Title:

A MIXED-METHODS INVESTIGATION OF WORK IDENTITY IN WAITING STAFF, AND ITS IMPACT ON TURNOVER INTENTION

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Abstract

This study set out to explore the factors which influence work identity construction and turnover intention in waiters. A mixed-methods approach was used. We first conducted a qualitative study into waiters' work identity, followed by a quantitative survey. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used for analysis. Ability to act 'authentically' in the workplace, and relations with intra-group members, emerged as factors that influence work identity construction. An impact of work identity on turnover intention was confirmed. The findings have implications for strategies that could enhance work identity construction amongst waiters and tackle problematic levels of turnover in the industry.

Keywords: waiters; authenticity; work identity; intra-groups; interference; turnover intention.

Introduction

Although restaurants employed a high number (1.5 million) of people across the UK (UKHospitality, 2019), this figure disguises problems with staff retention in this sector (turnover is estimated to be above 30% per year) and job dissatisfaction (Bighospitality, 2017). Both of these factors combine to undermine business productivity. Besides the costs of recruitment and training, employers also face staff shortages resulting from staff leaving their positions with little notice. Moreover, this is further affected by the scars the Covid-19 pandemic has left on the hospitality industry, although recent statistics show an improvement in employee numbers after national restrictions have been lifted (ONS, 2021). The 2019 UK Restaurant Industry Forecast stresses that employers must concentrate on retaining and recruiting staff in order to improve or maintain productivity (Frye et al., 2020). It is often assumed that the relatively low-skilled nature of the work, and low wages, are two of the main reasons for this problem. However, the work identity of waiters is an understudied and underappreciated factor which likely impacts turnover intention; strategies that focus on enhancing waiters' work identity could have significant positive impact on problematically high turnover rates within the industry (Wang et al., 2020). Thus, this study sets out to explore the factors that underpin work identity amongst waiters and determine their relationships with turnover intention.

Traditionally, researchers have focused on staff training and professional and financial rewards as a means of improving staff's attitude towards their work (e.g. Akgunduz et al., 2020; Yousaf et al. 2014). However, evidence from academic research (Ukandu & Ukpere, 2014), has clearly shown that this has not translated into improving waiting staff's attitude toward their jobs (e.g. Guilbault, 2019; Sukhu et al., 2017; Taşpinar & Türkmen, 2019). It has been suggested that the

fields need a shift in focus away from the purely professional aspects of waiters' jobs (Cooper et al., 2017; Michael & Fotiadis, 2022) and concentrate more on their deeper sense of self (Soelton et al., 2020). Low job satisfaction links to high labor turnover (Dahl, 2020), and one solution may be to enhance satisfaction by better understanding factors that influence the construction of waiters' work identity. Work identity, as defined by Hirschi (2012), is the "clear perception of occupational interests, abilities, goals, and values, and the structure of the meaning that links these self-perceptions to career roles" (p.4).

Within the waitering profession, however, factors affecting occupational identity have not been sufficiently explored. It is important to identify the factors that influence occupational identity formation in servers in order to develop strategies to reduce turnover within this group. This study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by developing our understanding of occupational identity within the waitering profession, its antecedents, and its consequences on work engagement and turnover. As a result of thoroughly examining these, the current study seeks to contribute to the literature by providing insight into how turnover might be minimized.

Literature Review

Previous research (Ann & Blum, 2020; Bauman, 2004; Jenkins, 1996) has confirmed that employees tend to evaluate themselves (and are evaluated by others), based on the work they accomplish, suggesting a relationship between work role and the construction of a work identity (Collinson, 2004). Therefore, this can be a motivation for the individual to find the right job. Other authors (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006; Yang et al., 2021) point out that the construction of work identity is an active, dynamic process that involves various factors; integrating these is required to form a cohesive work identity. The work identity construction

process involves developing, mending, preserving, reinforcing or reviewing existing identities (Simonetto, 2019). The construction of work identity is not a straightforward process of adopting a position towards one's work, rather, it is a complex process that takes time (Chen & Reay, 2021; Pratt et al., 2006).

Recent research interest in work identity has grown, but there remains plenty of scope for further study into the influence of different constructs on the development of work identity, within specific professions and working environments (Heinzelmann, 2018). The existing literature indicates that the construction of work identity is an interplay of individuals' life experiences, occupational skills, organizational context, work practices, and social memberships (Rudman & Denhardt 2008; Casey 2008; Wang et al., 2020); the individual biographies that individuals bring to work influence work roles and the ways that individuals identify with work (Collinson, 2004; Ponting, 2021). However, despite the restaurant sector representing a significant employer and economic contributor (Matzembacher et al. 2020), work identity construction amongst waiters has received little research attention, and little is known about how waiters perceive their identity in connection to their job. Crucially, the factors which influence waiters' construction of a work identity are largely unknown, although knowledge of these could allow restaurants to optimise the working environment, enhance work identities amongst their staff, and potentially reduce turnover (Soelton et al., 2020).

Construction learning based on cultural elements has often been utilised as a framework by researchers to explore the construction of work identity. However, Casey (2008) argues that applying theories of construction learning to work identity may be "problematic", as individuals often do not conform to narrow definitions of their occupation imposed by society, and actively construct their work identities by integrating diverse aspects of self, drawn from

group memberships outside the world of work (e.g. Casey, 2008). Further, the concept of self-actualization has also been argued to be important, since "it is linked with individualism and taking care of one's quality of work, which is not necessarily linked with material welfare" (Mustonen 2008: 172). Some research papers (e.g. Chan, 2014; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011), in exploring the factors contributing to work identity, also support the suggestion that a construction learning framework, while often used, might not be the best choice of approach. Instead, we therefore approached the RQs from a "rites of passage" perspective. The rite of passage concept proposes a structural model for understanding how individuals adapt to disruption and upheaval resulting from significant life experiences. The rites of passage concept has its basis in anthropology, it describes how certain rituals allow individuals to shift from one position, social situation or identity, to another (van Gennep, 1960). Rites of passage frameworks have been utilized in relation to diverse topics including group bonding (Albuquerque, 2018), cultural themes (Abeliovich, 2018) and even motives for cosmetic surgery (Schouten, 1991), but have rarely been applied to study the construction of work identity, despite the fact that authenticity, interference, and group identification are all factors evident within the context of most work roles and identities. Interference, for example, impacts work identity because non-work and work areas are not clearly delineated (Gibson et al., 2021); workers are in constant state of transition between the everyday and the interference (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Thus, it is surprising that the rites of passage frameworks have not been applied more often in the studies of work identity construction. As a concept, rites of passage have been identified as being particularly important within hospitality settings and professions. Ideas that are key to hospitality such as "community, space, mobility and temporality could be understood as rooted within rites of passage (Boudou, 2012). From a customer perspective, hospitality can be seen as a type of 'secular ritual', within which customers disrupt their everyday life: conventions and strict social norms are relaxed, during the relative anonymity

and pleasure of eating (Bian & Zhu, 2020). Within the (albeit limited) empirical research literature into work identity construction within the hospitality field (Priyadarshi, 2011), the role of interference has not been analyzed, and no studies have utilized a "rites of passage" framework: this methodological and knowledge gap is partly what the current study aims to address.

The Current Study

Employee turnover intention is related to the possibility that a worker resigns prematurely (Rabad & Wafaa, 2017). Previous studies (Michaels & Spector, 1982; Mobley, 1977; Wong & Cheng, 2020) have shown that turnover intention is the main rational antecedent of actual turnover behavior with significant explicatory influence. Turnover intention is influenced by external factors such as availability of different job opportunities and local levels of employment, and also internal personal factors. Amongst restaurant staff, these factors have been researched in relation to turnover intention (Lo et al., 2018) but the role of work identity construction on restaurant employee turnover has received much less attention. Thus, the current study seeks to investigate both the antecedents of work identity construction, and its impact in terms of influencing employee turnover intention, amongst restaurant staff, focusing on waiters/waitresses in particular. Two overall research questions are put forward: (RQ1) what are the influential factors with regards to work identity? and (RQ2) does work identity impact employee turnover intention? Given the lack of previous relevant literature upon which to base hypotheses, a Mixed Methods Approach was taken. First, qualitative data was collected from waiters' working within Michelin-starred restaurants in London, and also (for a broader perspective) from individuals working within (or with significant knowledge/experience of) the hospitality industry. The insights generated from the qualitative phase were then used to

support the development and design of a quantitative study, which was conducted amongst waiters only. This approach was seen as optimal: given the lack of previous research into identity construction amongst waiters, we first needed to gather views using in-depth interviews and focus groups to identify the important factors. The insights generated from the qualitative phase were then used to support the development of a conceptual framework, which was then tested via a quantitative study amongst waiters only. This careful procedure allowed us to confidently identify and then reliably determine (based on quantitative data from a large sample of waiters) the factors that have an effect on work identity and whether this affects turnover intention. In order to avoid restaurant settings that may be suffering from quality-related problems or that have little commitment to retaining staff – both issues that in themselves may influence work identity and turnover - this study centers on Michelin restaurants where professional standards are relatively high and in which waiters constitute the elite or 'la crème de la crème' of their occupation. (Cooper, 2017). Thus, waiting staff at Michelin-starred restaurants in London, UK, were selected as the main population for study, due to what this group mutually shares, which is: experience, a high-level of competence, training, knowledge and passion (Nascimento Filho et al., 2019). While Michelin restaurants suffer less staff from staff retention issues than elsewhere within the sector, there is still considerable turnover. Thus, for these reasons, waiters in Michelin-starred restaurants were chosen by the current study as a basis for investigating the research aims.

Methodology - Qualitative Study

The first part of this study used a qualitative research approach, adopting a social constructivist ontology (Peck & Mummery, 2018) operationalized by interviews and focus groups.

[Insert Figure 1]

Procedure and Participants

Interviews - 11 semi-structured interviews were performed. Inclusion criteria were: relevant experience in the field, across different jobs, but with full knowledge of the role of the waiter. Thus, interviewees comprised waiters, hospitality lecturers and managers. This heterogenous sample permitted the study to obtain a deeper understanding of the topic and collect a broader range of attitudinal and behavioral data on the subject (Shiu et al*., 2009*). Recruitment was by snowball sampling: one of the researchers used her ex-colleagues' hospitality labor networks to enlist initial participants, who were also asked to suggest potential future interviewees among their friends and colleagues.

The interviews were conducted at a venue and time chosen by the participants. The interview took an average of 45-60 mins and all of them were digitally recorded and then transcribed in word-for-word detail to guarantee reliability (Abbas et al., 2020). The in-depth interview method was individual, semi-structured and undisguised to ensure essential attitudes, motivation, feelings and beliefs regarding the topic. Additionally, the interviewer, after

introducing herself, established a good rapport with the participants in all interviews. The interview questions included:

• what do you understand by work identity?

• How would you explain work identity in your company?

• From your point of view, what do you think are the main elements that influence the development of work identity in the workplace?

• Do you identify your personal identity with your professional career?

• Do you or do you not agree with the following definition of work identity? Why?

 Work Identity is the clear perception of occupational interests, abilities, goals, and values, and the structure of the meaning that links these self-perceptions to career roles (Hirschi, 2012).

Focus groups - these were conducted after initial analysis of the interview data, so as to probe in more depth the topics identified as important in the interviews. These comprised waiting staff only. This technique allowed collecting of data in a shorter amount of time than individual interviews, and also benefitted from the group dynamics. Respondents were questioned about their perceptions regarding work identities; their thoughts about the key factors that could influence and help to construct work identity in the restaurant, and if they identified with waiters' career perspectives, among other questions that arose during the course of the focus group.

For two of the focus groups, Michelin-starred waiters were recruited from the field, via the researcher's network of contacts. The third focus group comprised waiting staff from the restaurant in a 4* hotel; all the participant groups from the three restaurants were selected via snowball sampling. 3 focus groups were enough to identify all of the most prevalent themes within the data set with a total of 18 waiters (10 women and 8 men), to encourage a satisfactory

group communication level that developed discussion and interaction (Woodyatt et al., 2016), and to evaluate more openly the concept of work identity. The waiters' ages were between 20 and 38 years old, with a mean of 24 years. The participants were drawn from diverse social backgrounds, reflecting the wider population under study, and thus enhancing the generalizability of the data collected.

Data Analysis of Qualitative Study

The interview and focus group transcripts were thoroughly examined using thematic analysis, to identify key factors influencing work identity construction. To reduce investigator bias, the three main researchers each undertook a separate, independent analysis of the data, and then agreed on the themes, in line with the investigator triangulation process (Decrop, 1999).

Results of Qualitative Study

Construction of Work Identity

Pre-liminal phase- The first phase of identity construction involves exposure to new experiences within the workplace which serve as initiating events. These events are disruptive and begin the construction process with the realization that a construction of work identity is necessary. This comes about as a result of the 'shock' of these new experiences which serve as "triggering events" (Bamber et al., 2017). In this regard, comments from participants centered around the realization that the waiters' existing self does not necessarily accord with the demands of the role, and those imposed by the organization:

"In this context, so of course companies have standards and rules and policies that everyone have to follow, and these are something that are non-negotiable [...] you need to be yourself but the rules and policies are also there [...] they need to be followed ..." (Marketing and sales manager 53 years old).

This observation shows that in the workplace, waiters wish to be independent actors ("*..you need to be yourself..")* and want to decide and execute activities autonomously. The notion of was authenticity appeared frequently in the interviews, participants highlighted a need to have the most authentic experience possible. However, quotes also highlight that this can be in conflict with the demands of the company, which include standards, rules and policies ("*and these are something that are non-negotiable.. they need to be followed")*. Thus, the realization that their autonomy is only permitted within these bounds can be a disruptive "shock" which prompts the beginning of the work identity construction process. Waiters are faced with a tension between their 'authentic' self' and the bounds of the job role, and thus the freedom to act authentically is limited by this. This realization is the beginning of the occupational identify construction process, through which a compromise must be achieved i.e., the eventual formulation of an work identity that is at least superficially aligned with the standards and policies of the company. In the data, this realization that a compromise needs to be struck between behaving authentically while also adhering to company policies was a theme touched on by many of the participants, as illustrated in the following quote:

"I prefer to keep the balance. But sometimes they don't allow you to be yourself just to follow the company standard" (Waiter focus group 2).

This waiter refers directly to the realization that his freedom to act authentically is curtailed by workplace demands. The scale of this 'disruptive' realization is of course dependent on the distance between the values held by employee's 'authentic' self and those imposed by the employer. If they are already well aligned, the process of work identity construction is less arduous, requiring fewer compromises to be made with regard to the individual's notions of authenticity. The extent of this will of course vary between individuals and is also contingent on the stringency of company policies. Indeed, one interviewee emphasized the need for overlap between the values of the organization and the values and the passions of the employees, describing that as the 'ideal outcome' :

"So, organizations need to first of all recruit the people who fit their needs and their values, so that they have got a high chance of connecting well with others, peers and managers, and the organization needs to be run in a way that people can be themselves. So that actually the values of the organization and the values and the passions of the individuals overlap. And that really is the ideal outcome" (Partner, 50 years old).

Obviously, some managerial staff recognize the tension that exists between employees' authentic selves and values, and those imposed by the company. One manager referred explicitly to autonomy and the importance of allowing waiters to express their authentic self within the job role, thus demonstrating their understanding that reconciling authenticity with the job demands is important for motivation and engagement:

"..about autonomy and freedom to be themselves, so they can feel like they're being individual within ... and express their own individuality in the job. And that's going to be absolutely central to create motivated staff." (Restaurant manager, 40 years old).

What also varies between individuals is the extent to which company values are fully adopted. Some employees construct a workplace identity that actively supports and embodies the organizational values and beliefs. Others rhetorically support these, yet express their disagreement when the policies and standards stop them from being themselves i.e., run counter to their authentic selves to an extent they are not willing to tolerate. Nevertheless, during the pre-liminal phase, the data suggests that employees' self-concept is challenged (albeit to varying extents). Liminality has the potential to then set in (Kerrane, 2018). As the quotes above illustrate, the challenge to one's authenticity by workplace demands is a preeminent factor here (e.g. "*..you need to be yourself but the rules and policies are also there..*"). Thus, the data gathered here suggests authenticity is a crucial factor in the pre-liminal phase, where the process of construction of waiters' work identity begins.

Liminal phase-Within the liminal stage, a person (the "liminar"), is in a state of interference or transition, and their sense of self-identity is in flux. In the current data, we found themes of transition and interference to occur frequently. For example, this quote refers directly to identity interference:

".. in order to develop your work identity and be mature enough to separate the central identity that is giving you a negative impact in your work identity by having a high concentration in your job" (Chef, 35 years old).

When asked what the interviewees thought about the interference between their various identities (e.g., "What do you think the interferences could be between being a member of the staff as well as them being a mum/dad/friend, etc.?" "How do you think the waiters can cope

with this situation?"), it became clear this potential conflict amongst identities was of high importance to many participants, as exemplified by these quotes from waiters:

"It was difficult to be young and working 16 hours a week, but I convinced myself that I was investing in my future" (Waiter 2, 35 years old).

This quote, in relation to when the participant was starting out in the profession, shows the interference between the job role and demands derived from this waiter's other identity as a young person in full-time education.

"A person who serves food, a very friendly person, hard worker with a large memory and has to put away any problems and smile all the time" (Waiter, focus group 2).

This quote shows that interference from problems related to other, non-work, identities, conflict with the job role and the need to *"smile all the time"*. Nearly all interviewees mentioned that interference stemming from non-work identities caused them difficulties in terms of focusing on, and behaving appropriately, within the job role. Resolving this can be difficult and is a critical step in the construction of a robust work identity, especially for people whose non-work roles generate high levels of interference. However, data suggested that identity interference can be moderated by the actions of the management team, by fostering a sense of 'belonging' in the workplace environment:

"That's the usual issue of being a working person versus being a private self..if you have a management team that understands how to create a sense of belonging and sense of career it will be very easy to reconcile your work identity with your private self." (Partner, 50 years old).

Others confirmed the sentiments expressed by the participants above. In sum, interference was seen as a crucial factor in the construction of waiters' work identity; harmonizing across different identities is a complex and lengthy process, and the level of success in this regard varies between employees: it is influenced by their personal situation and the actions of the employer.

Post-Liminal phase-This is the final step in the construction procedure. In this step re-aggregation occurs: in the data, we saw that in this phase, identification and integration with the intragroup, and relationships with other members of the intragroup, becomes paramount. Waiters come to share the same values and beliefs as other members of the group, including passion for food and service (Cooper et al., 2017), and pride in their job role:

"The key word here is professional pride, you have to be proud of your occupation, no matter what it is. In this case it's a waiter and you as a person, as an individual, are part of the bigger collective, the bigger group, you belong through your profession into this identity, in this case the waiter" (Marketing and sales manager 53 years old).

Further, data showed that this can be accentuated when management provide the opportunity for the high-end waiters to differentiate themselves as a separate group from 'conventional' waiters:

"... a good high performing restaurant will manage to give people the feeling and the identity to make them stand out from the conventional waiters." (Partner, 50 years old).

Overall, participants referred repeatedly to the critical role of intragroup identity in the post-liminal phase of the construction process. The influence of relationships with other intragroup members is also important, as is the role of management in allowing the intragroup to develop a shared (but distinct) identity of excellence and purpose.

Consequences of Work Identity Construction

Finally, in line with our research objectives, we considered consequences of work identity construction, focusing on turnover intention. Turnover intention is related to poor service and lower organizational success (Karatepe & Ngeche, 2012). Furthermore, turnover impacts on the morale of employees (Morrell et al., 2004), in addition to undermining the organization's efficiency and productivity (Agoi, 2015). Towers-Perrin (2003) found that 66% of highly engaged individuals had no intention of leaving, while in disengaged individuals only 12% reported no turnover intention. In the current data we found clear evidence that work identity has a direct impact on engagement as illustrated by the following quote:

"... for example, having a good environment, good philosophy at work, getting themselves engaged…, and giving them a vision to develop ... It's very important that you identify with the job and that you are allowed to be yourself" (Marketing and Sales Manager, 53 years old).

Further, other participators made explicit the links to turnover and organizational success:

"Both work identities and work engagement improve organizational outcomes, for instance through increasing employee motivation" (Hospitality lecturer, 50 years old).

This quote highlights the intimate relationship between work identity, engagement and organizational outcomes. Cole & Bruch (2006) suggested that employees with a work identity that includes robust organizational identification, and commitment to the organization, will have lower turnover intentions. Analysis of our data provided strong support for the notion that workplace identity is a critical determinant of turnover intention, as demonstrated by the following quote:

"I think it may also be important not to talk about them as waiters anymore ... why call them waiters? ... People working in Michelin-starred restaurants, they're not really waiters, they provide service to the customers which goes well beyond serving dishes ... it's a highly skilled job. So, I think restaurants need to recognize that they have to offer a development programme to the waiting staff. And if they do that, they manage to keep the people much longer..." (Partner, 50 years old).

This quote firstly illustrates the link between workplace identity ("*why call them waiters?... it's a highly skilled job"*) to the likelihood of staff staying in the job. Secondly, it also puts forward the need for managers to recognize support the construction of a favorable work identity amongst waiters. Specifically, this participant emphasizes the importance of recognizing the qualities of the intragroup ("*.. they provide service to the customers which goes well beyond serving dishes"),* showing these are valued, and offering development opportunities.

These quotes indicate the importance of considering the consequences of work identity. The data showed that work identity is closely tied to work engagement, and also supports the notion that work engagement is positively related to commitment to continue working with one's firm (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Further, the data showed that work identity is a factor that

managers should consider while building a team of engaged employees that are less likely to depart from the job. Practically speaking, participants indicated the importance of supporting employees work identity construction by recognizing the values and standards embodied by the intragroup, while also offering opportunities for self-development. In this way, companies can allow employees to maximize purpose and meaning in the work that they do and retain them in the job role.

Discussion of Qualitative Study

In sum, the construction of work identity is clearly complex; it develops, adapts or changes over time and is dependent on various external and internal stimuli (Abes et al., 2011). Here, we identified three key themes in the data: within the pre-liminal phase, authenticity was an overarching theme referred to by many participants, in particular the mismatch between the 'authentic' self and the values and rules imposed by the workplace serves as a triggering, disruptive event which stimulates the beginning of work identity construction. Then, in the liminal phase, we saw that interference between non-work roles and the developing work identity becomes a pressing issue. This interference needs to be resolved as the construction process proceeds, such that one's developing work identity and non-work identities become reconciled. Finally, in the post-liminal phase, intragroup integration takes center stage, as waiters' work identity becomes aligned with that of the intragroup.

The qualitative findings suggest that the development of work identity is contingent on three distinct factors: authenticity, interference and intra-group processes. Further, results indicated that work identity strongly influences turnover intention. Based on these findings, we propose the framework depicted in Figure 1. The quantitative study then sets out to test the propositions

implied by this framework.

[Insert Figure 2]

The qualitative findings and postulated conceptual framework highlight 3 factors (authenticity, identity interference and intra-groups) as influencing work identity construction in waiters, and also suggests a relationship between work engagement and turnover. This provided us with four testable hypotheses, which were subsequently investigated in the quantitative study:

H1: There is a positive relationship between authenticity and work identity

H2: There is a positive relationship between interference and work identity

H3: There is a positive relationship between intra-group identification and work identity

H4: There is a positive relationship between work identity and turnover

Methodology - Quantitative Study

Materials

To test the 4 hypotheses, quantitative data was collected from Michelin-starred restaurants in London. Appropriate measures with established validity and reliability were selected, based on those used by previous research (e.g., Cooper et al., 2017). These measures were then modified and adapted to create a questionnaire instrument that was able to address the research hypotheses, by covering the 5 constructs under study (I = interference, A = authenticity, IN= Intra- groups, OI = work identity, T = Turnover intention). This instrument was appraised by 13 academic experts based in London who are knowledgeable about the topic and were asked to collaborate in this study to evaluate the content validity of the questionnaire items by

applying arbitrating procedures (Chen & Raab, 2017; Zaichkowsky, 1985). These experts were asked to make suggestions as to the items' suitability and verify the precision of language; their observations were then considered and modifications made as appropriate. After all adjustments based on this feedback were made, the final version comprised 22 items. All questions use Likert-type interval scales (ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 7, strongly agree). (Table 1).

[Insert Table 1]

To validate the instrument, we collected preliminary data, employing a random sampling approach amongst waiters from London restaurants recommended by the Michelin-starred restaurant guide. 83 self-administered questionnaires were circulated and completed during the period of September to October 2019. After cleaning the data, 80 questionnaires were used to examine the instrument's validity, suitability, and freedom from errors. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to test validity (Aaker, 1997) by identifying patterns in the item responses (De Vaus, 2002). The validity of each of the factors included in the instrument was supported since a high degree of reliability was seen within each, with a Cronbach's alpha of WI: 0.846; I: 0.851; A: 0.912; IN: 0.862; T: 0.856. An alpha above 0.70 is considered adequate for most research purposes (De Vaus, 2002; Hair et al., 2018). After the validation process (pre-test), the main data set was collected.

Participants

The main survey data was collected from waiters working in restaurants in London recommended by the Michelin-starred restaurant guide. To obtain a large and representative

sample, restaurants were clustered geographically based on their postcodes (from the Michelin-starred restaurant guide in London). Stratified random sampling was then applied, to obtain a balanced representation of waiters across the postcode districts (Hair et al., 2018). A total of 430 questionnaires were completed from 213 restaurants: 14 questionnaires were excluded due to large volumes of missing information; 19 questionnaires with all the answers neutral or extreme responses were excluded also. This yielded a final sample of 398 questionnaires. Data collection took place between 20th October 2019 until 31st January 2020. 64.3% of the participants were female and 35.7% of the respondents were male. With respect to nationality, the findings show that only 12.2% of the respondents were English while more than half of the respondents (74%) were from the European Community Countries with Italian as the highest number of respondents (25.4 %), followed by the Spanish with 15.8%. 18% of respondents were non-European but reported English as their mother tongue. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 20 to 29 (53.3%). The respondents' profile also showed that a high percentage (39.3%) of the respondents were educated to degree level or above. 25.4% of those taking part were students (Table 2).

[Insert Table 2]

Data Analysis of Quantitative Study

The data analysis in this study proceeded in two stages, following Anderson & Gerbing (1988). The first stage was an EFA to confirm again the factor structure (Hair et al., 2018) and the internal consistency of the factors. The results showed that the expected 5-factor solution was optimum; Cronbach's α was above the criteria value of >.70 for all factors (.846 through .874); psychometric validity was thus demonstrated (Hair et al., 2018). Convergent validity of the

instrument was then tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (Hair et al. 2018; Hattie, 1985) in AMOS 21.0. Convergent validity was assessed based on AVE (average variance extracted); all factors had values of more than .5, demonstrating adequate convergent validity for the constructs under study.

Then, we tested the model fit using SEM (Structural Equation Modelling). SEM was selected since we had a specific model and associated predictions (Figure 1), to be tested. SEM was conducted using AMOS 21.0 (Analysis of Moment Structure).

Results of Quantitative Study

The SEM results indicated good fit with the structural model: the -comparative fit index (CFI) was .920, the incremental fit index (IFI) was .922, and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) was .902. All were above the recommended threshold of .90 (Hair et al., 2018), thus each condition of fit indicated that the proposed measurement model's fit was adequate.

Subsequently, the hypotheses were tested. The results are shown in Table 2: the model was well supported with 3 out of the 4 hypotheses supported by the data. Specifically, the construction of work identity was significantly influenced by authenticity, supporting H1: $\gamma =$ .211, p = 0.029. Likewise, the intra-group factor exerted a significant influence on work identity construction, supporting H3: $\gamma = $ .104, p = 0.027. Finally, the impact of work identity on turnover intention was also significant, confirming hypothesis H4: $\gamma =$ .783, p = 0.029. However, the influence of interference on work identity was not found to be significant, with the regression path not showing a statistically significant relationship between these two variables. Therefore, hypothesis H2 was not supported.

[Insert Table 3]

[Insert Figure 3]

Overall, results from the quantitative study largely supported the proposed conceptual model (Figure 2). Regarding factors influencing the construction of waiters' work identity, this was found to be directly impacted by authenticity in the workplace, and by the level of intra-group identification. These results accord with previous findings (Iranzo-Garcia et al., 2020; O'Neil et al., 2020;) that have also identified the importance of these factors. Findings also indicate that a robust work identity has a positive impact in terms of reducing the turnover intention of waiters, supporting hypothesis H4.

As a follow-up analysis, we investigated whether Work Identity was a significant mediator for relationships between the factors affecting work identity, and turnover. We carried out a mediation analysis with Work Identity as mediator and Turnover as the DV. Work Identity did not mediate the relationship between Authenticity and Turnover, as Sobel Test's was not significant; p= .696. Work Identity did not mediate the relationship between Interference and Turnover, as Sobel Test's was not significant; p= .130. However, Work Identity did mediate the relationship between the Intragroup factor and Turnover, as Sobel's Test was significant at p= .014; the point estimate of the indirect effect was 0.0583.

Overall Discussion

The present study set out to determine the factors that influence construction of waiters' workplace identity and explore whether workplace identity is itself a determinant of employee turnover intention. This is an understudied topic and the current study set out to address knowledge gaps. By using interviews and focus groups that included a range of knowledgeable professionals working in the field, the qualitative study explored the factors behind waiters'

work identity construction, and how this might impact on staff turnover intention. In contrast to previous work, we adopted a 'rites of passage' framework: specific themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis and a dominant theme emerged in relation to each phase of the framework, which proposes three stages of self-construction. In the pre-liminal phase, characterized by a 'shock' to the existing notions of self-due to work demands, authenticity emerged as a key theme in that waiters experience a tension between behaving authentically ("behaving in accordance with the true self") and the job demands imposed by the job role and the company. The data suggested that this tension serves as the 'trigger' for work identity construction, to attempt to reconcile these competing demands and resolve the conflict. Then, in the liminal phase ('being in-between'), interference from non-work roles came to the fore, suggesting that the emerging work identity, as a liminal identity, is vulnerable to interference from non-work identities. Employees need to move through this liminal state of ambiguity, towards the post-liminal phase, in which the individual has accomplished the construction of a coherent work identity that resolves the previous conflicts around authenticity and interference. In this final phase, personal values and non-work identities have become integrated with the demands of the job role, and now relations with the intragroup was seen to become dominant, in terms of identification with (and feedback from) members of the intragroup serving to cement the newly-constructed identity.

The qualitative findings suggest that the process of waiters' work identity construction is an internal, existential process, and support the use of the 'rites of passage' framework as a useful and appropriate perspective on this process. As this framework has not previously been applied in this context, this represents an important methodological contribution to the field, supporting the use of this framework in studies going forward. The qualitative results indicated that a large part of waiters' work identity construction occurs in the workplace, with authenticity,

interference and intra-group processes emerging as key factors, and these findings allowed us to propose a conceptual framework. The hypotheses entailed by this framework were then tested quantitatively, to determine whether the factors postulated by the conceptual framework were supported by data collected from waiters specifically, and in a much larger sample. This was conducted by way of a newly devised and validated quantitative instrument. The conceptual model was mostly supported by the quantitative data.

Findings highlighted the central role authenticity plays, not only in influencing waiters' motivation and job satisfaction as highlighted by previous literature (O'Neil et al., 2020), but in the identity construction process itself. Authenticity emerged as a key theme in the qualitative data; its impact on identity construction was confirmed by the quantitative study. The concept of authenticity came up frequently in the interviews, as participants were looking to have the most authentic experience possible. Participants highlighted their need to feel able to act authentically in the role and recognized that this can be in conflict with company demands. This recognition initiates the start of the work identity construction process, a process of transition which involves a redefining of the sense of self which, if successful, reduces or resolves this conflict; after some necessary reconfiguration, the individual still feels that their workplace behavior is 'authentic' while also aligned with company demands. experience. The quantitative results demonstrated that being able to maintain this sense of authenticity does indeed positively influence waiters' work identity transformations. The quantitative results also supported reference to the intra-group (waiting group) as a second important factor in identity construction. The qualitative data suggested that in the post-liminal phase, interviewees had either subconsciously or consciously adopted values of the team or organization as a self-referential explanation that answers the questions 'who am I?' or 'who are we?'. This is consistent with previous work showing that in the final stages of work identity construction,

the emerging identity is refined and validated in relation to the values and opinions of the intragroup (Pratt et al. 2006). The influence of relationships with other intragroup members was also seen to be important, as was the role of management in promoting a shared (but distinct) positive identity for the intragroup.

The relationship between interference and work identity however was not found to be significant in the quantitative results. While the qualitative data pointed to identity conflict or interference among waiters' multiple identities as being a potential influence on identity construction, perhaps waiters are, in actuality, able to segregate their work role from their other, potentially conflicting, identities. One possibility is that the waiter's job role (often conceptualized as that of a 'server', or of occupying a position of 'servitude' (Cumming, 2011) is sufficiently distinct from other identities that segregation can be achieved. Further work is needed to confirm the current findings and explore this issue further.

The notion that the construction of work identity impacts employee turnover intention (Popova-Nowak, 2010) was supported, both by interviewees and the quantitative data. A significant direct effect of work identity on turnover was found in the quantitative statistical analyses. Follow up, exploratory analyses showed that work identity was a significant mediator in relation to turnover: it mediated the relationship between the Intragroup factor and turnover. However, it was not a significant mediator for the factors of Authenticity and Interference. Previous work has shown that an outstanding work identity influences work engagement and turnover (Rabad & Wafaa, 2017; Zeijen et al., 2018).

On this basis, one could postulate that the link identified here between work identity and turnover could at least in part be due to a stronger sense of work engagement in individuals

who achieve a better work identity construction. This was not tested or explored in the current study but again would be a valuable line of enquiry for future work.

In terms of practical import, this study offers novel insights into an understudied topic, demonstrating the factors underpinning workplace identity construction amongst waiters. Therefore, this informs approaches that could foster better work identity amongst these employees, suggesting how this can be achieved and the factors that enable it. For waiters to construct an integrated and coherent work identity, the findings show that a process of transition (the liminal phase) is necessary, requiring a transformation of the current narrative of the self. Although effort and engagement are required and might involve navigating difficult experiences and emotions related to conflict between authenticity and work/company demands, practical initiatives could be adopted to facilitate this. In particular, opportunities to allow the individual to act with a sense of authenticity within the job role should be prioritized by management. Likewise, the findings around the importance of conflict between behaving authentically and job demands within the early stage of the construction process has practical import and should be recognized by restaurant managers. Company policies that provide a supported transition towards congruence would be beneficial. This could be achieved by not imposing too strict an adherence to company policies right from the start, recognizing the importance of allowing a sense of being able to act authentically in the work role, and also recognizing that while some conflict is necessary to initiate the identity construction process, too much conflict could be counterproductive. In the post-liminal phase, where self-reconstruction moves towards completeness and the employee embraces their newfound work identity, we saw that intragroup identification emerged as an important factor and this is therefore something to be recognized and supported in the workplace. Recognizing the importance of these relationships with peers to externally validate one's work identity (Moss

et al. 2014), restaurants would be advised to actively promote healthy relationships, in terms of identification and integration, amongst waiters. There are various ways this could be achieved, e.g., through policies to enhance a sense of group identity (e.g. uniforms, dress code) and through activities and facilities (e.g. teamwork and trust-building exercises, opportunities to socialize informally. Also, provision of a pleasant staff 'common room') could serve to enhance interactions between staff and promote healthy relationships in the workplace. Finally, a key contribution of the current work is the finding that work identity is a significant determinant of turnover intention. Thus, the practical strategies outlined above and backed by the current findings, to enhance work identity formation, will likely lead to benefits in terms of addressing the problematic issue of high turnover within the industry, allowing companies to improve staff retention and overall productivity. Addressing high levels of turnover is of prime importance for ensuring the profitability and sustainability of the restaurant industry; therefore, the topic and findings of the current study represent a valuable line of enquiry that should be pursued further by future research studies.

Some study limitations should be noted. Firstly, the measures used and the interpretation of the results might have been subject to researcher bias. Various measures were adopted to reduce such bias. In the qualitative study, a triangulation procedure was used to help ensure the reliability of the themes identified. In the quantitative study, the quantitative instrument was based on pre-existing validated scales, it was then appraised by a group of experts in the field, followed by validation of the instrument in a sample of 80 waiters. Nevertheless, it is possible that the choice of questions might have been influenced by researcher bias. Other methodological limitations include the choice of sample: this research has only examined employee experience with Michelin-starred waiters in London, which represents a specific segment of the industry. This was motivated by a need to avoid restaurant settings that might

have quality-related issues or with little commitment to retaining staff, as these issues could potentially confound the data collected as they may well in themselves undermine work identity and turnover. However, since study data was collected only from Michelin restaurants where professional standards (and also work demands) are likely higher than other restaurant settings, this does limit generalizability, and further work across a broader range of restaurants is necessary so as to establish whether the current findings are fully representative of the waitering profession as a whole. Nevertheless, it should be noted that although Michelin establishments suffer less staff turnover than the sector average, turnover is still a problem despite the actions of these establishments to retain staff. Also, data was collected only in one city (London, UK). Waiters in London (as a highly cosmopolitan city) are likely drawn from considerably more diverse backgrounds as compared to other cities, and this was evident in the sample characteristics. Again, further work, collecting data from other geographical locations, would be beneficial to establish the generalizability of the model and ascertain whether the results can be replicated: studies in businesses beyond the restaurant industry would also be useful to test whether the model can be extended to other professions. Given that the structured questionnaire was newly devised (albeit based on previously existing, validated scales), it should be tested in different contexts in order for its validity and reliability to be firmly established.

In both studies, the majority of participants were young adults; hence their perceptions, and the data collected, should be viewed through the prism of their sociodemographic profile. In addition, future research could explore waiters' work identity construction at different time points (and take into consideration other work-related factors such as the effects of shifts and workload: data around this was not collected in the current study and this limitation should be addressed by future work). Furthermore, the present study focuses unilaterally on the individual

construction of waiters' work identity. Future research should simultaneously explore the construction impact of waiters, peers, managers, organization and the environment, acknowledging that identity construction is influenced by other parties and the wider context in which it takes place. Lastly, future work could incorporate control variables which have not been considered in this study, since focus was on sense of self rather than demographic effects.

Conclusion

The present study contributes to theories of work identity, its antecedents and consequences, contributing to the discussion on how employees undergo identity change in the workplace. This study supports use of van Gennep's (1960) 'rites of passage' framework as a theoretical lens for work identity research that helps document and explain the process of construction. Future research in this field might be advised to consider using this framework. The present study findings highlight the importance of waiter's work identity construction in the workplace. The findings of this study cast light on the conditions under which meaningful construction occurs, pointing to authenticity and intra-group identification as key factors. Interference with non-work identities was seen as a potentially important factor in the qualitative study, but its importance was not confirmed by the quantitative results. Further, findings showed the importance of successful identity construction for reducing employee turnover and suggests company policy interventions that could be useful for facilitating the identity construction process in waiters, thus reducing turnover.

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Appendices

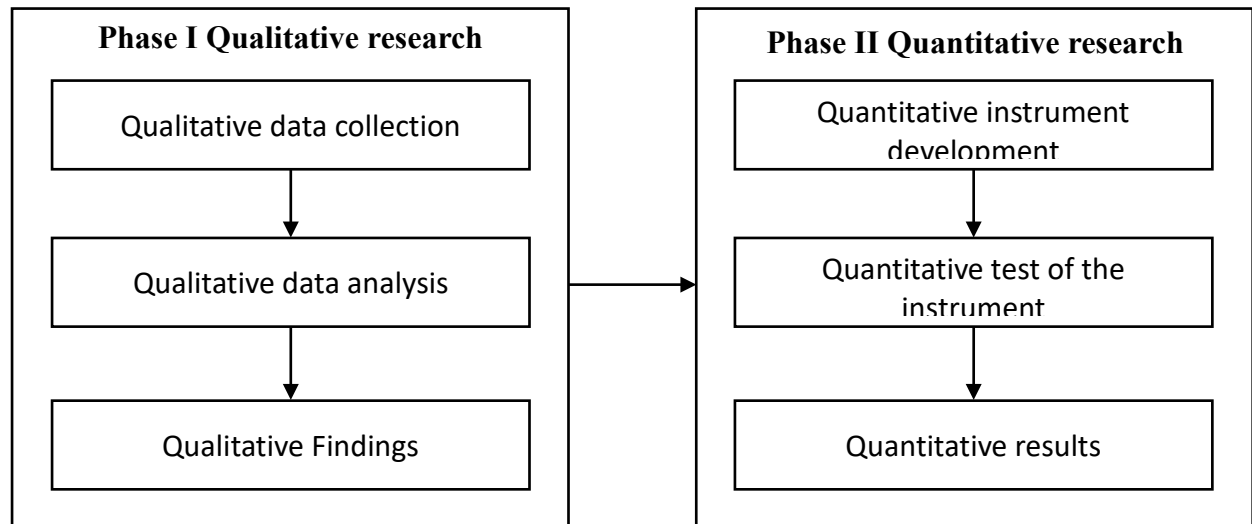*Figure 1 – Research Process and Design*

Source: Foroudi et al., 2021

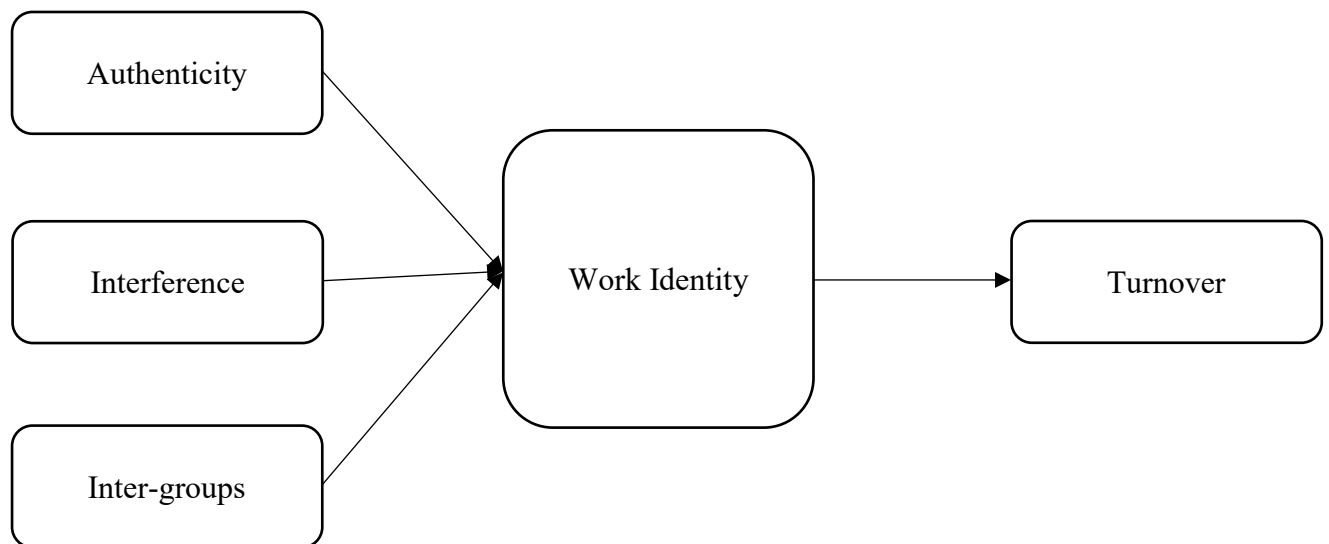| Phase I Qualitative research	Phase II Quantitative research
Qualitative data collection	Quantitative instrument development
Qualitative data analysis	Quantitative test of the instrument
Qualitative Findings	Quantitative results

Figure 2 - Conceptual Framework

Authenticity

Interference → Work Identity → Turnover

Inter-groups

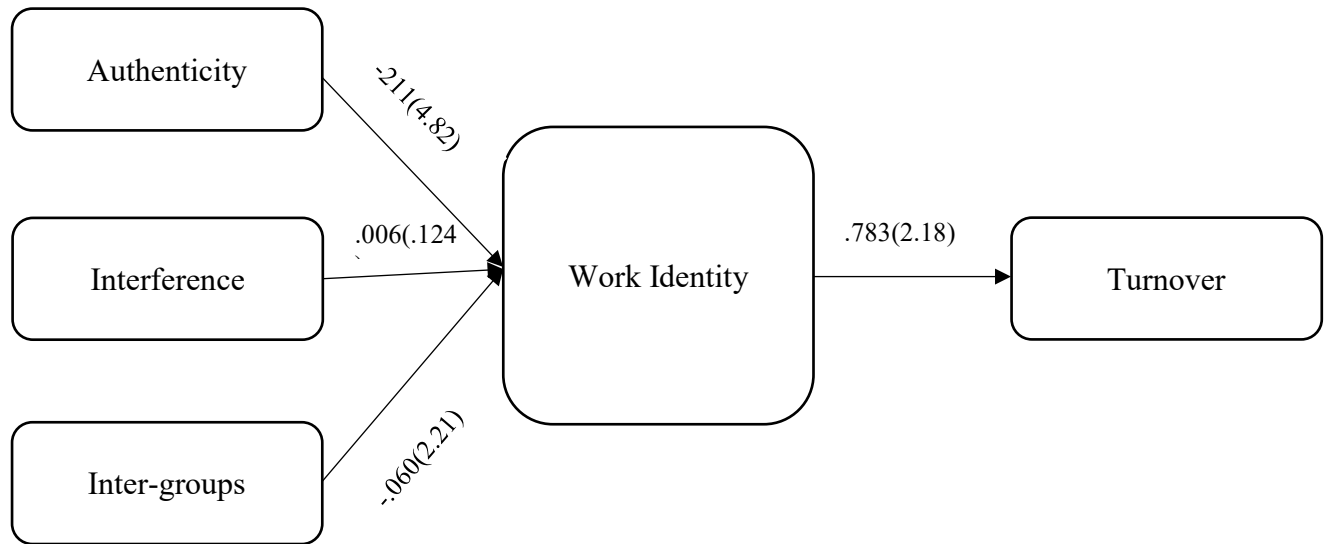***Figure 3 - Conceptual Model (with results based on direct hypothesis testing)***

Table 1 - Measurement Items of the Theoretical Constructs and the Codes

Construct Items codes	Items wording	Major references
Interferences		
My sense of belonging to this restaurant helps me to be focused on my role as a waiter.	**I_1**	Leong, 2000; supported by Qualitative study
When I am working, I forget everything else around me.	**I_2**	Cox *et al.,* 2014; Salanova *et al.,* 2005; Wilmar *et al.,* 2003
Other parallel roles (e.g. mother, friend, student) in my life help me to perform my job better and to be more empathetic and flexible.	**I_3**	Leong, 2000; supported by Qualitative study

The clarity of the explanation about the nature of my work help me to adapt my professional life to my personal life.	I_5	Qualitative study
Authenticity		
I feel I can be myself at work.	A_1	Qualitative study
When I am at work, I feel the restaurant is the stage and I am an actor.	A_2	Qualitative study
I like operational jobs, solving problems, taking initiative.	A_3	Qualitative study
I feel proud of how I am managing my career.	A_4	Qualitative study
I am not just a waiter who carries plates, I am a food advisor.	A_5	White 2011; Wood *et al.*, 2008
Intra-groups		
Mutual respect motivates me to stay in this industry longer.	IG_1	Qualitative study

I see waiters as I see myself, intuitive and with good social skills.	**IG_2**	Qualitative study
I feel we [waiters] belong to a sector that is quite unique.	**IG_3**	Qualitative study
I think the whole idea of the passion for food, serving food keeps me identified with my group [waiters].	**IG_4**	Feitosa *et al.,* 2012; Moksness, 2014
I am not only doing a job but I belong to community with a shared set of values.	**IG_5**	Feitosa *et al.,* 2012; Moksness, 2014
Work identity		
Being a waiter is more than just carrying plates and delivering food orders.	**OI_1**	Qualitative study
Your occupation [waiter] has to fit with your expectation.	**OI_2**	Qualitative study
The culture of my nationality helps me to be a good waiter.	**OI_3**	Qualitative study
It was hard for me to decide on a career, but now, when I look at myself I think that I will fit the profession I've chosen.	**OI_5**	Veiga, 2005
Turnover		

I want to leave my job for better restaurants.	**T_2**	Qualitative study
I want to leave for the next step in my career progression.	**T_3**	Qualitative study
I want to leave to earn more money within the restaurant sector.	**T_4**	Qualitative study
I want to leave because of the proximity to where I live.	**T_5**	Qualitative study

Source: Developed for the current study by the researchers

Table 2 - Demographic Profile of Waiters

	N	%		N	%		N	%
Gender			**Nationality**					
Male	149	35.7	Italian	100	25.4	Australian	8	1.9
Female	268	64.3	Korean	3	.7	Bangladesh	5	1.2
Age			Lithuanian	8	1.9	Brazilian	8	1.9
Less than 19 years or less	7	1.7	Moroccan	4	1.00	Bulgarian	1	.1
20 to 29 years	270	67.9	Napoli	5	1.2	Canadian	1	.2
30 to 39 years	91	22.8	Polish	25	6.2	Chinese	1	.2
40 to 49 years	22	5.8	Portuguese	5	1.2	Colombian	1	.2
50 to 59 years	8	1.9	Rumanian	6	1.4	Ecuadorian	4	1.0
Education			Russian	4	1.0	Hungarian	22	5.8
High school	150	37.4	Scottish	3	.7	Indian	9	2.2
Undergraduate	155	39.3	Spanish	62	15.8	Irish	4	1.0
Postgraduate and above	94	23.3	Vietnamese	3	.7	French	33	8.6
			Welsh	1	.2	German	1	.2
			English	49	12.2	Greek	16	3.8
			Estonian	7	1.7			

Table 3 - Results of Direct Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Standardized regression paths	Estimate	SE	CR	P	Results
H1	authenticity ---> work identity	.211	.044	4.824	.029	Supported
H2	interference ---> work identity	.006	.033	.124	.901	Not Supported
H3	Intra-groups---> work identity	.104	.047	2.206	.027	Supported
H4	work identity ---> Turnover intention	.783	.359	2.183	.029	Supported

Note: Constructs (A = authenticity; I = interference, IG = Intra-groups, T = Turnover)

S.E. = standard error, C.R. = critical ratio, P= significance value