambuilding social events	Nationally specific work and behaviour patterns
	System of values and norms

dichotomy between preserving and rejecting national cultural identity should no longer be in the spotlight. Usually, the focus is set on how people of one nationality can integrate themselves into a host society with people of another nationality (Favell, 2014); 'fit' and 'adjustment' are the essential keywords (Haslberger & Dickmann, 2016; Haslberger et al., 2013). This article focuses on integration as an ongoing participation in processes of socialization and community building. We are thus able to place innovative emphasis on participation in concrete social systems or structures: the results show that social world heuristics offer an opportunity for a more detailed examination of integration processes beyond the common framework (Zifonun, 2016). They can provide a contextualized understanding of integration processes and thus give insights into the complex mode of action between actors and organizations during this process.

We show that the concepts presented here not only demonstrate integration into the organization but also, via the organization, *into the German society*. Considering the knowledge-sociological integration perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) in combination with the concept of social worlds (Strauss, 1978), we empirically show that the integration of migrants into organizations through multiple cultures bridges *specific organizational* knowledge with *general* knowledge referring to the peculiarities of the receiving *society*. As mentioned before, the wider societal context thus corresponds to the "general knowledge" which describes institutionalized basic assumptions of interaction as a societal frame of reference (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 89), regulating the universal, unconscious, applicable and accepted interactions of everyday life. Depending on the extent to which organizations manage to establish formal or informal structures that make the socialization process tangible for new members, the socialization process becomes socially integrative—this is especially important for migrants as their narratives demonstrate and the literature reflects.

In sum, we extend our research framework. Figure 2 shows multiple cultures serve the present study as a premise for companies' role in the social integration process. Multiple cultures lie above the borders of the organization (*green*) and the receiving society (*red*) since they exist in their sub-organizational and organizational form within the organization, but also in their supra- and trans-organizational forms referring to societal general knowledge and beyond. Interestingly, as our results show, supra- and trans-organizational cultures strengthen team-building mechanisms and joint identification and thus also affect the organizational level. Likewise, sub-organizational and organizational cultures affect the societal level due to collegial interactions and subsequent value and behavior mediation.

5.1 Practical implications

Our findings also have important managerial implications. Heads of organizations and especially the IHRM should be aware of the impact of their integration measures. On the one hand, integration makes the knowledge and skills of migrants more accessible for organizations. On the other hand, it leads to migrants remaining in the organization and thus additionally results in sustainable accessibility, use and
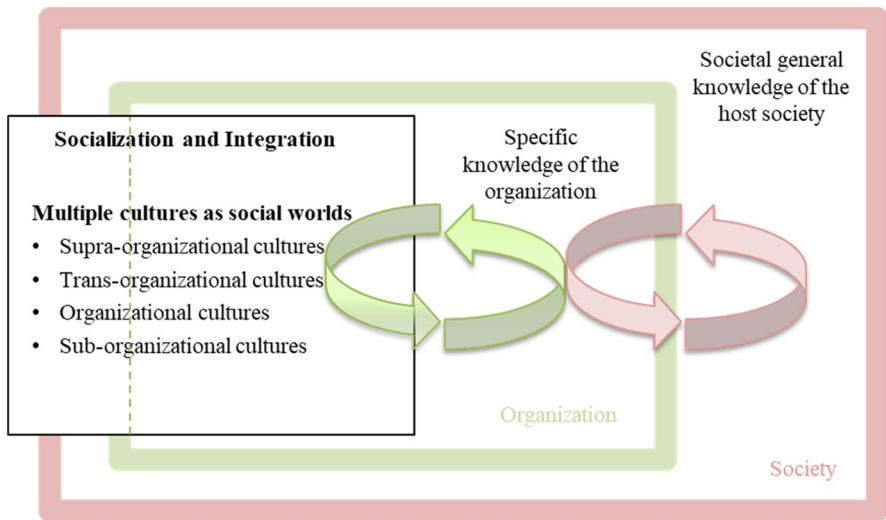
Fig. 2 Multiple cultures and socialization tactics as facilitators of organizational and social integration

even development of these knowledge and skills. Since organizations are multidimensional intercultural contact zones, they have a greater potential to contribute to the social integration of migrants than other arenas of social worlds.

Managers should promote an authentic and tangible organizational culture as a social system in order to generate a positive effect on the process of organizational socialization: Both the identity stability of migrants as well as the probability and intensity of interaction between migrants and natives will be positively supported, which will also assist highly skilled migrants in overcoming challenges mentioned in current research, such as the lack of recognition of educational status and thus substandard employment or unequal power relations (Dietz et al., 2015; Guo et al., 2020; Hajro et al., 2021; Omanović & Langley, 2023; Szkudlarek et al., 2021). For example, trans-organizational references to occupations, sectors, etc. enable interaction between migrant and native workers in the organizational socialization process, which can dispel prejudices and are thus a basis for further integration processes.

Managers will benefit from this research about socialization and integration processes being able to identify multiple cultures within their organization, and thus will be able to recognize and assess special challenges for integration optimization in order to reinforce socialization measures. They can consciously construct and instrumentalize these frames of reference in the socialization process of highly qualified migrants. To this end, further areas of possible research in this field should be uncovered.

In comparison to low skilled migrant workers, highly skilled migrants have more cognitive resources such as expertise in terms of their initial position. They are therefore in a better position to acquire and develop specific and general knowledge via the multiple organizational cultures, which is also helpful for integration—even though this does not mean that integration of highly skilled migrants is always

without challenges. Similarly, highly skilled migrants tend to be very self-reliant and intrinsically motivated, which fosters the career development. In sum, they will need less organizational mentoring with integrational focus (Chevrier et al., 2023; Knappert et al., 2023; Nardon et al., 2021).

5.2 Limitations and implications for further research

We acknowledge limitations of our study and derive directions for future research. First, limitations arise especially from a methodological point of view. The postulated concept of integration is characterized both by its reciprocity between migrants and native employees and by its processuality. The chosen approach, based on qualitative methods, is thus a fundamental necessity. Nevertheless, the research process posed central challenges in terms of access to the object of investigation, which entailed methodological limitations. Perspectives of the migrants' (German) colleagues were restricted, since companies were only conditionally willing to make them available for interviews due to time constraints. Moreover, access for a planned participating observation had to be omitted. This could have shed more light not only on the reciprocity but also on the processuality of the integration and participation processes in the context of the organization. Additionally, further SME contexts or even other types of organization (e.g. MNEs), as well as less migrant-friendly organizations (both the IT and consulting sectors are global and cross-border in nature; also, there is a constant shortage of talent, particularly in the IT sector), would shed light on different challenges and opportunities, and consequently, would lead to an exploring of a more comprehensive understanding of the integration process. In this respect, the insights of the present study are limited to the subjective-reconstructive perspective of the researcher and the objects under research. Future research should try to take advantage of the beforementioned research opportunities.

Second, further empirical validation is needed. More specific research questions would be revealing for theory and practice. Based on our conceptual framework, future research could spotlight specific cultural groups at different levels within the organization (Saks et al., 2012; Toh et al., 2012) as well as their impact for migrants, colleagues, organizations, and societies. For each of the multiple cultures, research could launch a debate on respective assimilation, integration versus segregation effects and consequences for the retention of migrants and thus for the sustainable use of migrants' skills for the organization. Furthermore, good practices concerning the introduction to multiple cultures for organizational newcomers should be figured out for different contexts. Additionally, a closer look is required at the integrative role of managing directors and company owners (Hambrick & Mason, 1984).

Third, the mostly unnoticed process of simultaneous integration into societal structures is also shown. An unanswered question of organizational socialization literature is the visibility of the organization's socio-cultural context in the socialization process and its relevance to new migrant members and their learning requirement to settle and orientate themselves within the organization and, at the same time, within society (Ashforth et al., 2007). Future research should therefore be sensible for the context and dynamics of an organization's environment.

Summarizing the future directions, our conceptual approach and presented empiricism provide a starting point for possible multi-level analysis and its interplay not only for sociology but also the international business and IHRM.

6 Conclusion

While prior studies have highlighted integration at micro- and macro-level, little is known about the organizational integration. Considering multiple cultures, this study delineates the socialization process of highly skilled migrants in the organization through interaction-acquired knowledge. In answering its research question, our article shows that organizations are central places for the integration of migrants because they enable personal fulfillment and development as well as interpersonal exchange and a space of belonging. Organizations are embedded in the surrounding social environment and convey values and cultural practices of society to their (migrant) employees enabling societal integration through organizational socialization.

Furthermore, our research shows which (multiple) elements of culture are consciously and unconsciously used in relation to the organizational socialization of skilled migrants. Multiple cultures affect the process of organizational socialization. The different cultural groups within an organization, at their respective levels, represent the spectrum of what can be experienced and learned by migrants in an organization. The emphasis of a specific level of multiple cultures, and thus, for example, either a professional culture, an industry culture or a regional culture, influences the socialization process. Depending on whether the socialization was, for example, oriented more towards teams within the organization or towards an understanding of the organization as a locally embedded actor, the contents of the organizational socialization are influenced.

Based on these influencing factors, in this study we demonstrate the integrative effect of organizations. It becomes apparent that integration in a company serves migrants as a resource for local, regional and national patterns of values, norms and behavior, and know-how about the system and languages as well as social contacts. The organization, thus, has a direct influence on the (cultural) integration of migrants in the closer and wider social environment of the organization. By focusing on the role of organizations' integrative effect, we bring much-needed attention to the socialization and integration process, which is so important for allowing organizations to exploit the (intercultural) potential of highly skilled migrants. Our findings call for more research in this direction.

Declarations

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