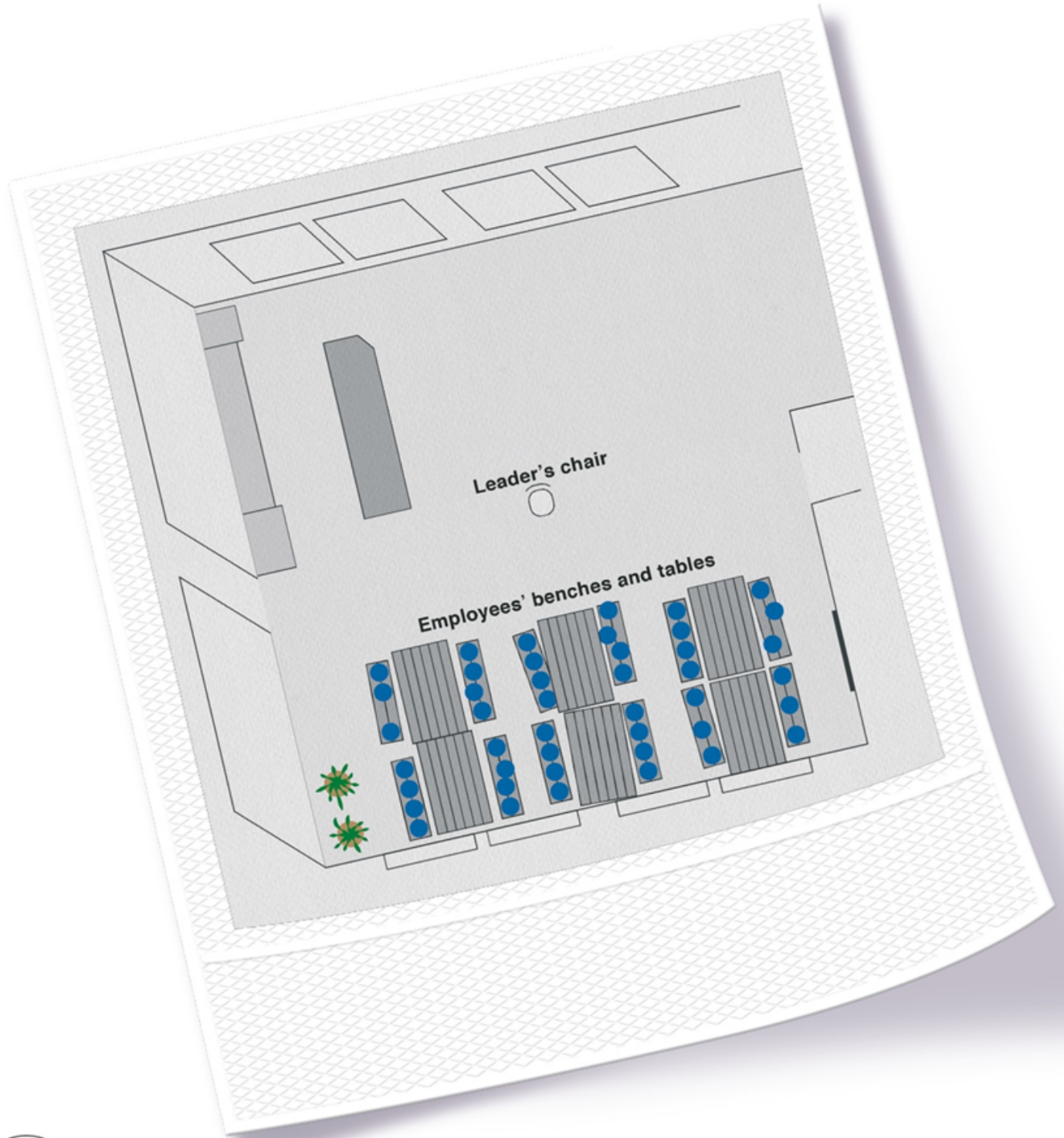# BEYOND THE BENEFITS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY MEETINGS FOR KNOWLEDGE FIRMS:

A DOUBLE-EDGED ORGANISATIONAL TOOL

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Leader's chair

Employees' benches and tables

A B S T R A C T

Cross-functional teams and meetings are recurrent structuring tools in contemporary knowledge organisations. They are recommended as solutions to enhance innovation and creativity. Current research gathers a myriad of reference to the benefits of such tools, but studies of their potential negative effects remain limited. This paper is specifically concerned with the effect of interdisciplinary team meetings on knowledge workers in the context of knowledge-intensive firms. The aim of this research is therefore to provide insights in management studies for modern knowledge-based businesses. Our contribution is to enrich the academic fields of interdisciplinary meetings and identity work in knowledge firms. This study qualitatively explored interactions of knowledge workers within organisational meetings and the psychological impact these interactions may have. Our fieldwork included semi-structured interviews and observations of a recurrent meeting within a high-tech start-up. We paid particular attention to subjective interpretations and perceptions of knowledge workers in the context of an interdisciplinary meeting. Our results show that there is a close relationship between the modern concept of alienation and the idea of identity struggle. We suggest for further research to focus on such linkages and explore them in different contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

"Hell is other people" has always been misunderstood. People thought that I wanted to say that our interactions with others were always poisoned, that they were always hellish. However, I meant something completely different. What I mean is, if our interactions with others are twisted, flawed, then the other can only be hell. Why? Because deep down, others are the most important thing in ourselves, for our own self-knowledge." (Sartre, 1964) [1]

The position of the self within society and its interactions with others is a recurrent topic in humanities. Within the debate surrounding the need for humankind to live in society and the value of others for the self, two lines of thought distinguish themselves and can be touched upon through two famous contributions: "ζῷον πολιτικόν" (Man is a political animal) (Aristotle, 2015) and "*Homo homini lupus est*" (A man is a wolf to another man) (Hobbes, 2014). The former, coined by Aristotle, refers to the fact that man needs other men to become a civilised being. Mankind needs society, norms and laws in order to develop its social self. Life in society is arduous but good and leads to virtue and happiness. The latter quote, a Latin proverb attributed to the playwright Plautus and later used by Hobbes in Leviathan, suggests a more pessimistic view of mankind. Men are not initially social, they rather rule by strength. However, men need a higher artificial force to be united and avoid violence (Hobbes, 2014). Such debate evokes the issues that individuals face living with others but also the need for humankind to live in society.

The discussion surrounding individuals and their lives in society echoes in more contemporary contributions, as the work of Sartre. Although the quote "Hell is other people" from the play *No Exit* (Sartre, 2000) emphasizes the challenges that individuals face in society, the author proposes a nuanced vision as he stressed in his commentary about the play (Sartre, 1964). The author claimed that the public misunderstood the intended meaning; other people are of the utmost necessity for individuals, however, in noxious settings, other people become hell.

It is considered that "Contemporary social life in many ways destabilizes a coherent sense of self-identity" (Alvesson, 2001, p. 877). Therefore, the aforementioned debate can be applied

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[1] For the purpose of this thesis, the original quote has been translated from French to English by Anaïs Lepers; member of the French Syndicate for translator (http://www.anaislepers.com/).

to modern society and one of its defining features: the knowledge-intensive economy increasingly necessitating knowledge work and cross-functional team settings (Newell et al., 2009). The observed increase in the meeting duration and frequency in companies and individuals' lives can be analysed as a manifestation of the importance of meetings and social interactions for modern organisational lives (Luong & Rogelberg, 2005).

In this thesis, we study the effect felt of a cross-functional meeting on its participants, attempting to address the impact created by gathering various profiles and knowledge together. Indeed, group situations can be challenging for individuals and their identities. However, a noticeable increasing trend for team work and meetings is observed within contemporary organisational contexts (Newell et al., 2009; Luong & Rogelberg, 2005). Therefore, one can wonder whether such a trend raises issues or solutions and how individuals cope with group situations when they generate tense or stressful moments.

In *No Exit* (Sartre, 2000) three strangers find themselves in a room together after dying. In this stressful situation, other characters' looks feel like a judgement of each individual's identities and becomes unbearable. In *No Exit*, the author highlights the important role others play in constructing one's sense of self. However, he also reflects on group situations as double-edged swords in which individuals can fulfil themselves but also risk going through identity struggles. Inspired from this duality and long-lasting debate, we propose to explore a cross-functional meeting and the effect it might have on participants.

1.1.   Research Background

In this subchapter, we will focus more in depths on the knowledge-based economy and the actors it involves. In doing so, we will provide a background for the literature review and the subsequent research project.

Propelled by technologies based on the production and spread of knowledge and information, numerous scholars argue that developed countries are by definition operating in the *Knowledge Economy* (Bratianu, 2017; Powell & Snellman, 2004). Powell and Snellman (2004) describe the knowledge economy as "production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technical and scientific advance, as well as a rapid obsolescence" (p. 199). Knowledge is a term used to refer to the intellectual capability to reason

and make sense of complex cognitive issues including the exercise of judgement and critical assessment of information (Alvesson, 2004). Driving forces in this new economy is data, information and knowledge (Bratianu, 2017). In the context of this innovation-driven environment, knowledge is an indispensable asset (Davenport & Prusak, 1998 cited in Alvesson 2004). That said, there are obvious reasons for observing and talking about knowledge-intensive work and firms.

Knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs) are now dominating the private sector in developed countries and are believed to be the driver of global economy growth (Bratianu, 2017; Newell, et al., 2009; Powell & Snellman, 2004). According to Alvesson (2004), KIFs can be defined as organisations offering sophisticated knowledge or knowledge-based products to the market and are dominated by knowledge workers (KW). KIFs include high-tech and research and development (R&D) firms, and management and IT consultancies. A typical example of firms offering knowledge-based products are high-tech companies where engineering knowledge is the core business. The workforce is typically comprised of a majority of qualified people executing intellectual work. These are categorised as knowledge workers (KWs) working with complex tasks requiring critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making. KWs tend to control or possess the firm's primary means of production, namely knowledge, and alongside being highly mobile, they expect to have a lot of autonomy in their work and therefore tend to resist command and control (Nair & Vohra, 2010; Yigitcanlar, et al., 2007; Alvesson, 2004; Davenport, et al., 2002).

Given the characteristics of KWs, a loose, informal and flexible organisational configuration is regarded as not only appropriate, but essential to fully exploit their capacity for innovation and creativity (Newell, et al., 2009; Powell & Snellman, 2004). These characteristics conform to an adhocratic design of organisations and seem to be the most adapted to the specifics of KWs (Mintzberg, 1980). Generally, this means that dynamic organisational structure is emphasized, instead of traditional hierarchies (Newell et al., 2009), and that leadership must adopt a flexible management style providing the indispensable enabling context to allow people to draw on their knowledge (Newell, et al., 2009; Heckscher, 1994; Adler, 1992). However, Powell and Snellman (2004) claim that the increased autonomy given to workers shifts responsibilities from managers to employees and could have detrimental effects, such as more demanding and stressful work. This implies a trade-off between the KWs' need for autonomy

and these negative effects. One needs, therefore, to be aware of the amount of judgement and autonomy granted to KWs.

As mentioned, KWs are known to be keen to pursue their own goals. They appear to be the most appropriate employees to decide how to introduce, organise and coordinate their specialised tasks (Newell, et al., 2009). This tendency has the potential to increase the risk of an organisation going in many directions (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2011). Even in an ad hoc setting, the creation of a coordination mechanism to structure the company is necessary to prevent such a problem. In the knowledge economy, there is a tendency to use liaison devices such as cross-functional teams (CFTs) (Newell, et al., 2009). By definition, "a cross-functional team is a group of people who apply different skills, with a high degree of interdependence, to ensure the effective delivery of a common organisational objective" (Holland, et al., 2000, p. 233). A CFT gathers colleagues from different departments and various research disciplines, such as engineering, manufacturing or marketing, and provides "the advantages of multiple sources of communication, information and perspectives … which is critical for success in a globally competitive, high-technology markets" (Keller, 2001, p. 547). High-tech firms often rely on implementing various interdisciplinary teams recognised as CFTs in order to create and deploy new products and processes (Keller, 2001). Team meetings are thought to be imperative to reap the benefits of CFTs as they allow a combination of various expertise, the discussion of ideas and united decision-making processes (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Thus, many modern firms plan regular team meetings gathering professionals from different backgrounds (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012).

1.2.   Thesis Outline

The outline of this thesis is as follows. In the next chapter we provide a review of the existing literature about individual identity, professional identity, alienation and knowledge work, and team meetings. The chapter ends with an insight into current empirical studies relevant to the field. In chapter 3 we detail our research objectives, research questions and the delimitation of this study. In chapter 4 we present our philosophical underpinnings, the consequent research approach and method. Chapters 5 and 6 constitute the core of our study, consisting of the analysis and discussion of our data and findings. In the last chapter, we reiterate our research questions and present how we fulfilled our objectives. Finally, the chapter also highlights our contributions, presents the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will focus on reviewing the existing literature in relation to this thesis project. The subchapter about literature focusing on identity is divided between individual identities within social contexts and professional identities within organisational context. This will be followed by a subchapter focusing on team meetings in which elements such as teams and meetings will be dealt with separately in order to then address team meetings as a whole. To conclude this chapter, an overview of existing studies gathering the reviewed theoretical elements is provided.

2.1. Identity

In this section, identity is explored as a social phenomenon in which both individuality and social interactions are required and balance each other. The concept of identity is further applied to organisational contexts in order to highlight potential needs and challenges individuals may face in their working lives.

The concept of identity is complex as it is shaped by multiple influences. It is multifaceted and can be approached from several levels of understanding (Alvesson, 2004). Identity reflects the considerable importance of individuality; each individual is thought to have a unique identity, influenced by a multitude of factors (Lawler, 2014). A general consensus converges towards the understanding of identity as the response to the question *Who am I?* (Alvesson, 2004). Identity refers to the meanings one reflexively attaches to himself and can be regarded as both the manifestation of uniqueness and similarities to others (Lawler, 2014; Cerulo, 1997; Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Therefore, identity is a construct that isn't built in isolation - it requires a context, influences and interactions in order to be shaped (Lawler, 2014).

2.1.1. Social Interactions Influence Individual Identities

Beyond the individuality of identity, its social aspect needs to be considered. Individuals bearing identities are social beings evolving within societies and groups (Burkitt, 1991). Furthermore, social interactions can be presented as the medium through which identities are shaped for each individual (Lawler, 2014; Jenkins, 1996; Goffman, 1959), potentially even further than individual choices (Lawler, 2014). It can be suggested, to better apprehend the concept, to consider it as an ongoing process or an open question (Alvesson, 2004). Identities

are the product of continuous negotiations and frictions occurring through social interactions, exposition to various contents, media and practices. The process of identity shaping is ambiguous as it is partly a choice and partly due to external influences, sometimes occurring through power relations (Knights & Willmott, 1989; Foucault, 1982). As summarised by Jenkins (1996) identity is a social artefact.

The daily lives of individuals correspond to a continuous effort to shape their own identities. People seek a strong and coherent identity to engage in social interactions which in turn influences individuals and their self (Alvesson, 2004; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Alvesson, 1994). This reciprocal process of self-confirmation of identity and confirmation through exchanges with others is defined by Jenkins (1996) as a procedure in which people interrogate others about their self and receive corroboration or disagreement of their identity. By using others to shape their self, individuals also locate themselves in relation to others, gaining a clearer image of their social environment (Ricoeur, 2005).

The complexity of identities not only resides in their intricate and reciprocal shaping process but also in their multiplicity. Identity can be understood as having different levels. One's uniqueness can be linked to the individual identity, while at the same time similarities, or sameness broadly means being part of a group and is in relation to the social or collective identity (Hotho, 2008; Alvesson, 2004; Tajfel, 1982). Indeed, the identity of each person is not only their individual identity but also their - potentially multiple - social identities. These correspond to the groups that individuals adhere to, these groups can be related to elements such as gender, age, citizenship, workplaces, occupation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1984). Each individual is able to build a unique identity in relation to the various groups they identify with, identities therefore correspond to an intricate weave of social identities (Lawler, 2014; Tajfel, 1982;). Society can be considered as relying heavily, if not being fully dependent, on individual identities, social identities and their intercommunication (Jenkins, 1996).

Individual identities are multifaceted processual elements (Lawler, 2014; Alvesson, 2004; Tajfel, 1982). As stated previously, individuals and their identities are interdependent as they are reciprocally necessary to keep each other in check. Reliance on other identities to confirm one's identity implies confrontation and contradictions. Indeed, people can be understood as embracing identities sometimes competing with each other (Holland et al., 2000; Kramer 1991; Ashforth & Mael 1989). Adhesion of individuals to groups can sometimes be made arduous

due to these contradictions, since it is possible for an individual identity to be in contradiction with the identity of the group in which the individual evolves. In such situations the contradiction can remain, individual identities can evolve, or the group identity can be influenced by the individual identity (Holland et al., 2000). These influences and their consequent changes can be perceived through means of communication used by groups; therefore, language is a crucial element of analysis. While shaping their identities, groups tacitly decide to adhere to jargon specific to themselves. At the image of the identities they are linked to, language and jargon are constantly evolving and adapting to new elements of influence (Holland et al., 2000; Cohen & Bailey, 1997).

It could be argued that the constant confrontation of identities leads to stress and self-questioning. The resulting uncertainty about the self can also fuel further anxiety (Alvesson, 2004; Collinson, 2003; Hodson, 1996). Indeed, individuals need a sense of stability and certain landmarks to secure their mental well-being (Alvesson, 2004). However, the contradiction of identities by their surroundings is necessary for identity confirmation, the creation of a sense of self and evading identity crises. Moreover, in the current fast-paced economy, flexibility and adaptability to new situations are required of both individuals and their identities. Constant questioning and recalibrating can be considered as a prerequisite for said adaptability (Alvesson, 2004).

Another suggested benefit of the constant struggle between contradicting identities can be the shaping of critical identities. The avoidance of consensus in favour of contradiction and adaptability can be linked with the prevention of psychological tendencies such as *Groupthink*. This concept of psychological tendency refers to the fact that individuals tend to seek consensus. To do so, differences tend to be considered as deviance and are rejected (Janis, 1971). The resistance of contradictory identities has an important role to play in the prevention of extensive homogenisation of ideas and identities (Holland, et al., 2000).

To summarise, social landscapes are shaped by individual and social identities constantly assembling and scattering between themselves. Individuals can be encountered as following a never-ending identity quest, gaining new identities while giving up on others through social interactions and experiences. Indeed, individuals gain identities by assembling with groups of people that are believed to have similar values and individual identities (Turner, 1984). This processual aspect can be assimilated to the process of sensemaking that individuals implement to understand their collective experiences (Weick, et al., 2005; Weick, 1995). They make sense

of their identities by receiving confirmations from peers. A considerable source of social identity analysed in the literature is occupations or professions. Indeed, the organisational context invokes a multitude of identities; individual, professional and organisational (Alvesson, 2004).

2.1.2. <u>Professional Identities</u>

How people relate to their working world and how organizations function is a crucial element for identity work (Alvesson, 2004). Doing the right thing, looking good and impressing others are issues that permeate organisations and social life. One could argue that maintaining appearances is nowadays more important than organizational results and that we are living in an identity-sensitive era. A very fashionable concept characterizing the knowledge economy is identity work. The latter is outlined by Sveningsson & Alvesson (2003) as the way "people engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (p. 1165).

The prestige associated with membership in a knowledge-intensive profession might be expected to produce a solid identity (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Alvesson, 2004). However, this might clash with the complex business and working life we are living in and contribute to the fragility of one's identity (Alvesson, 2004). In an organisational context coloured by instability and composed of various professional groups, identity work becomes particularly critical (Koschmann & McDonald, 2015; Alvesson, 2004; Deetz, 2003). Hence, it has been argued that KIFs "are sites of high-intensive identity regulation and work" (Alvesson 2004, p. 238). In order to achieve a strong feeling of a coherent self, engaging in identity work appears to be a necessity for knowledge workers to cope with complex work tasks and diversified social interactions (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Following that reasoning, it has been argued that individuals tend to have stronger ties with their occupational roles and the professional identities they entail than with their organisation as a whole, (Kramer 1991; Ashforth & Mael 1989). Having previously discussed how individuals tend to identify with different groups in their social world, thus making them holding various identities, one's identification with a profession is of importance as it prevails the organisational identity for individuals. Broadly, a "professional identity is the perception of oneself as a professional" (Weaver, et al., 2011, p. 1221) and can be linked to an impression of exclusivity (Weaver, et al., 2011; Blakey, et al., 2008).

Professional identity researchers have historically focused on dichotomies such as worker and manager, or blue collar and white collar (Barley, 1996). However, in modern structures such as KIFs, it is believed that the status of managers is not as relevant as it was in organisations following Taylorism (Barley, 1996). Occupational roles and the nature of their work tasks are considered crucial as they reflect the influence of education and background on individual identities (Barley, 1996). Through the use of jargon and techniques unique to specific bodies of work, identities are expressed and constructed in different perceived realities (Barley, 1996). In the last decade or two, scholars and others argued around professional identity and its potential strong influence on individual identity (Weaver et al. 2011; Hotho, 2008).

Group members tend to gather around or build common traits and values. This is also the case for groups of professionals in organisations. They share psychosocial traits consisting of norms, shared mental models and knowledge which are thought to influence the behaviour of groups and their members (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). One can suggest some resemblance between psychosocial traits and epistemic cultures of working groups as the latter consist of the shared knowledge and rules related to professions and work (Newell et al, 2009; Knorr-Cetina, 1999). The epistemic cultures of groups of similar workers can be apprehended as a root for their psychosocial traits; shared knowledge, understandings and norms can be at the core of groups of professionals.

However, people with professional identities that do not share psychosocial traits, but have to work together are often more likely to experience dysfunctional interactions (Keller, 2001). This amplifies the need to ensure a strong cohesiveness and *social glue* in a diversified workforce like KIFs (Keller, 2001). In other words, individual professionals need to sense that they are significant to the fate of the group (Holland, et al., 2000; Weldon & Mustari, 1988). One should consider that team co-location is crucial in a setting where separate cultures, jargon and personality differences are perceived (Holland, et al., 2000; Allen, 1986).

It has been said that individuals tend to juggle multiple identities and that the professional identity is one of them. Moreover, it could be argued that there are also a myriad of levels within professional identities. Some could be regarded as of higher calibre due to the knowledge they entail. Henceforth, identity work might be achieved more smoothly for some particular occupational roles. On account of this, knowledge based on facts could be regarded as being more recognised than subjective, or social, knowledge that is harder to measure and quantify. As claimed by Alvesson (2004, p. 200), "knowledge workers in the 'harder', science-

related areas may have a less contested knowledge base and are less frequently questioned". However, the author says, it is not all professionals that face such degree of scepticism from their surroundings. Hence, one could argue that not all professional identities and their knowledge are deemed equal.

As previously mentioned, interpersonal experiences play a key role in workers' identity construction but can spark identity crises. Indeed, a lack of understanding between colleagues can be a challenge of one's knowledge and individual self (Hodson, 1996). Moreover, as explained earlier, not all knowledge bases are deemed equal. However, in the context of KIFs, knowledge workers gather valuable expertise and therefore should all optimally possess a reliable and respected knowledge base (Alvesson, 2004). One could hypothesise that in the case of knowledge deemed superior questioning a lesser knowledge, identity crises can occur. Normally, questioning by others would imply one's efforts to try to change and reinforce a valued self-identity (Alvesson, 2004). To avoid such crises, it is perhaps necessary to work on the improvement of behaviours to reach some resemblance between one's view of oneself and its peers' view (Alvesson, 2004).

2.1.3. <u>Organisational Implications for Identities</u>

It has been argued that gathering various professionals with different backgrounds and identities can be a challenge for organisations and their members. It is in the management interest to create a cohesive company culture in which identities of various teams can take roots. Rituals and jargon are common tools used to shape organisational cultures. In KIFs it is considered that cultural manifestations are of the utmost importance; they allow companies to highlight their uniqueness and gather employees around this common exclusive shared identity (Alvesson, 2004; Grugulis, et al., 2000; Kunda, 1992).

There are various mechanisms through which management can manifest and attempt to shape identities. Indeed, day-to-day or even mundane artefacts within companies can be used to embody the status given to employees or the importance of individuals (Czarniawska & Mouritsen, 2009). Some argue that a critical task of management in KIFs is to create a social integration within the organisation around a sense of shared goals and community (Alvesson, 2004). However, some suggest that the physical environment such as objects and furniture have to be dealt with as seriously as the social environment due to the fact that they can inhibit a

feeling of community by separating individuals through status manifestations (Czarniawska & Mouritsen, 2009).

Identity regulation is a central concept that shows the relation between an organisation, its employees and their work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). As previously mentioned, KIFs can be understood as a context in which identities are complexly interlaced with managerial practices, rituals, language and culture. They are a source of identity regulation and construction, sometimes clashing with professional and individual identities. The symbolism of management initiatives and organisational rituals play a crucial role in the influence of identities as they are often seen as targeting employees' sense of self (Costas & Kärreman, 2016). Research has drawn attention to the risks of identity regulation within companies, showing that it can lead to negative psychological impacts on KWs, such as alienation (Costas & Kärreman, 2016; Costas & Fleming, 2009; Collinson, 2003;). However, how employees react and respond to such identity regulation remain contested (Costas & Kärreman, 2016).

2.1.3.1.   Alienation in Organisations

Identity and the struggles it represents are a crucial element to consider for organisations. Some authors propose that, on the one hand, a lack of meaningful work, boredom and poor subordinate superior relations is linked to identity struggles possibly leading to workers' alienation (Costas & Kärreman, 2016; Nair & Vohra, 2010). On the other hand, it is proposed that management attempts to regulate employees' identities and the ensuing results of varied interactions can lead to dis-identification and self-alienation (Costas & Fleming, 2009; Collinson, 2003). Moreover, in the setting of KIFs, identity regulation has to be considered within the context of power struggles occurring between KWs requiring freedom and organisations requiring control (O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014). Indeed, these contradictive forces exert pressure on the quest led by KWs for an authentic sense of self (Alvesson, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). It is important to note here that alienation is a concept applied to modern organisations and contexts, yet it has a historical background.

The long-established concept of alienation is linked to the notion of separation or loss. The word is derived from the Latin *alienare*, meaning to remove or estrange (Oxford, 2018). Alienation assimilated to theories developed by Karl Marx and is therefore associated with themes such as social struggles. The Marxist concept of alienation was anchored to factors that

are external to workers. It is a condition in which workers are disconnected from the fruit of their labour, becoming commodified, and losing the will to express themselves (Israel, 1971).

On one level, alienation is a Marxist concept inscribed in history, on another the concept is at the centre of a new wave of academic work about the individual in modern organisations. Authors propose to revive the concept by focusing on its personal, social and psychological facets. According to (Korman, et al., 1981), the core meaning of alienation reflects the separation from one individual from his peers and a loss of connection with the reality of his or her self-image. Other researchers apprehend the phenomenon as a subjective and personal state of mind (Tonks & Nelson, 2008; Blauner, 1964). A synthesis of the contemporary use of the concept is that alienation is the absence of commitment (Etzioni, 1969) or empowerment (Prasad & Prasad, 1993).

Nair and Vohra (2010) suggest that one out of five KWs is subject to alienation. However, the authors stress that further qualitative studies of the matter are necessary to provide more depths in the modern understanding of alienation.

In the context of KIFs, the study of identity work and regulation is critical as it is believed to have a strong impact over control-averse KWs. On the one hand, it is thought to have the potential to avoid existential uncertainty by building self-confidence, self-esteem and cohesion between and within groups of workers (Alvesson, 2004). On the other hand, construction of employees' sense of self has been linked to outcomes varying from frustration and dis-identification to self-alienation (Costas & Kärreman, 2016). Teams and meetings are analysed as another crucial element that also has the potential to ensure KWs' empowerment and self-confidence (Alvesson, 2004; Loehr, 1991).

2.2. Team Meetings

The previous section discussed the concept of identity and its ambiguous relation with social interactions. In this second subchapter of the literature review team meetings are explored with regard to the individuals and various identities they gather.

2.2.1. <u>Teams</u>

Teams are a common structure used to support knowledge-based tasks and work within organisations (Lin, et al., 2018; Tjosvold & Tjosvold, 1991; Bennis, 1965). In the context of

modern firms relying on knowledge creation, team members are selected and gathered not only based on their intellectual capital, but also upon their social capital (Newell, et al., 2009). This implies that the analysis of teams should focus not only on the professional background of employees but also on their individual and several social identities. Indeed, teams as groups of individuals have a crucial psychological dimension gravitating towards elements such as the shared social identity and its influences (Holland, et al., 2000).

An interesting benefit of teams is that through the shared identity they potentially offer, they might be able to overcome possible feelings of isolation and powerlessness emitted by employees of the current ever-changing environment (Alvesson, 2004; Loehr, 1991). However, Newell et al. (2009) suggest that teams can only harness such benefits if an actual synergy emerges between its members. One can further the idea by suggesting that parallel, shared identities are built through the friction and harmonisation of the individual identities of the team members.

Cross-functional teams represent an interesting context in regard to identity sharing as they gather various profiles and backgrounds of professionals. CFTs which are an increasingly common configuration of teams are purposely heterogeneous and allow functional diversity. This composition is thought to satisfy the constant need for extensive communication to stimulate information flow and knowledge creation (Newell et al., 2009; Alvesson, 2004). Because of this, CFTs are seen as a necessity for innovation and creativity in an ever-accelerating changing work environment (Newell et al., 2009; Hargadon & Bechky, 2006).

Some authors argue that the diversity of backgrounds and identities entailed by CFTs create synergies between diverse knowledge bases and their respective ways of assessing situations (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006). However, others propose a critical reading of CFTs; the interaction divergent identities can be the source of misunderstandings linked to the use of specific knowledge-related jargon or vocabulary. Since the interaction of various identities involves a constant friction and contradictions, CFTs can consequently spark conflicts (Lovelace, et al., 2001). This suggests that situations involving interactions between diverse team members, such as organisational meetings, warrant further exploration.

2.2.2. <u>Meetings</u>

In the context of value creation involving knowledge work, meetings are a recurrent setting in which employees tend to develop and interact. Meetings are closely related to CFTs as they consist of groups of individuals working interdependently, requiring them to meet frequently (Holland et al., 2000; Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Meetings are work-related interpersonal experiences gathering more than two individuals. They are planned, purposeful and follow a set structure (Luong & Rogelberg, 2005; Schwartzman, 1986). Meetings in general are a purposeful setting in which the objectives, knowledge and issues of companies are communicated and coordinated. They are organised as forums in which employees interact in order to engage in decision-making, problem-solving, information exchanging and interdepartmental interactions (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012; Leach, et al., 2009; Luong & Rogelberg, 2005).

Some authors distinguish sporadic meetings and recurrent meetings as they do not convey the same meanings and symbolism (Koschmann & McDonald, 2015; Hofstede, et al., 1990). Indeed, recurrent meetings can be characterised as organisational rituals that exceed mere routines by having specific meanings and mores. The values carried by some of these recurrent meetings can be such that they reach a level of sacredness for the organisation they belong to and their participants (Koschmann & McDonald, 2015; Hofstede, et al., 1990). It is further suggested that recurrent meetings and the value they carry have a crucial role to play in the building of shared identities (Guenzi, 2013).

Meetings, both sporadic and recurrent, are considered as crucial for organisations and their projects as they permit communication between individuals and within their teams. They can also allow cross-functional interaction and cooperation (Pinto & Pinto, 1990). Micro-level interactions within team meetings are a central element predicting the effectiveness of meetings and the potential successful outcome of team work. The main axis used to analyse meeting interactions is focused on communication behaviours and their effects on the success of meetings.

Some scholars suggest that group settings imply a time constraint on their participants. Lengthy and redundant interventions have a detrimental effect on team meetings, they are the source of not only latent loss of thoughts and ideas but also of frustration (Kauffeld & Lehmann-

Willenbrock, 2012; Okhuysen & Eisenhardt, 2002). Moreover, some suggest that interactions alone are insufficient to have a positive effect on performance. It is further suggested that in the context of cross-functional situations, a collaborative philosophy involving a strategic alignment through a shared vision and joint rewards is more necessary than interactions through meetings (Holland, et al., 2000; Kahn & McDonough, 1997). Furthermore, collaboration is thought to have the potential to overcome negative feelings and behaviours induced by differentiation or cross-functional team members (Holland, et al., 2000; Hauptman & Hirji, 1999).

Although a diverse team has some advantages, such unique structures are challenging and come with their own limitations. Unsurprisingly, the very own nature of CFTs is linked to a myriad of challenges. For instance, as Newell et al. (2009) argue, the most significant hurdle preventing knowledge sharing between teams is knowledge itself. Authors say that professionals from different backgrounds do not speak the same language, using different vocabulary or jargon. Such knowledge boundaries can raise misunderstandings in a diverse workforce. Keller (2001) argues that this can lead to lower group cohesiveness and can potentially increase stress in a heterogeneous group. One could therefore argue that knowledge boundaries can inhibit meetings from enhancing a shared identity among knowledge workers.

2.2.3. <u>Critical Review of Team Meetings</u>

As highlighted in the previous section meetings are a purposeful tool thought to have the potential to synchronise communication and the activities of companies. Beyond their intended direct goals, meetings are believed to have significant secondary outcomes beyond their direct goals. Authors suggest that job satisfaction is partially relying on the satisfaction that employees gain from their meetings (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012; Rogelberg, et al., 2010). Others, however, argue that meetings can be a potential source of dissatisfaction. Employees might consequently adopt a pessimistic view on meetings and feel dissatisfaction with their job in general (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012; Rogelberg, et al., 2010; Hackman, 2002). Furthermore, CFTs and their meetings might not reach their goal of building a collective identity if there is not already some degree of commonality between KWs. Indeed, teams created without the prerequisite interdepartmental integration have the potential to isolate their team members rather than gathering them together (Holland, et al., 2000; Kahn, 1996).

In spite of these risks, meetings in general should not be abolished. They are one of the only options for teams to face complicated tasks requiring diverse expertise and knowledge. Indeed, meetings can be a mechanism to leverage individuals, their identities and knowledge. The crucial aspect of team meetings is interactions, they allow the coordination of members and their goals (Ericksen & Dyer, 2004; Holland, et al., 2000). To summarise, meetings can be badly executed, and they represent various risks, notably exacerbation of isolation and potential alienation. However, they also represent a prolific source of solutions.

2.3.   Empirical Studies

Research centred on cross-functional team work and meetings have focused mostly on contexts such as healthcare. Hospitals are analysed as labour-intensive organisations in which the expertise and intervention of various professionals, cross-functional efforts and R&D are often required in order to face increasing competition, rapidly changing environment and rising costs (Wang, et al., 2010; Wang, 2010; Pinto, et al., 1993; Pinto & Pinto, 1990). Cross-functional project works answer complex therapeutic needs while implementing innovative and efficient healthcare (Shaw, et al., 2005; Irvine Doran, et al., 2002).

Many studies focusing on interdisciplinary meetings in hospitals suggest the existence of communication issues between specialists having different functional specificities. An example of communication issue between specialists is disagreements related to patient care induced by different approaches and perspectives regarding the handling of patients (Bokhour, 2006; Shaw, et al., 2005; Clark, 1997; Pinto, et al., 1993).

Meetings are analysed as a medium to coordinate diverse specialists with varying perspective. Moreover, they represent a forum in which communication can be facilitated (Wang et al., 2010; Bokhour, 2006; Pinto & Pinto, 1990;). Indeed, it is argued that communication and cooperation are crucial for the successful implementation of projects and teamwork (Wang et al., 2010; Shaw et al., 2005; Pinto et al. 1993; Pinto & Pinto, 1990). Therefore, several studies focus their research on communicative practices (Bokhour, 2006), patterns of communication and cooperation (Pinto et al., 1993; Pinto & Pinto, 1990) and team characteristics and their links to project success and satisfaction (Wang, 2010; Wang et al., 2010).

Cross-functional settings and teams are elements largely analysed in the context of healthcare and medical professions. Conclusions of this research point towards the need for professionals not only in positive contexts such as helping and cooperative atmospheres (Pinto & Pinto, 1990; Wang, 2010; Wang et al. 2010) but also for common goals and norms (Wang et al., 2010; Bokhour, 2006; Shaw et al., 2005). However, it is also stressed that meetings do not always meet their intended goals and that CFTs within hospitals tend to consist in disparate groups of specialists lacking cohesion (Bokhour, 2006).

2.4.   Chapter Summary – Literature Review

As developed by Sartre (1964) while reflecting upon his play *No Exit*, social interactions are crucial for individuals to develop a sense of self. However, in complex and negative contexts, other individuals can represent toxic encounters for the individual and itself. Interestingly, such ideas correlate with the literature focusing on identity. It is an individual concept anchored within social context and interaction. In organisational contexts team meetings represent a common form of social interactions between individuals. As it has been described previously, these situations can be considered as double-edged swords as they can allow the implementation of cooperation and sharing of identity but also induce frustration, exacerbate differences and lead to feelings of loneliness and alienation, if badly executed.

The current empirical studies related to the presented literature focus on two analytical approaches related to team meetings. The first focuses on the connection between team meeting interactions and team satisfaction (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). The second focuses on highlighting the crucial role that cooperation plays in linking CFTs towards a common organisational goal (Pinto & Pinto, 1990). The majority of empirical studies examined here took place in the medical field. However, research on interaction within team meetings, despite its importance, seems to be relatively sparse in management studies (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012).

3 . R E S E A R C H O B J E C T I V E S

In this chapter, we introduce the purpose of our thesis in light of the theories and concepts defined in the literature. From this reasoning a specific aim and research question will be formulated, leading to the subsequent scope delimiting the focus of this thesis.

3.1. Aim and Purpose

It is stressed by authors that knowledge transfer and continuous flow of information are enablers for innovation and therefore targeted by KIFs (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006). Tools such as interdisciplinary teamwork and communication, notably through the structuring mechanisms of meetings, are therefore considered crucial (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Holland, et al., 2000). CFTs are one way of unlocking benefits of the diversity of knowledge by creating commonality between different identities, aside from the supposedly shared organisational social identity.

In spite of a clear trend in KIFs for CFTs and meetings adapted to their diverse members, our impression is that empirical studies of meetings' psychological impact for employees and their identities could contribute to the field regarding group interactions in contemporary workplaces (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). It is suggested in the literature that knowledge and identity discrepancies and unsuitable management practices undermine the success of meetings and employees' satisfaction.

To date, only few studies analyse the effects of meetings on employees. Moreover, they are mostly focused on the impact of meetings load on employees' job satisfaction and well-being (Rogelberg, et al., 2010; Luong & Rogelberg, 2005). Besides, the majority of empirical studies applying frameworks related to CFT meetings take place within the context of hospital and medical teams (Wang, 2010; Wang et al., 2010; Bokhour 2006; Shaw et al., 2005; Irvine & Doran, 2002; Clark, 1997; Pinto et al., 1993; Pinto & Pinto, 1990).

We propose to source inspiration from the existing empirical studies to explore cross-functional meetings within KIFs. Indeed, KIFs are considered as highly innovative and flexible organisation using CFT to focus on the development of new services and products to answer increasing competition, corresponding to the reasons given by authors for focusing on hospitals

(Wang, 2010; Wang et al., 2010; Bokhour 2006 Pinto & Pinto, 1990). We further propose to enrich existing studies by focusing on a micro scale, the felt impact of cross-functional meetings on individuals in the context of business organisatio.

The aim of this research is therefore to provide insights in management studies for modern knowledge-based businesses. In parallel, we have the intention to contribute to the academic fields of interdisciplinary meetings and identity work. We are interested in exploring qualitatively how different professionals and their associated identities interact within organisational meetings and the psychological impact these interactions may have. We pay attention to individual interpretations and perceptions of KWs in the context of an interdisciplinary event. We also follow the recommendation of Nair and Vohra (2010) to analyse qualitatively the possibly alienated knowledge workers and the nature of their alienation. This leads us to the following questions:

How do interdisciplinary meetings function in knowledge-intensive firms?

How may interdisciplinary meeting affect the knowledge workers involved?

3.2.   Research Site and Scope

It is necessary to set the organisational context where the participants to our research are working. Thus, we briefly elaborate on the knowledge-intensive traits of the study site and how the work organisation of the various professionals we interviewed triggers the type of questions we are interested in. To answer the formulated research question, this thesis will be delimited to focus on one KIF, precisely a start-up, and its weekly company-wide meeting.

3.2.1. <u>Research Site</u>

First and foremost, the study site and its product are anonymized for privacy reasons. Therefore, the names used are aliases and few details are brought to the product of the company, as it is not the focus of this thesis.

This research analyses *Päron*, a KIF located in Sweden. Founded in 2016, Päron is a start-up that produces a knowledge-based high-technology product. The workforce consists of educated professionals taking part in a challenging journey towards the common goal of building a

knowledge-intensive product. The company employs thirty *technical staff*[2] and twelve *corporate staff*[3]. Päron's ultimate goal is to innovate within its industry, by making it cleaner and smarter (Päron, 2018).

Interestingly, as R&D organisations are employing a diversified workforce they are recognised to have a potential division of labour between functions, meaning that support personnel, such as marketing and accounting, become isolated or separated from tech staff (Alvesson, 2004). To ensure information flow among the different departments, a weekly team meeting takes place every Monday morning at Päron. The Monday morning meeting (MMM) is set to gather all the tech and corporate staff and the expected dynamic is to exchange and communicate with colleagues for approximately an hour. Specifically, as a manager puts it:

> *Given the structure of the company that is basically … corporate and engineering or development it's very important for the members of each respective team to understand what the other respective teams are working on … I think the main purpose is really to update everyone what each individual person or department is working on but also on the general state of the company and the outlook for next week ["Is it by nature cross-functional"] Absolutely … I think there's also an expectation of seeing each other, talking to each other having a more communal feeling to the company … ["so it's information and…?"] Socializing, yeah. (Agnes)*

Päron has been chosen as a study site because it is a KIF working on a knowledge-based product. It gathers various professionals around a weekly cross-functional situation. This setting therefore represents an opportunity to interview different professionals regarding a group situation, reflect upon their view of their own identities and of the meeting.

3.2.2. Scope

The scope of this thesis induces a focus on the different professional identities and knowledge differences it entails in a cross-functional setting. However, such scope imposes some limitations to the study. The studied meeting is not the sole cross-functional interaction within the company and may therefore not be representative of the average situation within Päron.

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[2] Regroups designers, electrical engineers, mechanical engineers and computer engineers
[3] Regroups content creators, finance, marketing, communication and human resources

Moreover, this focus involves results specific to the study site itself and its employees who are not representative of KWs as a whole. Therefore, results and elements of the discussion might not be generalizable to other companies or cross-functional situations.

The format of this thesis also narrowed the possible angles of analysis. Therefore, despite their relevance, this project does not consider topics such as gender, hierarchical differences and the inequalities they might involve. The concept of identity per se is not assessed in depth or challenged but rather used as a framework for our analysis and subsequent discussion. Thus, the scope of this thesis is delimited to the exploration of how social interactions in a formal context might impact individuals and their various identities.

4. METHODOLOGY

In the following chapter, we present how we developed and implemented the methodological approach behind this study. We start by announcing the philosophical underpinnings, then we present the research approach and the data collection method. These are followed by a detailed description of our analytical process. We conclude the chapter by giving insight into the validity and reliability of our research.

4.1. Philosophical Underpinnings

To better understand our thesis, it is important to clarify some of our underpinning thoughts and premises to help the reader follow our methodological lens. As made clear in the remainder of this chapter, we engaged with a qualitative research approach which "attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participants' perspective" (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). As it will be elaborated in the following lines, interpretivism and critical theory traditions guided us throughout the whole research process; from the formulation of the research question to how we engaged with our empirical material. We believe that using multiple philosophical standpoints helped us to better evaluate and analyse our data by allowing us to benefit from different angles to interpret the material (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2018).

Foremost, Chalmers (1999) explains that researchers' views regarding particular aspect of the world around them are guided by the paradigm they chose to work in. As agree with the idea that there is no objective social reality, but that every individual actively create their realities (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2018) we were first inclined to work in an interpretive paradigm. Prasad (2005) explains that every social interaction has numerous interpretations depending on the participant and its background. Indeed, we are not contesting objective reality as such, but we want to bring attention to the notion that self-images have a critical influence on the process of *sensemaking* led by individuals and could affect the organisation through social interactions (Prasad, 2005). The notion of sensemaking can be deemed crucial to explore social interactions and their effects on individuals. People make sense of interactions and social situations by receiving confirmation from their counterparts (Weick, 1995). Therefore, we considered interpretivism as the most relevant methodological framework as the aim of this study is to explore how employees at Päron understand they are affected by the dynamic created by the MMM.

The principles of symbolic interactionism (SI) underpins our study to help us answer our research question in depth. Researchers choosing to work in SI strive for in-depth understanding of social situations from a participant standpoint in order to extract the multiplicity of meanings and realities regarding a social situation (Prasad, 2005). Identity and the subjectivity it entails (Lawler, 2014) can be considered an element of analysis reflecting individual realities of social situations as it emerges from the understanding that individuals have of their own selves and the groups they connect to. Indeed, as we aim to deeply analyse the various interpretations our interviewees have regarding the dynamics between different occupational roles in team meetings SI is appropriate to our research. To avoid making assumptions regarding the interviewees' state of mind, we consider the necessity to take into account different individuals viewpoints, something which SI allows us to do.

To fully understand and gain various insights, we considered important to interpret the empirical material from different philosophical standpoints (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2018). Since SI is regarded as centred on individual sensemaking and thereby criticised for being overly optimistic and blinded from the influence of power relations (Prasad, 2005), we also draw inspiration from Critical Theory School of thoughts. We deem Critical Theory (CT) as overlapping with SI as they both analyse the world as being socially constructed (Prasad, 2005). By combining both traditions, it allows us to bring a critical dimension to our analysis while

highlighting conflicting interests of individuals and the power relations characterising their social environment. In turn, CT allows us to have relevance to question the impacts interdisciplinary team meetings might have on individuals (Prasad, 2005).

4.2. Research Approach

Moving from the paradigms that guided our study, our research followed a qualitative methodology. This approach has been regarded as the best strategy for this type of research as it not only views social reality as an emergent property of individual's creation, but it also deals with how individuals interpret their social world (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Merriam, 2002;).

Our study has an abductive approach. Following Hanson (1958) conclusion that facts are always theory-laden and that when entering a new field of study, a researcher can never know what is going to be uncovered (Styhre, 2013). This reasoning allows a broad mind-set and flexibility to approach new topics. In fact, abduction enabled us to adjust and refine continuously new data in light of prior theory. In other words, abduction is characterised by a circular process of moving between data and theory during a research process (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2018). Also, we were aware of having considerable pre-knowledge within the field we studied due to our respective backgrounds and education. Accordingly, we started our study with a broad knowledge of prior theory and previous research but also attempted to keep an open mind to any unexpected finding while we gathered the data (Van Maanen 2011 cited in Styhre, 2013). This means that we appreciated the emerging patterns rather than imposing our preconceived ideas on the data. That said, we also qualify our study as being embedded in the logic of exploratory study. It means that we aimed at finding new insights to explore CFTs meetings in the new light of employees' perceived impact and the setting of a start-up company (Robson, 2002 cited in Saunders, et al., 2009).

4.3. Data Collection Method

Our data was collected through a two-fold process to ensure the gathering of in-depth information about the internal interpretations of our participants such as perceived impacts of the MMM. In fact, combining multiple methods like interviews and observations can be relevant to triangulate the social phenomenon studied and reduce biases by providing insights from different perspectives and types of data (Eisenhardt, 1989). Within our qualitative

strategy, using more than one source of data collection helped us to double-check our findings (Bryman & Bell, 2015). As our analysis is mostly based on the scrutiny of the interviews we conducted, they can be seen as the primary source of our data collection. Therefore, the two observations provided additional insights and contextual information to enrich the analysis and discussion.

4.3.1. <u>Semi-Structured Interviews</u>

In the first phase, we conducted eleven semi-structured interviews (Appendix A – Interview Summary) framed as open-ended conversations supported by a flexible interview guide (Kvale, 1996). Interviews were designed to allow free discussion and the possibility to adapt throughout the interviewing process (Bryman & Bell, 2015). A more unstructured interviewing approach aligns with the purpose of this study since it is said to be more likely to provide the researcher with rich insights about the participants' views (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Indeed, this approach presents the opportunity for interviewees to further develop their thoughts (Saunders, et al., 2009).

Additionally, we followed Kvale (1996) recommendations of thematising as a first step of our interview investigation. Thus, the interview template has been organised around the purpose of this study and the topics we primarily wanted to explore with our respondents (Appendix B - Interview Guide). We used this guide as a source of inspiration and not as a strict tool. Our guide included different types of questions based on the framework elaborated by Kvale (1996). For instance, to open the discussion smoothly, we firstly asked general questions about interviewees' work at Päron. Then, we got to more precise *how* and *what* questions regarding the interviewees' thoughts and interpretations of the MMM specifically. Furthermore, we regularly asked follow-up questions such as *"Could you give us more details about that"* or *"Did I understand you correctly if I say that ... when you say that…"*. We believe these follow-up questions helped us gain richer understanding of our interviewees' answers. Finally, we concluded by asking participants whether they thought some things could be changed or be done differently in the MMM.

All in all, we have been careful to keep the interviews very dynamic while remaining attentive to unexpected findings that might further contribute to this study. Semi-structured interview

appeared to be the most adequate tool as we were concerned with the meanings and interpretations our research subjects ascribe to the MMM.

It should be highlighted that all the interviews were conducted in person and recorded with two different devices. We found it imperative to meet interviewees at neutral places to avoid perhaps interruptions and disturbances entailed by the workplace (Cohen, et al., 2007). This also in turn reinforced the anonymous nature of this research as, from what we know, nobody at Päron saw us interview the eleven participants. Both of us were present at all interviews and detained a specific interviewer role to focus on. One was the interview leader following the interview guide and asking the pre-formulated questions, while the other one had a more passive role. The latter role involved tasks such as observing reactions, taking notes and intervening at any point to ask follow-up questions or to probe further any subjects of the discussion (Bryman & Bell, 2015). After eleven interviews we ceased the interview process as we considered we might have reached a saturation of data (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

4.3.2. <u>Field Observations</u>

In a second phase, we took part in two MMMs as observer-participants (Saunders, et al., 2009). These field observations strengthened the findings we already had from the interviews (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This source of data collection provided us with additional material to present our case with deep and supportive elements to analyse and discuss the content of interviews. It should also be noted that we were not granted approval to record these meetings. Therefore, we put efforts to be attentive and wrote down notes (key words, quotes, etc.) about the most interesting details that occurred during the events observed (Lofland & Lofland, 1995 cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015). Our flexible field notes taking is based on the framework provided by (Merriam, 1998). Special attention was given to the conversation and interactions between the different professionals. Moreover, we concentrated on who listens, who remains silent, who speaks to whom and the different nonverbal interactions.

We expanded our observations by including maps of the physical setting and layout of the meeting room where the MMMs are held. As it has been argued by pioneers of laboratory studies in the tradition of Science and Technology, and showed by Latour & Wooglar (1969) providing the reader with a visual for how people act in an office room can be very useful for observations. We deemed such a process relevant for this study as the organisation of the room

can be regarded as symbolic and mostly participants referred to it during the interviews (Appendix C – Meeting Room Plan & Appendix D – Meeting Room Details).

4.4. Analytical Process

We consider transparency as a very important characteristic of our research design. Hence, we want to put forward that we did not write this paper to evaluate our interviewees or the company they are working for. Instead, our intentions were exclusively to analyse and understand a phenomenon. That said, the following section is to provide the reader with details regarding how the data collected was processed and analysed. The purpose of the described process is to lead to the identification of axes of analysis, in this case resulting in three overarching themes.

Step 1 – Transcribing

First, after conducting all interviews, we planned a partial transcript gathering only elements deemed relevant for our research purpose. However, the transcription became an integral verbatim as the majority of the data was estimated relevant. The transcription process from oral speech to written text resulted in about 49 pages (22, 973 words). It was then reduced to eight pages (2, 206 words) of selected material to be studied for the purpose of this research. Following our transparent approach, we decided not to correct the grammar of our interviewees' statements.

Step 2 – Extracting Information from the Data (Coding)

The second step of our data analysis focused on identifying themes within the data with a cutting and sorting technique (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). We broke down the material into units of analysis corresponding mostly to full sentences and we looked for repetitions. This scrutiny technique focused on highlighting as many recurrent topics as possible (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The technique followed to identify the themes has been to use the comment tools provided by the software *Word* for each interview transcript.

The interesting segments have been underlined in different colours and comments were made to briefly describe and summarise the content of each chunk of data. This process corresponds to the open coding stage (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this process, most of the data collected cut and sorted has been gathered under the overarching themes, very few rejects have been operated. To illustrate the open coding phase, an example of highlighted themes can be given. Some of the identified open codes are: d*istances between colleagues, various*

misunderstandings linked to occupational roles, disinterest regarding what is said, inferiority and superiority feelings.

To further clarify our analysis, we focused on highlighting axial codes based upon redundancies identified in the open codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This process reduced the number of open codes, as the most relevant ones have been assembled under eight axial codes deemed to reflect the purpose of this research project. Some of the axial codes of our analysis are for example: *professional Identities: segregation by professional background* and *segregation sparking identity questionings*.

The final step of our coding process has been to gather our axial codes under overarching codes related to our literature review (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Hence, we created three overarching themes: *a contradictory team meeting*, a *segregating encounter sparking identity struggles*, *a consequential organisational ritual*.

Step 3 – Organising the Data in a Table

To organise in a visual manner our coding systems and the selected segments of data, we gathered the quotes in an excel sheet. This method allowed us to sort the large amount of data and to focus our analysis on selected relevant patterns. We structured the excel sheet with the following process; along the Y axis we assembled personal and work-related information about the interviewees, along the X axis we gathered information about the open coding, axial coding and overarching coding.

The overall analytical approach followed a likely step by step structure. However, the progression of the coding and analysis of the data have not been linear but rather processual. Indeed, we experienced a mechanism of back and forth between the raw data and the analytical structure, each component influencing the assessment of the other.

4.5. Validity & Reliability

To ensure the reliability and validity of this study we engaged with practices of *source criticism* which "refers to a careful evaluation, reflection, questioning, rejection, and probing of interview accounts … and a carefully crafted research design which is essential for obtaining strong evidence for derivative knowledge claims" (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2017, p. 1). Hence, we did not only put efforts on the technical design of this study, but also on the genuine evaluation of the data gathered.

For instance, we had the opportunity to select the eleven employees we wanted to interview and they all accepted our request. We scrupulously chose people from different hierarchical levels, gender and age, resulting in five participants from the corporate department and six from the engineering department. This choice of *counterbiased* participants is believed to provide us with varied points of view and opinions. Since our respondents come from different levels and departments of Päron, it is thought to strengthen the validity of our interviewees' accounts (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2017). However, we are conscious that this might also be a source of bias as our interviewees are people that we selected ourselves. For instance, a problem might be that people were very comfortable to speak openly to us and might have accounted for things that they would not in the presence of other interviewers.

One should note here that one of the researchers had been working for Päron for a year when the interviews have been conducted. On the one hand, such a position represents a potential source for bias on the researchers' side as the company was already well known by one of the authors. On the other hand, it might also have improved our ability to understand the background of the study and facilitate the interviews by making participants more trustful and comfortable. This apparent source of bias has been carefully considered throughout the study. For instance, the use of swear words, even if revelatory, had to be overlooked generally as it might have been an effect of the informality of the interviews.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, to minimise the biases and triangulate the phenomenon studied, we conducted interviews and supported them with two meeting observations. This helped us cross-check, validate and relate our observations to interview statements (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2017). In parallel, we tried to keep balance between not uncritically accepting interviewee accounts and trusting what people said to us (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2017). Thus, we were alert for influences or motivations not to report the truth, but also to statements that might be tied to particular situations experienced by our interviewees at the moment.

It is important to consider that we unfortunately could not fully implement the schedule linked to our source critique approach. It was initially planned to run follow-up interviews after our observations in order to gain additional insights from our interviewees and verify for consistency or contradiction between two interviews with the same participants. However, since we made the choice of conducting a lengthy and structured analysis enriched with two

field observations, time restrained us from conducting the follow-up interviews. Another reason could also be that, the material gathered in the first round of interviews was already rich and we therefore deemed it was sufficient to lead our research study.

To enable transparency, cooperation and honest discussions, it should be noted that we ensured the anonymity and confidentiality for all interviewees (Ricoeur, 2006 cited in Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Therefore, a consent form (Appendix E) was signed in the beginning of each interview by both parties. In addition, all respondents are anonymised and protected from distinguishable content such as specific work task. We also attributed a fictive name to every interviewee and randomised the gender. We decided to conduct randomisation for these two variables since the purpose of this study does not necessitate the consideration of genders.

4.6.   Chapter Summary - Methodology

Our approach consisted in a qualitative and abductive method influenced by Symbolic Interactionism and Critical Theory as philosophical backgrounds. Eleven interviews have been conducted with employees at Päron and have been completed by two observations of the MMM. This approach is justified by our interest in the sensemaking and interpretations efforts of our participants. It was also estimated the most appropriate to understand how individual give meaning to the studied meeting and how they evaluate this group situation impacts their selves. Our general mind-set throughout the data collection and analytical process was to consider the data as brut gemstones requiring the least alteration possible in order to be treated in its fair value. We sincerely hope that we have managed to shape each stone with respect to its original value.

5.   DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter the data gathered during interviews and observations is presented and analysed. We first provide the reader with an insight of the context of the field observations. Then, the material is divided into three thematised parts: *A Contradictory Team Meeting, A Segregating Encounter Sparking Identity Struggles and Consequential Organisational Ritual*. These overarching themes are divided in several subthemes to facilitate the analysis. The chapter concludes with an overview of the findings which leads to the discussion chapter.

5.1. Introduction to Field Observations

As previously stated, we were given the opportunity to observe two weekly Monday meetings: MMM of the 9 April 2018 and of the 16 April 2018. The first meeting was led by the CEO who usually leads them. The second meeting was led by three top managers in the CEO's absence. In the following section, we present the notable differences and some commonalities we noticed between the two meetings.

As a first distinction, during the first observation session employees were talking before the meeting started, but they lowered their voices as the CEO entered the room. Contrarily, in the second meeting, one of the leaders had to ask the employees to stop talking in order to start the meeting. We noticed other differences, notably in the attitudes of the workers and the tone of the meetings. In the second meeting, individuals adopted a jovial attitude, commenting on others' input and making their colleagues laugh. During the first meeting, the atmosphere was noticeably tenser, and employees did not intervene as much as in the second one.

A commonality between the two meetings is that employees tended to look at their phones or hands and interact with nearby objects (pencils, napkins, etc.). In correlation with what was reported by our interviewees, we observed that employees with similar backgrounds tended to sit in groups rather than sit with colleagues from other departments. In general, the participants identified two main teams within the company, corporate and tech (also referred as engineering). As Nils stated:

> *I definitely think that same sort of work function sit, try to sit together, not always but sort of gravitate ... mmm so I'd say we have two primary categories that's corporate and under a big umbrella engineering ... mmmh ... and it's physically divided as well so it makes it easy and clear, so corporate is upstairs, engineering is downstairs and then, of course, you have the subgroups in all of those. (Nils)*

In parallel, we also observed that the two identified groups tended to sit in the areas closest to the exits leading to their offices (*cf.* Appendix C).

New information gathered during our field observation was in regard to the meeting room and its artefacts. Our interviewees mentioned the importance of furniture, notably chairs. We therefore measured these objects and gave special attention to other artefacts in the room.

Our observations found that employees sit on identical black wooden benches that are 44 centimetres high and the CEO seats at a white and metallic stool measuring 63 centimetres high with a footrest (*cf.* Appendix D). The benches and tables used for the meetings are organised in rows so that employees face each other, and the CEO's stool is behind the rows. Although the meeting room is a common office space, through the positioning of the different benches and tables, a strong distinction between corporate and tech staff was noticed. Maps are also used to show the extent to which the separation between the leader of the meeting and the employees. The illustrations show how the separation of the different groups of workers is reinforced by the layout of the room.

Another interesting element is a wall graffiti stating *I want to change the future* measuring 270 centimetres on 160 centimetres (*cf.* Appendix C & D). It is one of the first items we noticed when entering the room. The graffiti appears to be signed by all the employees that have worked at Päron to date. The signatures of employees form a circle around the quote handwritten in bold black letters. We consider this feature to be of great symbolical value, potentially representing a social contract through which employees affirm their mindset and motivation. This graffiti can also be regarded as a value statement; a managerial attempt to impart KWs with values and manage meanings (Costas & Kärreman, 2016). One could interpret this as a management effort to indirectly influence employees' selves (Costas & Kärreman, 2016; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Given the value of the observations we made, our field notes were used to reinforce our critical approach and deepen our interpretations. Therefore, we used the differences and important features we observed throughout our analytical process to both support our interviewees' statements and enrich our analysis and discussion.

5.2.   A Contradictory Team Meeting

In the following subchapter, analysis focuses on topics such as meetings, teams, management, communication and CFTs. The participants of this study were asked a set of questions focused on the meeting and its setting. Interviewees were invited to reflect on the purpose of the MMM, the distribution of its content and its overall efficiency. Here, we focus on general trends of

ideas and reflections, making the following the background of our analytical approach. A first impression of the respondents' overall opinions of the MMM resulted from these questions. Therefore, this subchapter gives a first glimpse at the interviewees' state of mind and vision of the studied meeting(s). As this research project follows the SI tradition, we used this phase as a way to reflect on our interviewees and progress into a deeper analysis oriented by the trends identified in this first analytical effort.

We gathered the responses of our participants under three subthemes; *How do KWs Evaluate the Purpose of the Meeting?*, *Is the Monday Morning Meeting a Waste of Time?*, and *What is the Impact of a Biased Meeting Content?*. Firstly, we show how the purpose of the meeting is perceived and assessed by its participants. Secondly, we see how the staff reflects upon the usefulness of the meeting. Finally, we shed light on the critical assessment of the interviews regarding the meeting setting.

5.2.1. <u>How do KWs Evaluate the Purpose of the Meeting?</u>

KIFs face numerous challenges due to their nature and composition. As has been detailed previously, they run the risk of losing direction and spread their attention excessively (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2011). Meetings are suggested as a remedy to this issue to provide a structural setting, notably involving the use of CFTs (Newell, et al., 2009). Communication and cooperation are crucial aspects that have been highlighted in the literature (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012; Leach et al., 2009; Rogelberg & Luong, 2005; Pinto & Pinto, 1990). Therefore, we asked our interviewees to reflect on their perceptions of the purpose of the MMM. The respondents described the MMM as an event to spread and share information. As the majority of the interviewees answered:

Mmmh the purpose is very well defined even not officially stated ... receiving and giving information. (Agnes)

So, the purpose is to inform everyone. (Jonas)

Getting everyone sort of synced up ... and just kind of general updates about various things ... that's at least in theory. (Axel)

Interestingly, the majority of our respondents suggested both an official and unofficial purpose:

I think there's also an expectation of seeing each other, talking to each other having a more communal feeling to the company. Mmmh but I think it is more of an unofficial expectation. (Agnes)

Maybe that's not the intent but there's no CLEAR [with emphasis] intent of Monday morning meeting. It's just one point in time where the whole team is in the same place. (Jonas)

Through this second set of answers, we sensed that the meeting also had a social element, it might be used as a way to consolidate connections between team members and/or to symbolically start the week together. However, five of our interviewees expressed the idea that the official goal was not met. As one interviewee commented:

Official purpose is to update everyone in the company about what is going on. Don't find that happening really though [interrogative tone]. (Hampus)

Some informants expressed doubts regarding the actual official purpose, as information does not seem to reach all members of the company. We suggest a critical note regarding the seemingly unclear purpose of the MMM by stressing the negative assessment of the meeting's outcome, most interviewee do not feel informed. We can also suggest that if the KWs' assessment of an informative meeting is that it does not inform them, it might lead to feelings of boredom for the participants.

5.2.2. <u>Is the Monday Morning Meeting a Waste of Time?</u>

Surprisingly, when answering questions regarding the informative purpose of the meeting, employees often mentioned that they felt they were wasting their time during the MMM:

I am not using my time in the best way, there's this meeting, it takes one or two hours and there's relatively little flow of information. (Ludwig)

… it's just a waste of time for everyone and it's not informing anyone … so yeah that's annoying. (Jonas)

Sometimes we are asked to update everyone ... I think it is a loss of time. (Beata)

We interpret these answers as reflecting a misunderstanding of the MMM's purpose. Indeed, most of the respondents expressed that they did not only waste their time, but also did not understand the point or the importance of this meeting. Commenting on this, some of the interviewees said:

I think it's a waste of time having forty people spend two or three minutes saying what they're doing... (Nils)

Similarly, this impression is echoed by Ludwig:
... and that information, at least to me, doesn't really matter.

Moreover, some employees felt that the MMM takes too much space in their schedule:

Because, for me no importance, to be completely honest ... it is just waste of time in the morning ... Stressed in the meeting and want to go do my job. (Hampus)

... you just get panicky for two hours and then half the day is gone. Like there's so much to do after that. (Erik)

Here, it is possible to propose that these inputs convey a sense of frustration in the interviewees. Indeed, it is considered that professionals need to feel that their work is meaningful and how they spend their time directly contributes to the fate of their organisations (Weldon & Mustari, 1988). The responses provided by participants echoed a lack of belief in the importance and efficiency of the time they invest in the MMM.

5.2.3. <u>What is the Impact of a Biased Meeting Content?</u>

The official purpose of the company-wide meeting, according to the interviewees, is to inform the employees once a week. However, a majority of interviewees expressed apathy regarding the meeting. We therefore oriented our interviews towards the content of the meeting and the topics discussed. The interviewees linked the content of the meeting with the type of product developed by the company:

The key focus is definitely the state of the R&D … I think it's very important for everybody to understand where we at with the vehicle mmm because that's the core operation that we design the business around, so I'd say that's very the core focus of the meeting. (Agnes)

An additional critique stemmed from the answers provided. Respondents addressed what they perceived as a bias in the content of the meeting:

Sometimes it's really finance-related topics and sometimes it's a lot of focus on … yeah, the product-related topics. (Nora)

Interestingly, as interviewees reflected on the bias they felt, they developed a new perception. They classified their colleagues, knowledge and task around this bias. Below, two comments illustrate this:

Mostly focus on what is happening on tech side, like what engineers are doing … corporate side don't get to talk that much. (Hampus)

… the competences of the other teams and employees … was not emphasized as often as the tech team… (Beata)

From the empirical data gathered through observation and interview, several lines of critique emerged. The purpose of the meeting seems to be unclear and may not be reached. Also, the meeting is sometimes regarded as a waste of time, and its content seems to be steered towards a certain type of information which sheds light on employees' differences. Moreover, a majority of the respondents put emphasis on the fact that the bias gave the impression to be linked to activities within the company.

This first phase of input can be connected to the literature focused on teams and meetings. Recurrent team meetings are prioritised to gather professionals and create a team spirit, while simultaneously forming a forum for the gathering various knowledge or information (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Teams carry a considerable psychological dimension circulating around the feeling of togetherness (Holland, et al., 2000). However, the answers provided by the respondents reflect possible doubts concerning the team feeling emerging from the MMM.

It is important to note that interactions during meetings and the evaluations made by the participants can be considered as indicators of potential meeting success (Pinto & Pinto, 1990). Therefore, we suggest deepening our analysis towards the evaluation the interviewees make regarding the meeting. Logically, in the following section, further details in relation to the differences hinted at in this segment will be developed.

5.3.   A Segregating Encounter Sparking Identity Struggles

In this overarching theme, we take a deeper look at the MMM and how it is experienced and perceived by the interviewees. This section is divided into two subthemes. Firstly, we portray how the MMM as a team meeting can in fact create distances between its participants. Secondly, we further the analysis of the identified distances through three effects; misunderstandings, disinterest and perceived inequalities. We use these three axes to highlight possible identity questionings of interviewees.

5.3.1. Professional Identities: Segregation by Professional Backgrounds

During our interviews, a variety of perspectives were expressed about how colleagues relate to each other. However, major concerns were communicated about distances between colleagues of different occupational roles (engineers, corporate). A considerable amount of answers we gathered revealed that employees have developed feelings of distance from colleagues. An interesting result of this study regards how people sit in the room. Results show that employees with similar occupational roles tend to sit in the same areas, close to each other. For instance, as one interviewee puts it:

> *… people come up in groups … from the different caves of the company. Corporate with corporate, tech guys with tech guys. (Hampus)*

This perception was also echoed by two informants who reported that they can pinpoint obvious groupings in the meeting room:

> *… But I think I tend to seat with the people that are in the same office than I am … It's clusters. (Erik)*

... people tend to clump together. I mean it takes a while for people to assemble in the room and they tend to sit down with people they work with because there is stuff to talk about. So they kinda group up naturally. (Axel)

As we previously mentioned in the subchapter *Introduction to field observations*, it has been possible for us to connect and confirm these statements with our observational data regarding how staff tend to group with direct co-workers. We identified another recurrent pattern in the collected empirical material. In their accounts of how people tend to sit at the MMM, some interviewees suggested that people tend to seat with the colleagues they work with, but also at the tables closest to their offices. Indeed, the right side of the room is located next to the door leading to the engineer floor, and the other side to a door leading to the corporate offices (*cf.* Appendix C). For instance, one interviewee said:

... the first rows is always software electronics when you come into the room and the first portion is always the tech team and the second portion closer to corporate is always to corporate or upstairs people. (Elias)

Indeed, this situation can be summed up with a comment of an informant. Reflecting on the distances between the two groups of employees, she said:

... in this company specifically, there's this gap between corporate and technical team ... in the end you're always like tangled up in your own stuff and you don't really get to communicate. (Birgit)

These comments were supported by our two observations at Päron. In fact, all corporate staff were sitting together at the closest tables to their offices. Engineers were sitting at the tables by the stairs, the ones closest to their workplaces. Interviewees reflected upon a felt magnetism towards people they are working with, or people having the same identities as presented by Ashforth and Mael (1989) and Kramer (1991). Indeed, we suggest an interpretation of the said groupings as gathering of individuals sharing similar knowledge, experience, background, norms and values. These can correspond to not only common psychosocial traits (Cohen & Bailey, 1997), but also working epistemic cultures (Newell et al., 2009; Knorr-Cetina, 1999) and their consequent professional identities. We observed different working groups segregating

themselves from the others, potentially unintentionally. One can suggest investigating the psychological reasons behind such clustering.

In contrast with previous arguments, a small number of those interviewed agreed that there is a team spirit at Päron and that they do not really feel there is some kind of separation between teams:

To a certain degree, I don't feel really isolated [when other people talk]. (Ludwig)
Mmmh well you're working towards the same goal, I mean in the end I feel like we're all the same team the 40 or so of us cause well we need to build the product and I think specifically to the meeting. (Nils)

However, something striking is that in general the interviewees mainly only acknowledged relating with their direct peers, or the people with whom they accomplish their daily work tasks. Talking about this, an informant said:

Yes [I feel like I am part of a team], I wouldn't say the team is the whole people around me. With my colleagues [I relate], to my daily colleagues. (Beata)

Many of the answers gathered revealed that employees have developed feelings of distance from their colleagues, while others expressed closeness. Taken together these results provide important insights into the notion of isolation, as employees are conscious of the diversity of the workforce and the segregation it can entail. As previously mentioned, teams are believed to have the capacity to shape common identities and therefore combat potential isolation felt by employees evolving in modern environments (Alvesson, 2004; Loehr, 1991). However, without interdepartmental integration, CFTs can isolate teams rather than bringing them together (Holland, et al., 2000; Kahn, 1996). We agree that the various identities might represent a barrier for interactions and we want to further suggest through our interpretations of the dataset that it may lead to a type of paradoxical isolation; employees are gathered together to interact, yet they feel lonely.

5.3.2. Segregation Sparking Identity Questionings

In relation to the previous themes, a salient topic regards the various misunderstandings employees face during the MMM. As granted, different knowledge bases create distinct

identities that are sometimes not interconnected and can represent a barrier to effective group interactions (Hodson, 1996). This can be interpreted as accentuating the felt distances between colleagues at Päron and results in difficult identity construction and maintenance.

5.3.3. <u>Knowledge and Identity as Their Own Hurdle</u>

It is likely that when interacting, individuals of the same group understand each other due to the fact that their identity is based on the same norms and knowledge. In a similar vein, what they communicate might not be fully understood by other groups of professionals with whom they interact. This can be interpreted as an amplificatory factor of the observed group segregation.

We suggest that the use of language that does not resonate to everybody in the group might cause misunderstandings that further emphasise the differences between the MMM participants. Indeed, people tend to adhere and evolve within groups that implicitly have jargon specific to themselves (Holland, et al., 2000; Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Too little understanding between colleagues can be a source of one's knowledge and individual identities (Hodson, 1996). When asked about whether they could understand their colleagues when they speak, the interviewees were unanimous in that they tend to have difficulties to follow everything being discussed because of the variety of professionals gathered together. On the whole, the participants expressed language as an ongoing issue:

> *Hard time following ... I get totally lost for some stuff they talk about ... Very often use acronyms. (Hampus)*

> *... the biggest like language barrier would be between engineers and corporates for obvious reasons. I think that's also where sort of the most ambiguity would come. (Nils)*

As it has been argued, the use of knowledge-related jargon or vocabulary corresponding to occupational roles can be the source of misunderstanding in the interaction of diversity. In fact, five out of eleven interviewees expressed that the misunderstandings that occur during the meetings are language issues. As expressed by Keller (2001), interactions between

professionals that do not share psychosocial traits, but must work together, are more likely to result in dysfunctional exchanges.

Another interesting thread of this subtheme regards how informants were prone to separate language from knowledge. Commenting on this, Erik from the corporate department said:

I would think that primarily it's language and secondarily it's knowledge ... as long as you explain it or use a language that is exemplary and that is, you know, hum clear, people will kind of understand. (Erik)

Following the same idea, one engineer interviewee stated that:

I don't think it's the field of work, most time it's when there is a specific term or abbreviation or something like that, that you just don't know about ... Usually it's more language-based than knowledge-based. (Axel)

Moreover, when referring to corporate people, he said:

... it's not super hard to understand the content of it but hard and weird language.

From the latter quote, we also interpret and suggest that the proposition of Axel can be regarded as a personal *feeling of superiority,* a theme that will be analysed in the following subtheme.

What is surprising from the data analysed in this subsection is that interviewees do not seem aware that language, knowledge backgrounds and identities are interlaced. The answers of the respondents are very focused on language particularities. Thus, we decode that when they use the term *language* it is connected to the diverse frames of references of professional identities. Although interviewees did not state the word *knowledge*, we want to suggest that the term *language* they consistently refer to depends on professional identities and associated knowledge bases.

An analysis of this choice of words could be that the omission of mentioning *knowledge* is voluntary as they maybe find it hard to admit that they do not have the proper knowledge to understand and interact actively during the MMM. Part of this situation might be because of some key characteristics of KWs, such as their knowledgeability and autonomous expert status

(Alvesson, 2004). Indeed, this could be a significant reason for them to put aside the term *knowledge* to refer to their misunderstandings and instead use the word *language*.

That said, despite the potential of meetings for building a collective identity (Guenzi, 2013) which is a crucial element for KIFs to function, meetings can imply the use of jargon that can be a potential source of limitations. Jargon is linked to specific occupational roles and maintain knowledge boundaries. Therefore, jargon can be considered as preventing meetings from enhancing a common shared identity among the KWs at Päron. Identities are, as previously stated, constructed and perceived from different realities and the use of vocabulary specific to certain bodies of work is one of the causes preventing the building of a common identity (Barley, 1996).

5.3.4. <u>Disinterest in What is Said</u>

We can link the previous findings regarding misunderstandings to other results about interviewees expressing disinterest during MMM. Many respondents recognised their indifference towards the majority of what is being addressed. This situation might be problematic as the MMM is the only meeting that gathers all workers together and could be a valuable opportunity to foster knowledge and information flow weekly.
An identified pattern is that participants tend to ignore what they do not consider relevant to their work:

> *I don't make too much of an effort, I'm aware when it is my turn to speak and a lot*
> *of the rest of the time, I tune out and I'm suspecting I'm not the only person who does*
> *that … I am not listening. (Ludwig)*

> *… I just tune out, if it's really irrelevant, I don't pay so much attention. (Nora)*

The literature is consistent regarding the desire of KWs to have the liberty to apply their own judgements, and to have decisional-power, feel valued and recognised (Alvesson, 2004). Likewise, and on account of the two previous comments, one could wonder whether employees become bored because of continually facing misunderstandings while interacting with their peers. It is important to note that an abandon of interest in the meeting can have considerable psychological impacts on the participants. Indeed, KWs are usually considered active and

implicated in the core of the business, one can wonder what this impact could be. Moreover, and undeniably from the observations we made, we noted how people looked distracted and possibly bored. They tended to look down to their cell phones, look out the windows or play with objects in front of them.

Furthermore, an interviewee seemed to undermine the output of her colleagues which he is not able to understand:

... Listen to shit I don't understand. (Hampus)

The choice of words made by the respondent is considered unusual and might be due to trust and comfort with the interviewers, but valuable to analyse in this subtheme. Indeed, the participant seems to be rejecting and even minimising the importance of his colleagues' inputs he is not able to grasp.

This observed boredom or disinterest can also be analysed in parallel to the *I want to change the future* graffiti (*cf.* Appendix D). This artefact represents a strong symbolic value. As it seemed to be signed by a majority of employees, one could analyse this as a sort of social contract. People signing the wall testify of their go-getter mentality and their will to be a part of the team. Moreover, as we further delve into the analysis, we interpret this as the will of each signatory to become involved in shaking things up and actively changing the *world*. The message conveyed by the wall artefact and the attitude of the participants in the meeting can be possibly scrutinised as a dissonance among professional identities; they sign in to get involved in change, however they lose interest through the company-wide weekly meeting.

We wonder whether such dissonance can be the cause of identity crises for the participants. Indeed, as previously mentioned, they seem to identify as dynamic, knowledgeable workers that want to get actively involved. However, they also identify as bored employees choosing not to pay attention. Therefore, one can contemplate whether the KWs go through identity struggles (Alvesson, 2010).

5.3.5. <u>Inequalities of Self-Esteem Produced by Professional Diversity</u>

As briefly mentioned when analysing interviewees' mutual misunderstandings, a considerable amount of the participants emitted a feeling of inequality between professions, their related knowledge bases and therefore their identities. Some interviewees from the corporate team

seemed to put themselves into question when they did not entirely understand what is said by the tech staff during MMM. Some even mentioned that they feel stupid or that their tasks are not taken seriously by *others*. For example, one interviewee said about the MMM:

Sometimes I take notes, so I can read up and I don't feel stupid again, but sometimes it's also like, it makes you feel a little bit like, inadequate, cause I'm working in a technological company, I should know everything, but why…. I don't. Or have I not asked proactively enough to find out more? (Erik)

This comment could be read as revealing that he puts himself into question. As he further reflects on the situation, it emerges that Erik does not only recognise that he can feel ignorant, but he also wonders if it is because he does not adopt the correct attitude by proactively asking questions to get the correct information. Another corporate staff member mentioned the risk of feeling ignorant. However, he concluded his answer saying that he has the capacity to understand the majority of what is being said because *they* "keep it very low level" (Nils). The choice of words is interesting as it seems to disclose that the interviewee considers the knowledge he is able to grasp as limited or even inferior. Such wording can imply that the respondent is under-evaluating his own capacities.

Another interviewee also alluded to the notion of inequality or the feeling of not being as important as the tech staff. Talking about this issue Hampus said:

… commonly known that other employee should not take tech people time! That is how it is expressed. Indicator: what I am doing is NOT [with emphasis] important even if it is definitely essential for the company to function … I think my tasks are a joke in this company.

Here, one can analyse that Hampus has a dual vision of himself. He knows and mentioned that his tasks are crucial for the survival of the start-up, yet he feels like they are regarded as a joke and the only topics of matter are related to the technical (engineering) activities. This answer developed by Hampus can be joined to other answers provided by his corporate colleagues under a common pattern of doubtfulness about corporate tasks, knowledge and competences. Here, we can suggest that this doubtfulness and questioning about oneself can be interpreted as a feeling of inferiority when considering tech peers.

In parallel, when talking about corporate tasks, the technical staff tend to provide a similar kind of answer. For example, one mentioned that it is quite easy or simple to understand *them*:

... but just for how people phrase it it's not that difficult to understand what they are doing if they phrase it correctly ... I mean if topics of finance and design, creativity came up that way outside of my yeah [laughs] what I can do, but it's not on a level where it's a problem I would say if it's correctly phrased and correctly explained. (Elias)

We suggest that between the lines of this comment that Elias might be undermining the tasks of his corporate colleagues. This can be linked to the potential feelings of superiority among engineers. Interestingly, this pattern of a possible superiority feeling emerged from other respondents also pertaining to the technical staff. Another engineer commented on the complexity of his work:

... but I would say that if I was talking to more details in my stuff, sometimes, more people would not understand rather than the opposite ... I would be more able to understand. (Beata)

We read this comment as a possible feeling of superiority. From this comment, we decode that Beata argued that it would almost not be possible for others to understand when she talks about his tasks, but on the counterpart, she is not having a hard time understanding her peers. In brief, engineers did not seem to put themselves as much into questions in comparison to their corporate colleagues.

Here, we highlighted that depending on their background and tasks, interviewees did not seem to value their work and knowledge on the same level. Interestingly when considering their tech counterparts interviewees seemed to have a bleaker analysis of themselves. We can propose that this possible complex of inferiority can be the source of identity struggles for corporate workers.

Indeed, KWs are pictured as considerably knowledgeable (Alvesson, 2004). However, when facing unknown jargon and misunderstandings they might become doubtful about their own knowledge. Moreover, as it has been previously detailed, some kinds of knowledge are less contestable than others and are given more value. For instance, hard-science-related

knowledge or engineering is less contested than more subjective knowledge like human resources or marketing (Alvesson, 2004).

Accordingly, we propose that it might have serious psychological impacts on workers, particularly on administrative staff, like we just saw at Päron. For example, if an individual holding knowledge deemed superior questions a colleague holding knowledge deemed inferior, the former may face identity struggles and question his own knowledge and self. In addition to these concerns, when feelings of inequality between the various professionals emerge, more individual crises may occur. To avoid such crises, it is perhaps necessary to work on the improvement of behaviours to reach a resemblance between one's view of oneself and its peers' view (Alvesson, 2004).

So far in the analysis, the results indicate that employees put themselves into question and doubt about their own individual knowledge and capacity through their interactions with their peers. Furthermore, we suggest this might be regarded as a result of the absence of a common shared identity at Päron, thus impacting negatively the group cohesiveness. As we previously detailed, it is argued in the literature that lower group cohesiveness is correlated with an increase of stress among KWs cooperating in cross-functional settings (Keller, 2001). Our analysis leads us to the suggestion that knowledge boundaries can prevent the creation of a shared identity amongst workers coming from distinct disciplines.

5.4.   A Consequential Organisational Ritual

In this segment, our analysis focuses on the meeting and its symbols. Through answering our questions, interviewees reflected upon the way the communication was organised within the meeting, their interactions and feeling of autonomy. From the data collected, we identified recurrent topics such as communication, social identities, domination, feelings towards the atmosphere, the group and the interactions. We structured these under three codes: *A Ritual of Symbolic Power and Domination*, *Coercive Pressure to Talk and Please*, and *Resistance to the Authority Figure: A Paradoxical Group Cohesion*. The following sections will be used to explore these three subthemes.

5.4.1. <u>A Ritual of Symbolic Power and Domination</u>

When asked about the meeting, some interviewees put emphasis on its importance. The meeting is symbolic, and it influences the mood of the participants:

> *... To have a joint feeling of getting the week started ... I think the symbolic value is a very important ... I really feel like new team members when they are joining the team, these meetings are INCREDIBLY [with emphasis] valuable... (Agnes)*

Some suggested that the potential of the meeting emanates from its leader. Päron's CEO is believed to have the potential to influence people's morale. However, this influence is not always deemed positive, it is sometimes referred to as a source of demotivation for employees. In the comment below the interviewee reports on how the influence of the leader varies greatly:

> *[CEO's name] being an exceptional motivator at times he wants to ... sometimes it's quite the opposite and more like the direction the company goes right now is pretty bad. (Elias)*

Another informant alluded to similar notions expressing how the variation can entail increased pressure on employees:

> *... usually it ends with some sort of ... inspiring part, and sometimes this also: 'well keep in mind everything you do might contribute to our FAILURE [emphasis]', so also being sort of a fire up in your ass both in a good and negative way. (Nils)*

Additionally, one participant developed his answer around the psychological impact of the phenomenon:

> *... but then the negative part is that it's demotivating and de-energising ... certain people bring certain energy into the meeting which is not motivating or energising ... mmmh can impact what people feel mmmh in a very strong way, and that happens. (Jonas)*

Delving further into the complexity of the answers given, one informant reflected on the leadership style and linked it to the psychological impact of fear. As he said:

... and I would put him in the category of leading by fear ... and how we seat in the Monday meeting he seats on a high stool, and we seat on low benches... (Hampus)

To reinforce those statements our field notes support a number of these ideas. In the first MMM observed, the CEO sat on a high chair, while on the second MMM the three top managers were standing in front of the employees. One can suggest here to analyse the situation with the framework given by Czarniawska and Mouritsen (2009); objects are used as mediation for management and to give status or attest of somebody's status. An analysis of the choice of chair by the CEO can be linked to a demonstration of power and domination to employees sitting on low benches.

As interviewees deepened their answers, a pattern emerged; most employees described the meeting as a ritual revolving around a single figure of authority. We can note here that the word ritual does not appear in our interview guide (*cf.* Appendix B), this choice of word was made spontaneously by participants. As said:

The whole oppressive meeting kinda thing is a bit of a recurring theme ... The CEO is oppressive ... oppressive ritual. (Ludwig)

A group of colleagues described the CEO using comparison with patriarchal figures, such as a father or a teacher. In these comments the figures were also tinted with authority. The answers below are illustrating this pattern:

... when you did not do your homework properly in school and teacher is like: 'you, answer this question!', you knew you would get ask this question because you did not do it. But even if I know exactly what I'm doing, it is just like ...'ok whatever' ... He can act like a dad [interrogative tone]? (Hampus)

... how he phrases the whole thing like: 'who doesn't know? Hands up, who is this, do YOU know what it is?' and it feels like back in school ... that unpleasant feeling of sitting in school and you don't know an answer and he is like: 'do YOU [with emphasis] know the answer?'(Elias)

Two other informants used another type of association, they compared the CEO to a preacher or an idol:

> *Mmmffff, I guess the set-up of the meeting is [CEO's name] sort of preaches [laughs]… [CEO's name] is the structure whatever he thinks in his head sort of becomes the structure… (Nils)*
> *It's a [laughs] [pause] it's a culture made by a cocky [censored[4]] that needs to be cheered up and feeling important. So, it's mmmh, trying to idolise someone, I think it's the culture of it. And that's what he is taking from the meeting personally, maybe he's looking for confidence, I don't know. (Beata)*

Here, the CEO is described by the interviewees as a figure of authority, compared to a teacher interrogating students or a preacher idolised during the MMM. In our first field observation, we noted how the CEO interacted with the participants as an orchestra conductor; he indicated when to talk and that the word should go around the room, so that everyone had to speak. He sometimes speeded up the process by using interjections such as "yeah, continue" to signal to the next participant it was his turn to talk.

As presented by Guenzi (2013), recurrent meetings have a special symbolism and meaning. They are believed to play a crucial role in identity shaping within groups. Our analysis of the data gathered suggests that employees may shape the identity of intimidated followers. Indeed, they compare themselves to scared students and expressed the impact the tone of leadership had on them. Furthermore, several employees commented upon how implicit rules of behaviour were embedded in their minds. The MMM can be apprehended as a tacit social contract within the company: employees are followers sitting on low benches and know they must listen to the CEO sitting on a higher chair and conducting the meeting and its participants.

Moreover, an interesting pattern reflected in the dataset is that despite the absence of questions about the leader of the meeting (*cf.* Appendix B), ten of our eleven interviewees talked about him. However, very few used direct ways of mentioning him. Indeed, three interviewees used the CEO's name and title, three others only used the title. The rest of the interviewees used indirect forms to refer to the meeting leader: *some people*, *a person, somebody* and so on. Here,

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[4] For privacy and anonymity reasons

one can see that the fear expressed towards the leader is apparent in the language used by the interviewees. Most of them avoid referring directly to the leader of the ritual, hence they never mentioned his name.

5.4.2. <u>Coercive Pressure to Talk and Please</u>

A specific set of questions (*cf.* Appendix B) asked to the interviewees aimed to gain insights about the feelings employees had about their participation and interventions throughout the meeting. Interviewees expressed a discomfort asking questions during the meeting, they felt that precise types of answers were expected from them. Also, they suggested that the leader of the meeting tended to make them feel isolated, in spite of being in a group setting, by targeting them personally to talk. This analysis correlates with what has been explored in the previous theme; *a segregating encounter sparking identity struggles.*

Six of our interviewees expressed the feeling that an implicit rule of the meeting was not to ask questions or expose yourself to the risk of being publicly scolded by the meeting leader for not knowing:

> *... to discourage people from asking questions that is my biggest concern about this, because it happened to me once that I asked technical question for something I might should know but I was asking because I didn't know and I felt it was a better way to ask for it than to stay silent and then getting by top level management of the company being scolded by: 'you should know this, you would be the first person I would ask if I wanted this information!'. This discourages you from ever asking again such a question ... for other people that destroys their whole asking mentality ... That's because the whole company attitude is discouraging the people to ask. (Elias)*

As mentioned in the previous subtheme, the organisational ritual and its leader have the capacity to influence the identity of the MMM participants. One can analyse the scolding of the employees by the CEO as a reframing of the participants' identities and what is expected from them or even allowed. Interviewees communicated that they knew that asking questions could lead to scolding by the leader. As a result, they tend to avoid asking questions.

Indeed, during our observations, we noticed that very few questions were asked. This is possibly due to the fact that employees know the potential cost of asking questions. For example, during the first observation the CEO answered a question he deemed unnecessary: "I don't know why you don't know, because it has been explained very well". We interpret this type of interaction as inhibiting participants from asking questions by making them feel judged by the leader and scared of a strong reaction. Indeed, during the few questions asked, we analysed a potential insecurity of the participants. For example, when an engineer[5] asked a question, he also asked for permission: "I have a question, if it's okay."

An additional feeling expressed by eight of our interviewees was that specific types of answers were also expected from them:

… before those Monday morning meeting I get anxious because it feels like they want the right answer to something… (Hampus)

… And if we want to give some feedback or thoughts, it is usually not really well appreciated if it's not cheerful feedback… (Beata)

The consciousness of such expectations is analysed as having an effect on the behaviours and emotions of participants during the meeting. As Jonas explained, employees adapt to the implied rules and norms of the MMM:

Everyone starts talking to a certain person and then you're not supposed to do that, you're supposed to talk to the whole team, but you also need to watch out that you're not saying incorrect thing, so you have to watch the first person. Mmmh people don't care to just look at the team and talk they look at a certain person to check that 'yeah what I'm saying is okay to say'. (Jonas)

While Jonas expanded his answer, he further characterised how employees act during the MMM:

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[5] This engineer is not part of our interview sample.

Mmmh like scared animals, I would say [silence] people [silence] tend to have neutral faces, mmmh so not show too much emotion, sit static, don't talk if they don't have to, be so, anonymous, yeah.

Additionally, most of our interviewees expressed the fact that they felt directly targeted and singled out by the CEO, when asked to talk:

I just think everybody is getting targeted, because HE [with emphasis] targets people with names ... It is true, I really find it uncomfortable. I am not a person who gets nervous. (Hampus)

... they're on the spot ... they feel a bit insecure... (Nora)

If you are getting asked directly by [CEO's name], you, I feel very alone. Then you are basically on the presentation table ... I think people are in general feeling uncomfortable about it ... normally people are standing alone for themselves. (Elias)

Hence, and as previously detailed, social interactions are believed to be an intermediate through which individuals shape their identities, sometimes against their own decisions (Lawler, 2014; Jenkins, 1996; Goffman, 1959). We can analyse the MMM as a social interaction in which employees become unwilling participants of a demonstration of power and domination.

This dynamic of unwilling and silent followership was observed during our first observation session. However, our second observation led to different analytical elements. During the meeting led by three top managers - usually sitting in the audience as MMM participants - seemed more inclined to contribute, talk, ask and even interrupt the leaders. We analysed this difference as linked with the centralised leader status attributed to the CEO. Potentially, when he is absent, several top managers handle the task of replacing him. This different multipolar structure possibly corresponds intrinsically in the KWs' minds to a dilution of what is usually felt like a centralised power. Talking about this centralised source of power, Beata said in her interview that she would rather appreciate "something that is not from the CEO to us, but from the team leaders to us ... I think there is no real communication because it is just one guy relating to everybody". Moreover, Elias commented that the centralised leadership was failing to represent the multiplicity of employees gathered.

We propose that the identity shaped does not correspond to a CFT gathering KWs commonly understood as determined for creativity and problem-solving initiatives (Newel et al., 2009). It rather corresponds to a dissonant group of isolated, silent selves gathered around an authoritarian leader. KWs do not feel neither enticed nor free to express their ideas and identified the leadership as a central source of issues.

5.4.3. <u>Resistance to the Authority Figure: A Paradoxical Group Cohesion</u>

We analysed the MMM as a cross-functional situation in which employees are conscious of their differences and in which they tend to feel isolated and lonely. Nevertheless, we also read the MMM as an identity shaping experience in which employees become a group of followers, or subjects, to an oppressive leader. Interestingly, interviewees also reported the occurrence of a silent and passive resistance to the controlling situation. Moreover, a surprising idea was conveyed by interviewees when describing the psychological impact the leader has on them. Interviewees expressed a newfound feeling of closeness with other meeting participants due to empathy.

We studied the resistance to control as following three different axes; unwillingness to participate, avoidance, and resistance of thoughts and identities. A majority of interviewees expressed the unwillingness to talk and participate and four employees declared being late on purpose. For instance:

Mmmh [long silence] I would say some people come late on purpose to shorten the time they seat in there… (Elias)

If he asks I will talk, but I won't raise my hand. And I don't want him to ask me questions. I just sit there and HOPE [with emphasis] that he won't, or hope I'm stuck in the bus so won't be there on time [laughs]. (Hampus)

In Hampus' statement, a note of irony can be analysed through the cheerful approach he adopts. Indeed, the interviewee suggests that usually unwanted situations, such as being stuck on a bus, can represent a desired deliverance from the MMM.

Few employees suggested the resistance of ideas, they refuse to adhere to the given framework of culture, thoughts and identities:

He is making the culture he would like the company to be, but in the end, I think it's not exactly the real culture, in the people … Sometimes I didn't feel, I didn't like to be part of the tech team when the CEO was always saying that 'yes, yes, we were doing a great job', without them (corporate employees) we couldn't do anything. (Beata)

This interviewee, for example, argued that she refuses the mental and cultural models given by the company and its leadership. Indeed, although she is an engineer, when this interviewee's group is praised by the CEO and it is judged as unjustified and biased, she expressed a discomfort being part of her own team and gave credit to the other corporate group that is not praised.

A majority of interviewees expressed empathy towards other employees. They expressed a feeling of companionship for other persons enduring the same situation, for instance:

I feel uncomfortable presenting my things in front of HIM [with emphasis] not in front of the group … I kinda feel I am part of the team, because I also know how they feel … With the individuals I relate… (Hampus)

This interviewee mostly used expression such as *them* or *the others* to refer to the other participants of the meeting (both corporate and technical). However, when reflecting on the discomfort implied by the CEO's attitude, he referred to the participants of the meeting as *us* or *the group*. Some respondents depicted two distinct entities in the meeting; the employees and the CEO. As said:

… yeah, I would say so, for this time, but I think it's just because ahhh it's not a common enemy, but we have a common feeling of awkwardness in the meeting … it feels like we are solidified group who wants this to end [laughs]. (Elias)

Because I always feel like the team that's there feels quite similar also about the conversation. I always feel that if it's [CEO's name] who's doing the meeting then

he's kind of the other one, you know, so it's like those two sides ["so it's all the
people on one side and he's on the other side?"] [Laughs] yeah. (Nora)

The interviewees suggested that they related with the other individuals in the room, and felt as a tight group, more or less directly opposed to the individual leader. One can suggest here that beyond the occupational differences highlighted and the misunderstandings occurring between the participants of the MMM, they created a common social identity of followers enduring an oppressive meeting. This social identity can be interpreted as based on common norms and understandings; employees know how to behave in the situation and do not expect other participants to break the pattern of followership to the leader.

This social identity can also be met at a deeper level of analysis; it creates a feeling of cohesiveness and a feeling of fellowship between individuals whom we previously investigated as feeling different and even sometimes incompatible. As we mentioned previously, identities are complex; individuals can sometimes embrace various identities that are competing with each other (Holland et al., 2000; Kramer, 1991; Ashforth & Mael 1989). In the situation of the MMM we can suggest that the schism separating professional groups is mainly due to their knowledge and norm-based professional identities. The cohesive social identity between employees can be interpreted as based on a rather social and humanist side of employees; they relate as individual people but not as professionals.

5.5. Chapter Summary – Analysis

This chapter began by analysing the participants' views of the MMM and argued that the lack of clarity and exacerbated differences between employees might lead to feelings such as lack of belief in the necessity of the meeting, frustration and impatience to *go back to work*. It has also been explained that felt distances between colleagues are identified as linked to individual knowledge and background. Moreover, they are analysed as leading to potential identity struggles through expressed misunderstandings, disinterest and feeling of inferiority towards other professionals. It went on to suggest that the ritualistic form of the meeting and the power domination personified in the CEO are highly impacting employees and their identity, they admit going against their ideas and desires to please the leader and avoid confrontations. In turn, they feel a newfound group cohesion with the other participants in the meeting they previously felt disconnected from.

The chapter that follows moves on to consider and discuss the possible implications of our findings in regard to the literature about identity work and its psychological impacts, cross-functional meetings and KIFs.

6. DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we discuss our most striking results. We focus on how the MMM is experienced by our interviewees and the subsequent impacts it has on them. The chapter is organised around two axes. First, we highlight and discuss the principal patterns observed in our analysis in light of the relevant parts of the literature we provided in chapter two. Secondly, the reasoning effectuated is discussed under a new conceptual lens. We use a modern understanding of the concept of alienation that we apply to our findings.

6.1. Knowledge Workers Just Wanna Have...

In the following section, main patterns of analysis are discussed and compared to relevant existing literature in the field of identity work and team meetings. In accordance with our abductive methodology, unexpected findings are also discussed in light of literature in order to suggest a potential enrichment to existing studies.

6.1.1. … Justified Managerial Control

In the analysis chapter, we showed a parallel between our findings and the existing literature in the field of respective results. It is suggested that KIFs tend to prefer adhocratic structures in which the power of management is not omnipresent and where hierarchical distances are shortened (Newell et al., 2009; Mintzberg, 1980). However, this does not appear to be the case at Päron as managerial power and domination seem to be present in each MMM.

A consensus is observed in the literature, control within KIFs can be problematic to companies as KWs tend to resist command and control (Alvesson, 2004). When managers' influence is deemed too strong over team decisions, resistance can form. If controlling management overrides initial choices made by KWs, it is thought that working teams can no longer be effective (Holland et al., 2000).

6.1.1.1. Instead of an Oppressive Leadership…

Throughout our analytical approach, we noticed a common pattern of employees not using the CEO's name to refer to him, but rather indirect forms such as *a person* or *somebody*. We analysed this as a representation of the fear or discomfort felt by our interviewees. This sentiment of fear seemed to be present even outside of the setting of the MMM. Indeed, the CEO is depicted as an oppressive leader, often aggressively reframing his employees. This was an unanticipated finding during the interviews, and we had to ask respondent who they were referring to for clarity. This can be discussed in light of the literature about meetings. Informants compared the MMM with an oppressive ritual. It has been suggested that the meeting reaches such a status because it is an important recurrent company-wide meeting with specific norms. The result of employees being scared or ill at ease is likely to be related to the ritualistic status of the MMM.

In agreement with the literature on organisational rituals, this event represents the potential to shape identities (Koschmann & McDonald, 2015; Guenzi, 2013). However, an interesting finding of the current study could be added to broaden previous research. Indeed, we suggest that organisational rituals can represent opportunities to institutionalise someone's status. In this study, the oppressive leader status is symbolically imbedded in the atmosphere of the meeting.

The use of objects, also coined silent artefacts can be relevant to signal status and to differentiate management from the managed crowd (Czarniawska & Mouritsen, 2009). In our study site, silent artefacts reflect differences of status within the room; employees sit at identical low benches and tables while the leader seats on a high chair, facing the rows of employees. This difference of status has also been analysed through the dynamics of the meeting. The CEO steers the meeting as an orchestra conductor. Subsequently, employees feel that they should talk only if they are spoken to, they do not feel like they have the right to take initiative. Therefore, we found that this status is embedded in the KWs' minds. An explanation for this can be the institutionalisation of his status through the official recurrent meeting, the MMM.

6.1.1.2. … Shaping Their Identity

One might regard the dynamic between managers and workers as a relationship (Alvesson, et al., 2017). Although employees are regarded as subordinates, they are not necessarily

followers. For this reason, some kind of alignment is needed between a leader and its workers. If there is no shared meaning and feelings towards a leader's efforts and actions, they will easily bounce off (Alvesson, et al., 2017). Identity is a central element of subordination within companies; if KWs do not identify as followers, they will tend to resist the imposed control (Alvesson, et al., 2017).

Following that reasoning, we perceived that the KWs at Päron shaped an identity of followers while assisting to the MMM and adhering to its rules.

We also noticed an indirect form of resistance to the oppressive management control. Employees tended to criticise and question the meeting leader they avoided naming. Most of the participants expressed doubts regarding the purpose of the meeting. During our interviews, respondents also expressed a feeling of being exceeded by the CEO's control. A respondent questioned and criticised his attitude: "He can act like a dad?" Another participant undermined his legitimacy by ridiculing his abilities: "The person leading has a short attention span." Few others described the content of the CEO's interventions as: "… listening about [CEO's name], adventures of [CEO's name]." Accordingly, they manifested little interest about it: "… 'oh on the weekend I did this', so everyone's gonna be like 'oh nice, nice!' [Silence] like I don't fucking care about that!" Supporting the same idea, a culture of discreet group criticism is reported by an interviewee: "I'm questioning this myself all the time, we are kind of gossiping about it." Such a subtle phenomenon can be linked to the fact that employees are aware of their identity of followers, but they might deem the control source as illegitimate or inappropriate, therefore they criticise it.

While scrutinizing this phenomenon, we observed that the critical KWs continue to assist to the MMM without openly questioning it which might lead to the reinforcement of the power domination exercised by the meeting leader and therefore the compliant follower identity. A possible explanation for these results corroborates with the ideas of Fleming & Spicer (2003) who suggested that the cynical worker tend to resist power through *dis-identification*, but often reinforce it inadvertently. This means that while distancing oneself with corporate rituals and power relations, one is reproducing the powerful patterns unconsciously. The dis-identification is implemented by individuals expecting to create a space from the rejected identity that management is trying to exhort. However, the identity refusal of our respondents might reinforce the MMM as a structure of domination which is a central source of material for

resistance. This could result in a stalemate in which KWs internally refuse their identity of followers and the meaning of the corporate ritual, while unwillingly reinforcing it through their actions. We argue that this static situation represents potential psychological impacts on KWs, such as identity struggles (Alvesson, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003).

6.1.2. <u>KWs Also Wanna Have Collective Understandings and Goals…</u>

After discussing resistance to control, we can now turn to the identified power itself. Our analysis highlighted that employees unanimously identified one centralised source of pressure and control, the CEO. The participants questioned the legitimacy of this unilateral leadership and identified it as a source of bias and a barrier for free communication.

We further use the critique of centralised power to pinpoint elements desired by our interviewees. Participants expressed a need for diluted managerial power in order to access critical interactions and ecumenism of ideas. Moreover, they emanated the idea that a fair representation of each professional identity within the meeting might help create a feeling of equality in Päron's diversified workforce and therefore build confidence.

6.1.2.1. … As a Centralised Source of Control is not Always Justified

An interesting feature in the analysis regards the psychological impact of the CEO's centralised control on the participants. It results in an increased pressure which can lead to anxiety and interpersonal insecurity (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Keller, 2001) described that some KWs work better in situations deemed not optimally comfortable in which workers feel several sources of external pressures and constraints. The central source of pressure is reflected upon when respondents admitted the idea that when talking during the MMM they purposely omit to speak to their colleagues, whom they are supposed to address, according to the CEO, and prefer to focus on the reactions of the leader, to make sure that their input is appreciated and will not lead to scolding. Our results reflected that respondents overlook various sources of pressure and critique to mainly divert all their attention to the CEO-centric meeting dynamic.

There are, however, more nuanced examinations of the effects of pressure on employees. If pressure is centralised around a single source, it might entice KWs to purposefully bias their vision, in order to avoid conflict. This kind of attitude can be compared to the concept of Groupthink developed by Janis (1971) and also with the more recent concept of *Functional*

Stupidity advanced by (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). The latter concept suggests the "absence of reflexivity, a refusal to use intellectual capacities in other than myopic ways, and avoidance of justifications" (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012, p. 1194). It can be regarded as providing a sense of certainty offering organisations smooth interactions where members act in order to avoid frictions provoked by reflection or doubt.

Indeed, our respondents admitted acting against their ideas during the MMM to "make it go smoothly" (Beata) and to go back on their input after the meeting "with the right persons" (Beata). We propose to underline that a distortion of reality is preferred by the employees at Päron in order to avoid conflicts and allow the meeting to move forward which may result in a lack of reflexivity leading to inefficiencies. The leader of the meeting seems to be the only source of critique identified by our interviewees. They admitted to mostly tending to focus on the leader's appreciation of their comments in order to adhere with his expectations. This is thought to result in intentionally biased outputs towards the opinion of the meeting's leader and unwillingness to question his claims**.** This interplay between unwillingness and lack of reflexivity is characterised as functional stupidity helping the avoidance of frictions (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012) and can be applied to the reality of our interviewees.

Our results reflect respondents' consciousness of this intentional inefficiency. We read this element in light of the frustration also highlighted in the analysis chapter. Indeed, the interviewees questioned the use of the MMM since the meeting is deprived of its fundamental functions: information flow and togetherness. The loss of the MMM's meaning is encountered as having a detrimental psychological impact on respondents, they are unwilling participants in a ritual they deem meaningless.

6.1.2.2.   Indeed, Dilution of Power Enables Communication…

In relation to the CEO-centric pressure and control, another result is the desire of our respondents for more representation and a more decentralised power relationship. This highlighted result can be linked with the literature about flat organisational structures within KIFs. Such theories can be discussed in parallel with the previously mentioned argument advanced by Barley (1996) that the status of managers in opposition to the status of an employee is no longer as relevant in KIFs as it was for traditional companies. It can be further advanced that cross-functional settings and the occupational differences they involve might not be compatible with a structure with a centralised source of power and control.

The results highlighted in our analysis suggest that respondents were irritated by the bias and lack of communication involved by the centralised controlling authority. Indeed, it is believed that communication based on suggestion and consultation has the potential to overcome boundaries between different professionals (Newell et al., 2009). Moreover, we noticed that participants seemed to interact more freely when the leading power of the meeting was diluted between the three top managers during our second observation. To support this finding, we can shed light on the fact that in their accounts of the MMM, a majority of the interviewees argued that multiple sources of leadership would be beneficial. They are regarded as valuable not only for communication but also for psychological comfort and the creation of representation of each professional identity. For example, interviewees were concerned with a biased single representation and the unity of ideas accepted by a meeting model organised around one central leader.

6.1.2.3.   … It Also Permits Representation and Shared Identity!

Our results reflecting the need of representation for employees can be associated with the theories about identities gathered in cross-functional settings. It has been demonstrated that respondents are conscious of the differences between their knowledge-based identities and of the possible differences in knowledge level. In fact, engineering knowledge of the tech team seems to be taken more seriously within the company studied. This result corroborates with the theories advanced by authors regarding the existence of knowledge deemed superior or less questionable than others (Alvesson, 2004). It is possible that the fair representation suggested by employees might help prevent the creation of superiority and inferiority feelings which we highlighted in the analysis. Such discrepancies might be rooting a conception of identities as being competing within Päron (Holland et al., 2000; Kramer, 1991; Ashforth & Mael 1981).

Following this reasoning, a feeling of equality between participants in the cross-functional meeting might help cater a solid basis in order to create a common social identity amongst the diversified team. Indeed, in accordance with Jenkin's (1996) idea, we consider the process of identity shaping as a voyage between corroboration and disagreement with the reaching of identity confirmation as a destination. However, if the social environment of interactions is coloured with misrepresentation, misconceptions and dominant power relations, commonality might become almost impossible to reach (Ricoeur, 2005). As previously mentioned, it is highlighted in the literature that KWs need to feel important and valued by their peers and

organisation (Holland et al., 2000; Weldon & Mustari 1988). We can add a layer of complexity to the idea by underlining the fact that this identity linked with a feeling of importance might be solidified and confirmed if it is a social identity shared by a group rather than solely an individual feature.

At Päron, in the cross-functional setting of the MMM, it seems that the tech team's identity is not related to the corporate one when it comes to the feeling of importance. As stated previously, the two types of knowledge might not be deemed equal, which might create identity struggles. We can suggest that if Päron's workers are able to create a social identity of competent KWs, the unity and feeling of excellence might form a connection between the two distinct knowledge-based identities. As a matter of fact, it is explained by some authors that organisational culture can be used to highlight the uniqueness of each company and their employees (Alvesson, 2004; Gurgulis et al. 2000; Alvesson, 1994; Kunda, 1992). It can be stressed that the shared sense of working towards a common goal, creates a feeling of community.

Finally, our findings seem to corroborate with Keller's (2001) ideas that social glue is more beneficial for cross-functional team situations than command and control (Newell et al., 2009). Indeed, it has the potential to create efficient interactions, synergy and cohesiveness. We propose that this cohesiveness is also the necessary basis for building a common identity of equal KWs. We suggest that it allows the empowerment of employees and of their respective knowledge and might be made possible, in the case of a meeting with a strong control of management, through representation of each group of professional identity rather than a central and considered biased leadership.

6.2. Alienation

While using identity as a first order concept and focusing on elements such as team meetings and cross-functional situations, we observed the emergence of the concept of alienation as a second-order concept. Therefore, in this section, we will discuss our main results under the lens of the modern understanding of alienation.

Predominantly, alienation is historically assimilated to Marxian theories and academic interest for the concept declined since then (O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014). A field of organisational

studies proposes to revive the concept with a modern connotation. We therefore propose to finalise the discussion of our results in light of the contemporary concept of alienation, distanced from its historic source, and focused on the psychological facet of the notion (Blauner, 1964).

To do so, we summarise our findings into four axes corresponding to the work of Blauner (1964) that conceptualised alienation as a state of mind that is four-folded. Firstly, respondents expressed a feeling of isolation and loneliness while assisting a cross-functional meeting surrounded by colleagues. Secondly, they also reflected upon doubts they emitted about themselves; misunderstandings with their colleagues tend to make them wonder whether they are suitable for the situation. Thirdly, they emitted feelings of disappointment and impatience regarding the meaninglessness of the MMM. And finally, it appeared that interviewees shaped their social identity of followers in the MMM as passive participants avoiding conflict; this might entail the realisation of powerlessness. Indeed, the interviewed KWs might feel powerless regarding the implementation of changes in the MMM, and potentially to *the future* (*cf.* Appendix D - Graffiti). In what follows, we connect alienation as a state of mind with identity work and regulation in teams evolving in cross-functional situations.

6.2.1. <u>Identity Work and Regulation</u>

Consistent with prior research, we base the following discussion on the four dimensions of alienation developed by Blauner (1964). We will therefore focus on the four terms related to the concept: *Meaninglessness, Isolation, Self-estrangement, and Powerlessness*.

Meaninglessness corresponds to the absence of a sense of how one's work contributes to the organisational goal. Isolation refers to the feeling of not belonging to a group which creates a feeling of loneliness while being in a group dynamic. Self-estrangement is the loss of sense of identity or personal fulfilment, it can prevent from building social identities and can be the consequence of isolation. Powerlessness is related to relations of control in which individuals lose the capacity of stirring situations. The four concerns are believed to be interlaced and reciprocally enhance each other. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that considering the four facets together is a necessity (O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014).

The first overarching theme of our analysis *A Contradictory Team Meeting*, exposed results such as a loss of purpose for employees. Indeed, respondents associated the MMM as a

purposeless encounter and a waste of time. However, it is suggested in the literature that it takes a sense of purposefulness to avoid identity loss (Costas & Kärreman, 2016; O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014; Nair & Vohra, 2010; Blauner, 1964). It is further suggested that a loss of meaning and the consequent loss of identity has a consequent psychological impact on individuals. We propose that in Päron's case, the purpose of the meeting and the credibility of its leader are questioned by the employees and might reveal a source for self-alienation linked to the meeting meaninglessness. This observed pattern is consistent with the ideas advanced in the literature (Costas & Kärreman, 2016; O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014; Nair & Vohra, 2010; Blauner, 1964). In fact, assisting the MMM and having the feeling of losing time has been reported as a source of disinterest, boredom and therefore demotivation by a majority of our interviewees.

The second overarching theme, *A Segregating Encounter Sparking Identity Struggles*, gathered elements related to the cause of potential identity struggles. From our dataset, isolation is reported in relation to knowledge-based differences, such as the use of technical jargon. We argue that the various identities and their knowledge bases might represent a barrier for interactions. We want to further suggest that it might lead to a type of paradoxical isolation; employees are gathered together to interact, yet they feel lonely. The reported paradoxical isolation can be discussed as a source of self-estrangement; individuals are gathered as team members in a social setting, however, they pointed that no social identity is built. This correlates with ideas developed in the literature: differences might lead to isolation and prevent from creating a sense of belonging and the consequent social identity (O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014).

This finding can give nuance to previous studies suggesting that teams can prevent feelings of loneliness in modern workplaces (Alvesson, 2004; Loehr, 1991). Other works proposing that social identities are sources of motivation and self-esteem (Turner, et al., 1979; Tajfel, et al., 1971) can also be enriched by such results. Indeed, if individuals do not manage to feel included within group situations, it will exacerbate their isolation. Teamwork is a popular structuring tool used to counteract isolation. An awareness of the unanticipated effects it might have on workers should be regarded with consideration by managers (O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014). Some authors suggest that separation and isolation deteriorate the issues relating to diverging backgrounds, jargon and identities (Allen, 1986). We propose to read this phenomenon as nonlinear. In the case of CFTs, existing jargon can also prevent the creation of

a shared identity in the first place. Thus, the relationship between elements such as jargon and identities are processual and circular.

The distances linked to knowledge reported by the respondents are linked to misunderstandings and subsequent disinterest regarding what is said. These are thought to induce boredom and identity struggles such as self-questioning and feelings of inferiority. An implication of this could be that CFTs, if not built around interdepartmental integration (Holland et al., 2000; Kahn, 1996) and a sense of equal importance might create self-estrangement for team members. Indeed, some interviewees reported feeling less important than other interviewees with different occupational identities. This feeling might create an interruption between the self-image of KWs and how they feel they are perceived by others.

The third overarching theme, *A Consequential Organisational Ritual,* disclosed results such as the feeling of being oppressively led by the CEO during the meeting and the creation of unwilling followers' identity. A parallel thread of analysis exposed the creation of a group cohesion built around the shared identity of reluctant followers relating to each other. According to this data, we can infer that this dis-identification attempt through unwillingness to participate in the MMM doubled with the absence of active resistance (Costas & Fleming, 2009; Collinson, 2003) can correspond to a feeling of powerlessness and self-estrangement. Respondents admitted gossiping about their disapproval of the leader's tone in the meeting and even to implement light sabotage (Fleming & Spicer, 2003) such as arriving late to the MMM or hoping for delays in public transport so that they are able to escape the meeting. However, respondents also admitted to ensuring things *go smoothly* during the meeting. They picture themselves as educated experts, but they also reported giving input contradicting their knowledge and expertise in order to avoid conflict. Therefore, participants of the MMM gather conflicting identities of their own selves, which we regard as reflecting self-estrangement. Moreover, their paradoxical attitude can correspond to a feeling of powerlessness regarding the meeting, participants do not feel able to steer the meeting as they might wish.

These findings may help us to understand powerlessness and self-estrangement as two closely interrelated elements. Blauner (1964) develops that the remedy to powerlessness is to provide autonomy, while the remedy for self-estrangement is to allow self-expression. In the context of the MMM, respondents are supposed to express themselves and share information. However, a lack of autonomy is induced by a forced compliance by the CEO. This dynamic goes against the identity of meeting participants whom are free to suggest and elaborate ideas

and information, resulting in identity struggles. Interestingly, the reluctant followers create a paradoxical group cohesion. Indeed, felt oppression might create a common grounding for the group of participants to feel togetherness. We can wonder whether social identity construction around the unwillingness to participate and the feeling of powerlessness can have long-term additional negative psychological impacts on KWs.

6.3.   Chapter Summary - Discussion

To summarise our findings and discussion, we suggest that our interviewees generally criticised the central source of power and control of the meeting and the lack of common goals and identity between participants. They suggested that the cross-functional situation requires a fair representation of all the professional identities gathered in order to avoid issues such as bias of content and feelings of inferiority. Moreover, we discussed that dilution of power can also allow beneficial outcomes such as free communication. Altogether, KWs reported issues corresponding to contradictions and conflicts between their own perception of self and the external conditions of the MMM affecting them. Therefore, our results have been addressed under alienation as an all-embracing concept for the result of this study.

We can emit the idea that alienation as KWs' state of mind could correspond to what is depicted as identity struggles within the literature (Alvesson, 2010). It is described that the lack of identity confirmation by counterparts through social interactions can lead to anxiety and uncertainty around the self. Alienated workers can be considered as individuals being in a state of disruption with reality where their apprehension of the world is clashing with the image sent back by their social landscape.

As discussed, several sources of alienation can be highlighted through the lens of meaninglessness, isolation, feelings of powerlessness and self-estrangement. We discussed the apparent loss of purpose and lack of belief communicated by the respondents regarding the MMM and propose to tie it to the idea of meaninglessness. Indeed, our interviews reflected a general lack of understanding according to the necessity of the meeting, it is notably associated with a waste of time. Moreover, meaninglessness is even more important to consider in the case of KWs. Indeed, it has been explained that these professionals require important and meaningful tasks correlating with their identity of educated professionals. We propose that meaningless tasks and situations can lead to a struggle of one's sense of self and self-estrangement.

Another source of alienation can be the control emitted by management. Control implemented over unwilling KWs can lead to a feeling of powerlessness and further self-estrangement. This finding correlates with organisational literature suggesting that control-shattered relations and working dynamics between subordinates and leaders can lead to negative psychological impacts on employees such as alienation (Nair & Vohra, 2010).

Finally, in the context of the MMM, competing identities and their related knowledge bases can notably be the source of isolation and self-estrangement. Therefore, it is advisable to organisations developing and implementing CFTs to give special attention to the gathering of various professionals within heterogeneous working group.

7. CONCLUSION

This thesis provides an investigation into the ways in which different professionals and their identities interact within the context of a recurrent cross-functional meeting. It also explores the psychological impact knowledge workers can feel in such a situation. Through our two research questions, we have been able to fulfil our research aim and purpose. In this conclusion, we will present our research questions again and summarize the answers.

How do interdisciplinary meetings function in knowledge-intensive firms?

Interdisciplinary meeting function in a variety of ways. For the purpose of this research paper, we analysed a weekly Monday morning meeting at the knowledge-intensive firm Päron. We found that CFTs meetings, in this case, did not reach their intended goals. We were confronted by workers experiencing disinterest, boredom, and a lack of understanding in a meeting that has the intended function of informing employees. Aside from this, the meeting has been analysed as an arena for both identity regulation and identity construction. Several forces are exerted on individual and social identities which can lead to identity struggles and prevent from building a cohesive group identity. Moreover, in the context of KIFs we highlighted that management and leadership, despite the autonomy desired by KWs, have a strong influence on the meetings' function. Indeed, meetings can have a ritualistic dimension in which the reinstatement and reinforcement of managerial status and control can have an impact on KWs' identities.

To summarize, CFTs meetings are not an organisational panacea. They have been shown to prevent communication and isolate individuals. These organisational tools need clear purpose and meanings otherwise they can be seen as being badly executed and are perceived as being toxic.

How may interdisciplinary meeting affect the knowledge workers involved?

In order to answer this question, we analysed the internal interpretations that KWs have towards the interdisciplinary meeting and in which ways they feel it affects them. This study has identified that the KWs at Päron experienced alienation. To enrich and give nuance to our findings, we used the modernised concept of alienation and the four dimensions suggested by Blauner (1964): meaninglessness, isolation, powerlessness and self-estrangement. This approach helped us answer our question by highlighting the negative impacts on KWs and the ensuing identity crises they can endure.

By answering our two research questions we hope to contribute to and enrich management studies and the literature of meetings and CFTs, which is usually focused on hospitals. We used a qualitative approach to explore these topics in the context of a start-up knowledge organisation. With our findings, we propose to improve the literature on KWs' alienation within contemporary organisations by linking it to the theory of identity struggle. We suggest that this association can help the defining and understanding of the modernised concept of alienation.

Sartre's idea seems correct in the sense that in a toxic and tense setting, the other becomes a critical look upon the self that could even be considered as a medium of alienation for individuals. However, an interesting finding of this study is that when the source of issue and oppression is a single individual, the need for group cohesion is such that people tend to cluster with others whom they ordinarily do not relate to. Brief, under negative and coercive circumstances, professionals from different backgrounds connect together.

7.1. Limitations and Future Research

Every study has limitations and as researchers it is important that we think critically about both our findings and the way in which we arrived at them. An example of such a limitation is the fact that we implemented only two of three expected data collection steps. In order to enrich our findings with more depth of insight in the KWs' interpretations and perceptions of meetings, we suggest follow-up interviews with informants.

Our two observations are also limited in that we observed one meeting with the CEO and one with three leaders. In order to avoid this limit, we would suggest that multiple observations be undertaken, both with the CEO present and potentially with other meeting leaders. Both observations were unique occurrences and they are therefore subject to bias. External influences could have influenced the meeting leaders, for instance, whether the leaders had had a good or bad day. Nonetheless, being able to observe meetings with different leadership styles allowed us to gather crucial information to support interviews' statements.

One might also argue that the organisational environment we investigated is not representative of other KIFs. Indeed, the studied meeting is referred to as a dysfunctional and

oppressive encounter by its participants. This, however, means that our research contributes to the field of study on dysfunctional interdisciplinary meetings.

This being considered, the study site has eminent traits of a KIF as it employs highly qualified workers and aims for innovation, development and interdisciplinary work. Therefore, the analysed alienation of KWs is a striking phenomenon. Evidently, we do not state that all KWs are inherently subjects to identity struggles and alienation. As discussed, not all our interviewees expressed feeling distanced from their colleagues and teams. We therefore propose that alienation is a risk for KWs rather than a pre-existing condition.

A potential direction for future research could be a focus on the links between the fields of identity work and alienation. Other relevant areas of research could be the application of such qualitative topics and analyses to other contexts and configurations, aside from hospitals and high-tech companies. Finally, due to the fact that qualitative approaches are subject to the bias of memory, it would be useful to videotape meetings in further study of this phenomenon. The resulting material could stimulate the memory of interviewees and help them deepen their answers by allowing them to relive past situations.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Summary

Interview Date	Interviewee *(fictive name)*	Department
2018-02-18	*Hampus*	Corporate
2018-03-13	*Ludwig*	Technical
2018-03-15	*Axel*	Technical
2018-03-21	*Beata*	Technical
2018-03-25	*Nora*	Corporate
2018-03-26	*Elias*	Technical
2018-03-27	*Erik*	Corporate
2018-03-28	*Nils*	Corporate
2018-04-05	*Agnes*	Corporate
2018-04-09	*Observation #1*	
2018-04-09	*Birgit*	Technical
2018-04-11	*Jonas*	Technical
2018-04-16	*Observation #2*	

A P P E N D I X B

Interview Guide

Introduction to the research and interview

Thank you for considering our request and for agreeing to this interview meeting

Note that the interview will be 40 minutes max

Purpose of the research

Here take 2 minutes to reiterate the purpose of our research study.

Confidentiality

Explain why we want to record - Transcription and data analysis deprived of bias

Anonymity – Fictive name (pseudonym/alias) for interviewees and study site (company)

Sign consent form for both parties

You have the right to refuse to answer any question

➔ *Can we record?*

Opening questions

➔ *An interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the working world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena.*

1. What do you do at the company?

2. How long have you worked for it?

3. Except from the Monday morning meeting, do you attend any other meetings?

Exploring the recurrent meeting from an individual view - meeting function

➔ *Explore important aspects of the meeting highlighted by its participants. How they understand this recurrent meeting. The aim here is to talk about facts, what is the routine of the meeting, who sits where, what are the common topics, etc.*

4. Do you always sit in the same position/place?

   ➔ Does everyone sit in the same position?

5. What is your understanding of the purpose of the Monday morning meeting?

6. Do you think that people have different expectations regarding it?

7. What do you gain from this meeting?

Identity & Knowledge work

➔ *The extent to which employees are aware of their knowledge and the knowledge of their co-workers, how they feel about it, how they understand it, but also the extent to which employees realise that they have their own identities and specific identities linked to their occupations/professions. The aim here is to talk about the individual and its 'place' within a group.*

8. From our observations there are different types of professions and professional knowledge involved in this meeting, such as engineers, HR, etc.

➔ Where do you feel you belong?

➔ When a corporate/engineer talk, do you always understand what they are saying?

9. Do you ever feel like some of the topics discussed during the meeting are outside your area of expertise?

➔ Is it because of the words/language or the field of work?

10. Do you have any problems when trying to cooperate or understand each other?

➔ How do you feel about it?

Communication flow and employees' interactions

➔ *The extent to which the dynamic and relationships within a group enhance communication processes or prevent from communicating. The aim is to talk about the employees' feelings regarding others' opinion(s) about themselves.*

11. Do you feel like a part of a team during this meeting?

12. Do you speak often during the meeting?

➔ Why? Why not?
➔ How does that make you feel?

13. Do you feel your comments are appreciated during the meeting?

14. How do you believe other colleagues regard your tasks and work during the meeting?

➔ Do you ever feel like some of the topics discussed during the meetings are not related/relevant to you?
➔ How do you feel about that?

15. According to you, how do people behave during the meeting?

Concluding Note

➔ *All things considered, to what extent the meeting is appreciated by its participants, and whether there is a perceived need to improve or change something about it.*

16. Do you appreciate these meetings?

➔ Why? In what way do you appreciate them?

17. Did your view on Monday morning meetings changed throughout your time at the company?

18. Do you think they are necessary?

19. Is there anything about these meetings you would like to change?

➔ Can you give some examples?

APPENDIX C

LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM.

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick the appropriate box):

1.	I have been given information and I understand the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.	☐
2.	I have been informed that if I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the session.	☐
3.	I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time.	☐
4.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	☐
5.	The use of the data in research has been explained to me - all data will be kept secure and will not be viewed on the public domain.	☐
6.	I understand that the interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. I understand that notes will be taken during the interview and that the interview will be recorded.	☐
7.	I fully understand that this interview is highly confidential and none of the information and content discussed in the interview will be disclosed to anyone within the company. I also fully understand that the fact that the researcher involved is also an employee of the company this will have no affect on the level of confidentiality.	☐
8.	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this consent form.	☐

Participant/Interviewee:

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Researcher(s):

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

APPENDIX D

Meeting Room Map

windows

kitchen

Leader's chair

stairs
down to the
technical floor

corporate
office

grafitti
on the
wall

Employees' benches and tables

tv screen

windows
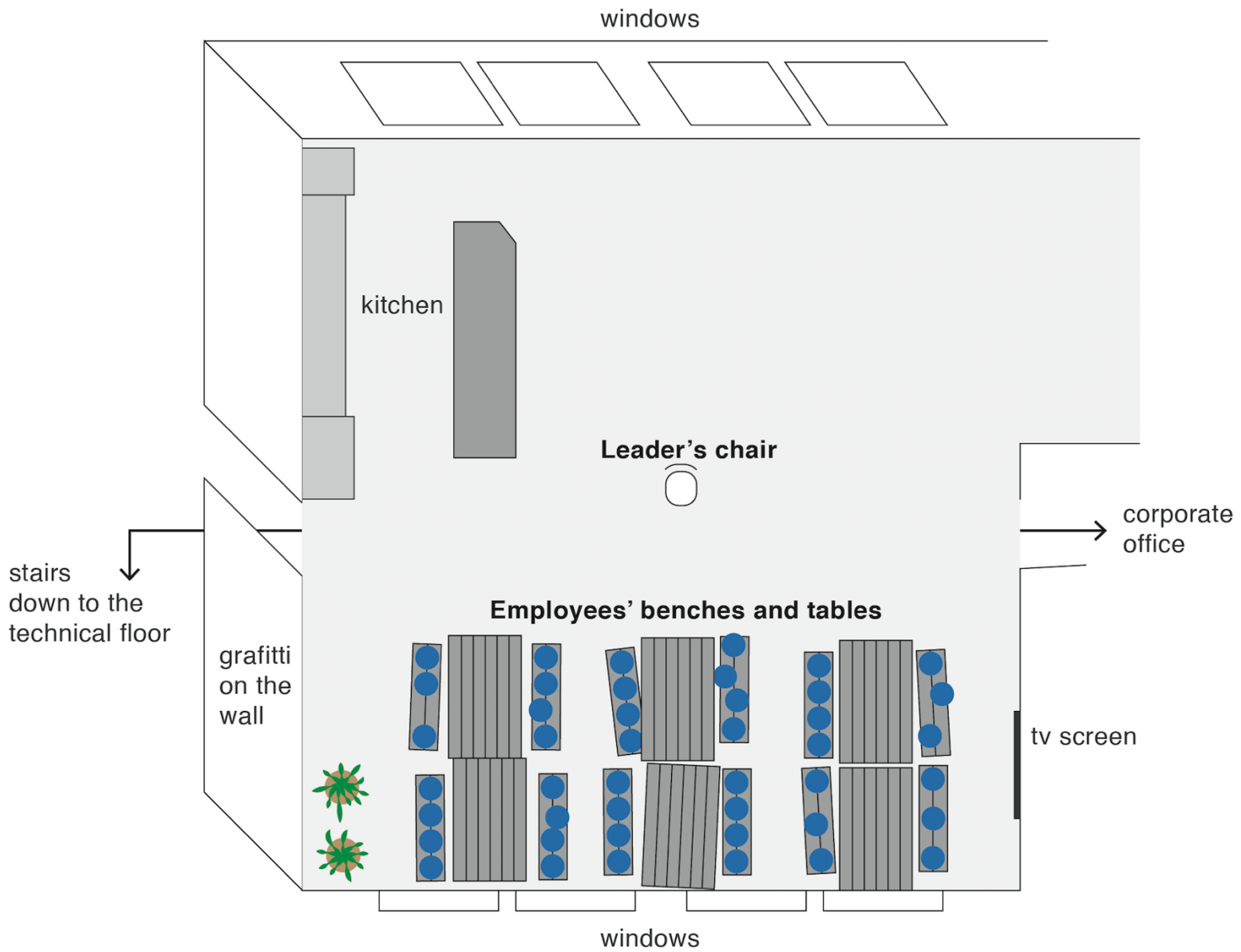
APPENDIX E

Meeting Room Details

Grafitti wall

"I want to change the future"
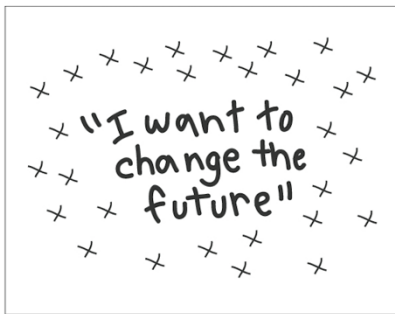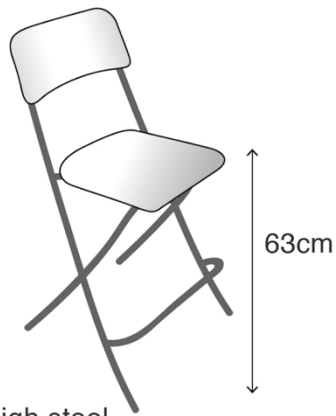
✕ employees' signatures

Leader's chair

63cm

high stool

Employees' bench

44cm