

## Acculturation Processes of International Labour in Switzerland in the Hospitality Organisations

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### Abstract

The following research examines the acculturation processes of migrants, working in Switzerland, particularly in the hospitality industry. Due to rapid globalisation and lack of investigation on worker's adaptation, there remains a gap in the research based on the employees' cultural clash occurrence. The study explores potential tools which might simplify cultural adaptation and provide a better understanding of international communication for any future employees coming to live and work in Switzerland. Semi-structured interviews with participants from different nationalities were conducted to identify the importance of effective acculturation, the adaptation issues, and the influence of those on work and life in Switzerland. The results demonstrate that the most efficient way to acculturate in Switzerland is integration to the culture and traditions of the country and its history through understanding their values, norms, practices. Moreover, Switzerland was viewed as a very conservative and strict country where one must work hard to be accepted. Those participants who tried to separate, assimilate, or marginalise tend to experience tougher acculturation. Language, namely Swiss German or German, was highlighted as the most essential to learn or to be provided by the workplace. Lastly, current research identified a link between successful acculturation with job opportunities and development. Since salaries and job opportunities are not the same for the foreign workers in comparison to Swiss employees on the same position there might be a potential recommendation for improvement. Little to no link has been found between acculturation and psychological well-being, financial status, and health conditions.

**Keywords:** acculturation, adaptation, international labour, migrant workers, Hofstede's framework

### Introduction

Samnani et al. (2012) claimed that the intensification of globalisation has generated a profound impact on international partnerships, forcing companies to become multicultural (Kyove et al., 2021; Lithoko, 2021). As an example, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2016) calculated the number of international tourist arrivals has doubled over the past 20 years, boosting demand for foreign labour to 5.5% in establishing economies and 2.6% in developed countries. Coinciding with the demand in foreign labour, rising challenges are

seen from the employee point of view, specifically their adaptation to different organisational and socio-cultural environments (Kyove et al., 2021; Samnani et al., 2012, 2012; UNCTAD, 2016).

This process of adjustment, also known as acculturation, has a profound impact on any individual wanting to work in a different societal culture, the environment in which individual motivations, values, and learning are formed (Baldwin et al., 2013; Berry, 2019). Hummel (2009) highlighted the importance of understanding societal culture in doing business globally, stating that companies diminish the effectiveness of their performance because of non-awareness of cultural issues. This was further elaborated by Oktadiana and Djauhari (2011) in the context of hospitality enterprises in which they concluded that intercultural awareness, flexibility, and capitalizing on differences are fundamental to effective operations (Fong et al., 2016).

There has been a large amount of research conducted on the acculturation processes influencing customer satisfaction, loyalty, commitment, physical, social and psychological well-being, however, employees' adaptation in the hospitality organisations was not considered (Gauer et al., 2017; Liem et al., 2021; Maldonado & Tansuhaj, 1999; Taylor & Finley; 2009; Thompson, 2013). Moreover, a lack of studies on employees' acculturation in the Swiss hospitality industry was identified since the major focus within Swiss hospitality context has been put on students' acculturation while studying. Furthermore, a case study of international hospitality labour in the United States executed by Valenzuela (2008), demonstrated the absence of effective resources to provide cultural adaptation tools for the environment that creates satisfaction and loyalty within the organisation. Krieger (2016) also put the emphasis on investigating those tools, saying that numerous companies have no formal acculturation programs to help employees adapt. Additionally, both international and local employees who move from one region to another can encounter issues such as a greater likelihood of unemployment, and facing discrimination in gaining promotions (Mohamed et al., 2012). These outcomes, related to the lack of acculturation, further strengthen the need for additional studies in the area.

The findings of this research will help international and local employees and their employers, not only in Switzerland but all over the world, to focus on faster acculturation, to comprehend many aspects of adaptation, and to minimise cultural misunderstanding. Furthermore, the following research paper has its focus on the hospitality industry, particularly in Switzerland, since it holds a strong image of hospitality education and a wide provision of job opportunities for the international labor for students and migrant workers. For instance, according to African Council (2023), the resident African population in Switzerland keeps on increasing accounting for 100.000 people living and working here. Additionally, 40.7% of the international workforce receive jobs in the hospitality industry while its necessity to employee international workers continues to rise. Therefore, the goal of this study is to educate migrant workers in Switzerland on their expectations of living and working in the hospitality industry, as well as educating them on how to properly acculturate. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to investigate the acculturation processes of foreign employees working in the Swiss hospitality industry. The following objectives are presented:

1. To investigate the range of the acculturation processes and the differences among foreign behavioural patterns.
2. To assess foreign employees' acculturation experience in the multinational environment in Switzerland.
3. To critically examine the biggest challenges and potential tools to simplify employees' adaptation.

## Literature review

### *Switzerland hospitality industry*

The Swiss hospitality industry is the leading the way in excellent service, quality, and facility for guests (SHG, 2022). According to the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) (2022), Switzerland was ranked the highest number of tourist arrivals in 2019, further identifying those tourists having a tendency to stay in hotels and luxury properties. Additionally, EHL Insights (2022) claims the hotel chains in Switzerland have experienced over 26% growth, and the demand is only increasing. To meet this demand, a tremendous pipeline of hotels, resorts, and restaurants will be entering the Swiss market in the next three years. In addition to tourists seeking to visit Switzerland, students are eager to study and work in the hospitality field (Glion, 2022). The most recent data on foreign labour reached 1.683 million persons working in Switzerland, and the prospects of its increase are positive (BFS, 2022).

### *Theoretical background*

Acculturation is broadly defined as the result of certain cultural changes through contacting groups or individuals with different values, languages, beliefs, behaviours, values, and identity (Jeedigunta, 2015; Nitischa, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2013). Furthermore, Bei (2017) claimed that the process of acculturation is directly connected to cultural intrusion and has a profound influence on the performance of any individual. However, those differences may affect an individual negatively, forcing them to conform to two sets of values and norms, potentially resulting in stress, demotivation, and burnout (Baldwin et al., 2013; Škreblin & Sujoldžić, 2003). Another viewpoint expressed by Schwartz et al. (2013) claimed that through the acculturation processes, one acquires a better and faster comprehension of self-purpose and self-worth.

Berry (1997) was one of the first who proposed a theory involving four acculturation strategies and singled out integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation, as identified in Figure 1. The choice of the acculturation method is based on the background cultural traits of an individual and the personal choice of whether to retain, reject or accept the host and home cultures (Berry, 1997) However, it is not always an individual's decision since dominant groups may force certain forms of acculturation towards the non-dominant group (Berry, 1997). Analysing Berry's latest work from 2001, Giang and Wittiq (2008) revealed that the integration approach (retaining home and accepting host cultures) will be the most used whereas marginalisation (rejection of both) is the least applicable. According to UK Essays (2003), separation is a complete refusal of the host culture and a full dedication to their own culture, whereas assimilation (accepting host culture and rejecting home culture) is the opposite of separation or segregation strategy.

Nitischa (2016) claimed that acculturation can be viewed from the social perspective and proposed a concept of two acculturation methods, direct and indirect. Direct process includes straight social interaction of cultures, while indirect process impacts the cultural adaptation through the mass media (Nitischa, 2016). Schumann, [(1986) cited in Zaker, 2016] believed that acculturation is the social and physiological taxonomy of factors and includes elements such as attitude, social dominance, enclosure, cohesiveness, congruence as well as motivation, and culture shock. Zaker (2016) mentioned in her study that Schumann selected only two types of acculturation that are effectively used: (1) living with the same values retaining the individual's lifestyle enhancing social contacts referring to the integration strategy of Berry and (2) adapting to the foreign way of living remaining in contact with the target culture.



acculturation. The prominent researcher of acculturation processes (Berry, 1997) earlier indicated the direct connection of acculturation theories with the psychological theory of stress and coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Nonetheless, Tropp et. al (2011) pointed out that many approaches of acculturation methods were attempted in terms of cultural behaviour, however, “feelings of belonging and emotional attachment” were simply left out or rarely applied.

Maydell-Stevens et al. (2007) introduced Ward’s theory of acculturation discussing the interconnection between psychology and social aspect. It was observed that the changes in cultural perception happen with another culture collision through the interaction with the host culture and the outcome of those contacts (Maydell-Stevens et al., 2007). Additionally, researchers Karla and Sharma (2014) added that the core element of adaptation is an individual’s well-being which goes along with the ability to social integration. Furthermore, Nap et al. (2014) asserted that the level and the success of acculturation are directly connected to the mental state and social ability of a person. Since extent literature is lacking with the evidence of the interdependence of psychological and social elements of acculturation, this study investigates this point more thoroughly.

### ***Swiss behavioural patterns through Hofstede framework***

It is essential to point out that Hofstede’s model provides a comprehensive understanding of how cultures can affect the workplace through the six dimensions: power distance, level of individualism, uncertainty avoidance, level of masculinity, long-term-orientation and indulgence (Corporate Finance Institute (CFI), 2022; Norges Klibben Sveits (NKS), 2018; Soares et al., 2007). Switzerland is located in the lowest rank of the power distance, respecting all levels within the hierarchy, encouraging leadership instead of dictatorship, and empowering equality (EHL Insights, 2022; Eugster et al., 2017). At the same time, the behavioral pattern within the country is not connective, but rather individual. In the workplace, the interaction is direct and specific and success depends on the individual’s hard work; there is no mixture of personal relations and business. Therefore, the level of masculinity remains high and aimed at competition, performance, and wealth. This long-term vision makes Switzerland a very pragmatic country. Furthermore, Swiss culture tends to not tolerate uncertainty by introducing strict regulations and policies. Nevertheless, people allow themselves to have proper relaxation after work or an achieved goal where they are capable of dividing work time from leisure (EHL Insights, 2022; NKS, 2018).

### ***Applications of Berry’s Model***

Baber (2016) analysed a case study of American information technology workers located in Japan in regard to employees’ cognition and its outcomes, applying Berry’s model of acculturation, and singled out two types of acculturating employees: (1) restarter and (2) maverick. Restarter tends to experience assimilation of marginalisation to the integration path, whereas maverick results straight in separation (Baber, 2016). Yu et al. (2016) raised a topic about the importance of psychological adjustment of Chinese employees in the U.S. pointing out their struggle with American culture, stating to integrate into the culture they are obliged to reconcile and involve in society with their traditions and norms. Moreover, it has been concluded that psychological well-being alters based on the initial choice of acculturation from an individual (Berry, 2005). Those foreigners choosing to integrate experienced less stress adjusting in comparison to those who decided to stay separated. Researchers have based their studies on Berry’s theory of acculturation, which has been criticised by opponents due to poor validity and little focus on minority groups (Abdelhady, 2014). Additionally, Schwartz and

Zamboanga (2008) stated that extent research stopped at the point of linking acculturation to cultural integration or retention, not fully developing their thoughts on the topic.

### ***Acculturation processes in hospitality domain***

An earlier study by Au et al. (1998) connected the succession of the acculturation processes of Chinese employees working in the US with language proficiency and level of education. Another angle of successful acculturation was introduced by De-Juan-Vigaray et al. (2021) stating that social-demographics variables affect acculturation the most when it comes to being abroad. Whereas a recent study by Lefrid et al. (2022) underlined the biggest influences on the acculturation process of a foreign employee are the work environment and relationships of co-workers within and outside the hotel. Even in the initial stage of education and internships, a struggling adjustment to different cultural values and norms has been experienced by Asian international hospitality students coming to America due to a high level of expectations and recognition of achievements from their families (Ma et al., 2020). Hence, the most up-to-date research papers refer to Schwartz's Multidimensionality of Acculturation (2013) proving the points of importance in cultural adjustments tested in American and Asian contexts preliminary. Therefore, the author remains eager to undertake the study in the Swiss hospitality sector to spot similarities and differences.

### ***Challenges of foreign employees to acculturate***

Doki et al. (2018) researched stressful factors of acculturation amongst foreign workers and identified six main aspects such as communication, cultural differences in the workplace, daily life, relationships, financial problems, and social inequality. Similar results were illustrated by Aung et al. (2020), concluding that three aspects made their acculturation challenging: (1) lack of experience, (2) financial status, and (3) health condition (obesity, alcohol and smoking). Additionally, Hommey et al. (2020) highlighted employees' feeling of belonging is fully dependent on their anxiety level in the workplace, due to a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities, self-worth, and social acceptance. In terms of solutions, Taylor and Finley (2009) conducted a study on acculturation techniques facilitated in American resorts and identified formal techniques introduced to workers to assimilate them into the hotel culture and hardly existing strategies on full acculturation being mainly informal.

## **Methodology**

### ***Approach***

To investigate the aim and the set of objectives corresponding to the given literature, the qualitative approach, namely the interview-based method, is considered to be as the most efficient one (Baber, 2016; Baldwin et al., 2013; Hu et al., 2001; Pantiru & Barley, 2014). Valenzuela (2012) stated that in comparison to the quantitative method, qualitative approach has its focus on a deeper understanding of a situation from a closer perspective with few participants required. The aim of the interview-based research proposed by the author is to identify and clarify the individual process of acculturation - the way individuals feel, live, understand, and accomplish those. (Schwandt, 2001 cited in Huang, 2015). Moreover, interviews allowed a deeper analysis of contextual accounts of participants' experiences (Schwandt, 2001 cited in Huang, 2015). Furthermore, the qualitative method, unlike the quantitative, was focused on the micro-level of social interaction (Crossman, 2020). In fact, all queries in the qualitative interviews were described as inconclusive, explicit, neutral and delicate, which are based on the experience, behaviour, opinion, value and background details (Patton, 2002 cited in Huang, 2015). Researchers pointed out that the acculturation processes, behaviour and attitude of individuals are interconnected, and the comprehension of those might

decrease cultural misunderstanding. That is why the author intended to utilise the qualitative approach in this investigation. Additionally, a handful of studies have previously selected quantitative approach instead of qualitative such as web-based and serial surveys (Do, 2016; Pantiru & Barley, 2014; Škrebliin & Sujoldžić, 2003). Therefore, a qualitative approach provides a different lens to the given topic. Furthermore, an application of Berry's and Hofstede's models was aimed to be applied in the following paper. Previous studies made use of both models and spoke about the efficiency of these theories in examination of acculturation processes (Kennedy & MacNeela, 2014).

### ***Sampling and data collection***

In line with the objectives of the current study, the author has determined that the interview-based approach is the most applicable. Moreover, a semi-structured questionnaire is composed to address challenges that migrants and international employees come across (Huang, 2015). Additionally, an online individual interview provided a deeper understanding of internationals' opinion and feelings towards adaptation in Switzerland.

To achieve valid and extensive results, this study aims at a small group of international operational and back-of-house employees working in hotels in Switzerland. Additionally, the author resolves to integrate the acculturation theory proposed by Berry (1997) and the six cultural dimensions model by Hofstede (1980) in the questionnaire to identify the most frequent acculturation method of participants, as well as to compare cultural backgrounds of the host and home cultures and spot the areas of challenge. The respondents were questioned about their acculturation process, complications and reasonings behind those basing it on Schwartz's Multidimensionality of Acculturation (2013). The sample should comprise of eight to ten individual interviews to reach trustworthiness and necessary information (Luca, 2012). Moreover, Hennick and Kaiser (2021) highlighted that the sample size for saturation in qualitative study ranges from 5 to 24 interviews. The author managed to reach an acceptable number of respondents to proceed with the data analysis and results. The question samples were formulated as follows: "What is your opinion/feeling about...? How would you describe...? How do you perceive...? What is the impact of...?" To add on, the average length of the interview was for 30-40 minutes. The respondents' origin countries, based on the primary background research on Swiss foreign employment, were Europe and Asia. The language used to conduct the interview was English to generate more meaningful data.

### ***Data analysis***

The author was inclined to utilise semi-structured interviews based on Berry's theory of acculturation and a Hofstede's framework of cultural dimensions. The aim was to collect data from the participants truly willing to share their experience (Shenton, 2004), to gain frank and honest answers. Moreover, rephrasing questions (iterative questioning), drawing conclusions (debriefings) and using various information sources and theories (triangulation) were found by the researcher as a trustworthy tactics to gather valuable information. Additionally, the researcher aimed to implement such variables as a reflexive journal to keep track on the given information, as well as the audit and video trials to listen and to view respondents' answers, to gain more insight into the inquiry. Moreover, recording data, comparing, and evaluating results was a reasonable way of improving the quality of the manuscript (Bowen, 2009). The data received was automatically transcribed through the Webex application, coded and analysed based on similarities and differences of responses. The results were grouped in themes and sub-themes, presented in the results section.

### ***Ethical issues***

Resnik (2015) and Fouka and Mantzourou (2017) pointed out the major ethical issues while conducting the research are the right of beneficence (do effective and significant research not harming participants with the appropriate questions), respect for the anonymity, and confidentiality. Additionally, Fouka and Mantzourou (2017) stated there is an extra challenge in qualitative research, which is that vulnerable groups of people can be offended or forced to participate. For example, lower-level employees might regard the interview as an invasion of privacy. Therefore, the author undertook the research with the permission of the hotels and the employees themselves – but independently of them, interpreted the purpose and the aim of the research in the beginning of the interview, assured respondents of anonymity, as well excluded statements of any political and religious content which might insult the participant.

### ***Limitations***

According to Younus (2014) cited by Sudeshna & Datt (2016), every methodology comprises two broad phases which are planning and execution. It is obvious that these two are expected to have limitations which are unfortunately uncontrollable (Simon, 2011). The first limitation, which is applicable to the current research, is the time consumption. Qualitative research requires a big amount of time to conduct interviews with the participants and to execute the analysis (Sudeshna & Datt, 2016). Secondly, the interpretation of the results due to the art of the approach. The researcher also believes that lack of respondents may cause issues. Only ten participants might not be able to provide the information which is credible enough and which reflects the opinion of the rest of the world. In addition to a small number of respondents, some respondents may feel uncertain to express their opinion in a foreign language. Subsequently, they would be reluctant in sharing truthful experience by give basic answers.

### **Results**

A total of 12 international employees working in the Swiss hospitality industry were approached, and ten participants agreed to take part in the individual interviews conducted through Webex. After the review of responses, the author had to use only eight valid interviews for the analysis of the results due to the technical errors of the automatic transcript and the irrelevance of the answers. Five of those were male and three were female aged 22 to 30. All participants originated from European and Asian countries and studied hospitality before being hired. Most of the participants possessed a Bachelor of Science in International Hospitality Management and worked for more than two years in Switzerland. The majority were employed in four-to-five-star properties within Food and Beverage, Kitchen, and Rooms Division departments. Different themes were determined throughout the analysis of their acculturation processes, challenges and recommendations in terms of working and living in Switzerland.

Analysis of the individual interview responses demonstrated the following themes, identified in Table 1: the image of Switzerland, expectations versus reality, Swiss people, management, and relationships, working relationships, choice of acculturation, major challenges, and recommendations for employees and companies. Theme one represented the image of Switzerland. All participants had a very generic vision of Switzerland: a country famous for its chocolate, cows, cheese, watches, and mountains. The participants expressed their opinion as “a beautiful country with its nature, good business, and strong education.” Some participants highlighted the prices using the following statements: “very rich,” “high standards of living,” “pricy,” and “expensive.” Theme two is focused on the expectations before arriving at the destination, and the reality faced after arriving at the destination. All participants were aware of working and studying opportunities, however, more than half had little or no expectations, saying that, “I had no expectations, just went to study,” “I tried to





expect less, just to get a job,” “No specific expectations, positively surprised especially at work,” “It is known for its good education,” “strong educational system in the hospitality schools.” Every participant had something positive to mention with regard to their experience: “my expectations were exceeded,” “more or less met,” “fully met, not much to complain.” Theme three illustrated the description of Swiss colleagues/culture, management and working relationship. Fifty percent of participants described people as open-minded, whereas the other half had a completely opposite vision. Those who view colleagues as open-minded tend to have positive experiences with managers being helpful and surroundings being welcoming with an easy way of communicating and building relations. The rest highlighted strictness, unfairness, overprotectiveness, and hard to approach. One participant stated, “In order to get up the ladder, a foreigner needs to work harder than the Swiss, to do long working hours and not be rewarded still; more hours but not more payment.” When it comes to communication outside the workplace, more participants agreed that, “Swiss people are friendly, fun to be around, and accepting as long as they see you make effort.”

**Table 1: Identified themes and sub-themes**

Theme	Participants (N)
<b>Image of Switzerland</b>	
Nothing specific	5
Very generic	8
Nature and beauty	3
Business and education	6
Expensive	3
<b>Expectations</b>	
No specific expectation or very little	5
Work and education	8
Environment and people	3
Traveling	2
Fully met or exceeded	4
More or less met	4
<b>Swiss people, management, relationships</b>	
Closed-minded	4
Open-minded	4
Strict, demanding managers	4
Helpful managers	5
Hard to build relationships	5
Easy to build relationship	3
<b>Choice of acculturation</b>	
Integration (accepting both cultures)	8
Assimilation (rejection of home culture)	1
Separation (rejection/difficulties with host culture)	3
Marginalization (rejection of both)	0
<b>Challenges</b>	
Non-Swiss standard jobs and salary opportunities	4
None	3
Different mentality	3
Language barrier	3
<b>Recommendations</b>	
Language courses	7
More communication with locals	5
Interest in foreign cultures from Swiss organization	3
Swiss standard rewards	2

Theme four is the acculturation process itself. All participants having lived and worked for some time came to an agreement that their choice of acculturation became integration. A couple of respondents experienced separation in the beginning, the assimilation process. Theme five is focused on challenges. Surprisingly, three out of eight participants did not mention any challenges, stating that the experience was way above their expectations comparing it to their

home culture. A handful of those related to the language barrier and different mentality. The biggest number of participants pointed out the salary and job opportunities, which are lower than for Swiss people considering the standards of living. Theme six identified the advice from the respondents on how to make the process of acculturation faster, easier, and more beneficial for the country, industry, and employees. Seven out of eight participants highly recommended the companies provide language courses to new employees, particularly “Swiss German.” Forty-five percent placed high emphasis on the interaction with locals through “team building,” “communicating outside the workplace,” “educating foreigners with Swiss regulations,” “cultural visits” and more. Another valid point was the interest of locals in accepting and getting to know other cultures and being more open to changes (Hartzenberg & Rogerson, 2022). Finally, a handful of participants expressed their wish to get equal treatment and rewards to feel more belonging (Acha- Anyi & Masaraure, 2021).

### Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the tendencies in acculturation among foreigners coming to live and work in Switzerland. From the findings, the author concludes that most participants chose to acculturate through integration into the Swiss culture, retaining few traditions and traits of their own. Little evidence of assimilation and separation as well as no signs of marginalisation were identified. The relationship between psychological well-being (Berry, 2005) and acculturation was not found due to completely different challenges such as job opportunities, salaries, and language barriers. Unlike previous studies mentioned by Schwartz and Zamboanga (2008), current research identified a link between successful acculturation with job opportunities and development. Moreover, there is the same outcome as the Lefrid et al. study (2022) that better acculturation is directly linked with the working environment and social interaction. At the same time, Yu et al. (2016) recommended involvement in society as advice for international workers, which is supported by this research. Lack of experience, health conditions, or financial status were not found as challenges. Instead, more language courses, fairness in treatment at work, and Swiss acceptance of other cultures were highlighted. The following research has started the investigation of international workers coming to Switzerland and experiencing acculturation processes. The author would highly advise further research to be initiated in a context of a particular groups and positions within the hospitality industry from operational to managerial levels, of specific countries. Moreover, based on the results, special projects, courses, and training can be invented and tested to see the difference in the acculturation process, its success, and longevity.

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