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Balancing Talker and Worker

How is self-identity constructed to foster team identification in a hybrid work setting? A qualitative case study in a technology company

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Abstract

Title:	Balancing Talker and Worker – <i>How is self-identity constructed to foster team identification in a hybrid work setting? A qualitative case study in a technology company</i>
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Purpose:	The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of how self-identity is constructed in the recently established hybrid work setting. Building on this, we outline how team identification is experienced in hybrid teams.
Theoretical perspective:	The theoretical framework refers to literature on the internal process of forming a self-identity and the impact of social structures on identification. In this regard, it includes the topics of identity juggling, social contexts, group-identification, and social identity theory. We outline the research in relation to the hybrid work setting: working from home and in the office.
Methodology:	This study contains qualitative research with an abductive approach in the interpretative tradition of symbolic interactionism. It is a single case study and includes empirical data from twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews, seven held in person and five online.
Contribution:	This study contributes to the literature on the hybrid work setting by considering self-identity construction and team identification processes in combination when working in a hybrid team.
Key words:	Self-identity, multiple roles, identity juggling, team identification, social identity theory, outgroup, hybrid work setting, home office

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1. Introduction

“...[O]nly full commitment to identities shared with others makes possible the grand human phenomena of love and grief.” (Foote, 1951, p. 20)

As with so much, Foote's words are of timeless relevance. In this rapidly changing and crisis-affected world, we strive to connect with others – not only on social media but in every aspect of life – and long to understand ourselves in relation to our place in society. In the world of work, full commitment to our role and our team lets us celebrate wins or suffer losses collectively. However, Foote (1951) also noted that we often take our identity so much for granted that we practically ignore its influence on our reactions and focus only on the stimulating environment. Therefore, he suggested observing situations in which identity itself is becoming acutely problematic to examine its impact on behaviour.

In the scope of this Master's thesis, we conducted such research by focusing on how identity is constructed in the context of a hybrid team setting. Inspired by our own work experience and our course on Strategic Human Resource Management within our Master's programme, we found ourselves reflecting on our experiences of identifying with our job and our team when working in the office versus from home. As we learned in our course, it is of great importance to take a holistic perspective, which sparked our interest to examine the interactions of the self and the team in the hybrid setting which combines both working in the office and from home. Hence, we look at the situation from different perspectives.

To introduce our topic in more detail, we will provide some background in the following.

1.1 Background

Given the development of new work models accelerated by digitalisation and the worldwide covid pandemic, organisations and their employees are facing new challenges as well as opportunities (Chamakiotis, Davison & Panteli, 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021). Especially hybrid work models that allow employees to both work from home and the office are widely perceived as making life more purposeful, productive,

and flexible (Chamakiotis, Davison & Panteli 2021; Fayard, Kahn & Weeks, 2021; Gratton, 2021). For many employees, the possibility of working from home makes it easier to juggle their work and private roles thanks to greater autonomy which simultaneously enhances performance and saves costs in the interest of the employer (Ashforth, Moser & Bubenzer, 2020).

1.1.1 Development of Hybrid Teams

Overall, working from home has some history in relation to the concepts of teleworking or working remotely. When gas prices rose in 1970, the practice of working remotely began (Choudhury, 2020). Employees were allowed to work from home and in public spaces such as a library or coffee shops (Choudhury, 2020). It was recognised that remote working increases “organisational commitment, job satisfaction and job-related well-being” (Felstead & Henseke, 2017, p.195). Employers have also been found to profit from teleworking, which has the ability to reduce costs, for example by lowering real estate expenses and increasing productivity (Khanna & New, 2008). Due to digitalisation, the option of working in the home office including its policies increased in the 2000s (Choudhury, 2020). Because of the ongoing rise in technology and competition for globalisation, virtual work and virtual teams were established (Townsend, DeMarie & Hendrickson, 1998).

The covid-19-pandemic has brought us to a worldwide change into virtual teamwork, where employees were faced with new challenges but also experienced increased flexibility (Chamakiotis, Panteli & Davison, 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021). Suddenly employees were forced to stay at home, sometimes with their whole family, and had to keep the business running (Kniffin et al., 2021). During the lockdown, routines changed dramatically as employees adjusted to the so-called new normal (Chamakiotis, Panteli & Davison, 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021). It needs only a minimum of 21 days to internalise new routines (Jacobides & Revees, 2020) and in many countries, the lockdown lasted so long. Hence, these changed routines are now the foundation of the employee’s current needs (Kniffin et al., 2021). This means that many of them do not want to return to the way work has been done before, they favour a hybrid model as it will make their work life more purposeful, productive, agile and flexible (Chamakiotis, Panteli & Davison, 2021; Fayard, Kahn & Weeks, 2021; Gratton, 2021). Of course, implementing a hybrid team set-up that entails that part of the

employees work co-located at the office and the other part does their jobs from home (Choudhury, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021; Knight, 2020) is not possible for every team in every industry. For instance, staff at hospitals, kindergartens or stores still must come to their work location. Nevertheless, the concept of hybrid work has become a popular solution for companies to meet post-pandemic needs and is thus an interesting setting for our research.

1.1.2 Construction of Self-identity

This increasingly dynamic and digitalised nature of work requires the individual to be flexibly adaptive and create one's self according to the situation (Alvesson, 2010; Ashfort, Moser & Bubenzer, 2020). According to identity research, this means that identity varies according to context and is negotiated in social interaction (Alvesson, 2010; Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Consequently, identities are more fluid and individuals need to juggle multiple work roles at the same time (Alvesson, 2010; Ashfort, Moser & Bubenzer, 2020; Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998). The concept of self-identity is helpful to explain how employees perceive themselves when fulfilling one of multiple possible roles (Rogers, 1959).

At the same time, the slippery notion of identity makes it challenging to obtain an overview of this phenomenon (Alvesson, 2010). More specifically, Scott, Corman & Cheney (1998) point out that places shape and are shaped by the content of the interaction between people. Consequently, social interaction in places like the office, the home office or the cafeteria is assumed to influence identity construction. This brings us to our focus on the self-identity in the social structure of the team within the hybrid work setting.

1.1.3 Relevance of Team Identification

Interestingly, a majority of identity research focuses on the individual's organisational identification. However, the physical and social isolation from the office when working from home can make it more difficult for individuals to identify with the organisation, resulting in a tendency to identify more or as much with closer targets such as their team (Ashfort, Moser & Bubenzer, 2020) which affirms our focus on team identification.

Understanding how employees perceive themselves in a team and how social identity is developed in such a group has been an important subject of research to foster self-esteem, performance, and commitment (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Rogers, 1959; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). A recent study further supports that a high average team identification benefits the employees' well-being (Junker et al., 2022). This underlines the relevance of team identification in the hybrid work setting for our research even more.

Based on this background, we searched for a case company that has implemented the hybrid work model and where working together as a team plays an important role. In the following, we will introduce the company that we chose for our case study.

1.2 Case

The case study was conducted in a Swedish technology company, renamed New Tech AB ("New Tech") for reasons of anonymity. It operates globally with more than 2,000 employees including a revenue of over one billion annually and can therefore be categorised as a large enterprise (Novak, 2019). At the beginning of our thesis collaboration with New Tech, our contact person Willy elaborated on the context for their interest in our research proposal about identity in the hybrid team setting: During the COVID-19 pandemic, New Tech had to move its whole workforce into the home office setting with the only exception of necessary lab work in the office. Since Sweden eased restrictions in early 2022, New Tech shifted to a hybrid working model that focuses on office presence and allows limited days of home office per week. Willy's impression is that this shift has caused certain frustration among some staff who enjoyed the flexibility that the home office offered. However, the management still believes that the office is the best place for social interaction which fosters innovation. A year has passed since the announcement of the new work regulation, and, according to Willy, it seems like the employees have adjusted to it. Consequently, the management is interested to evaluate how the hybrid team setting is experienced by employees, especially considering innovative and creative teamwork. At the same time, there seems to be an interest from the employee side to talk about this new way of working together. We took this context into consideration when strategising our interview approach (section 3.3).

Additionally, we were given the opportunity to use New Tech's office space for work on our thesis. This gave us excellent insights into the culture, team setups and general mindsets. New Tech made us feel part of the team and we were able to attend many breakfasts, lunch breaks as well as fikas, where a lot of hot topics and ideas were discussed. Many of our conversation partners were very interested in our Master's thesis and gave us their spontaneous opinion on the hybrid setting. Those conversations allowed us to grasp the general attitude towards the hybrid setting. Therefore, we are aware that being able to work in the office of the company influenced the direction we took with our research. However, using such conversations as proper data would have involved the hurdle of having to obtain consent from individuals retrospectively and would have become difficult to implement due to the time constraints of the thesis project. Overall, we believe that the insights predominantly enhanced our understanding of certain attitudes and ways of thinking, which gave us deeper insights when interpreting our empirical findings (chapter 4).

1.3 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to provide new insights into the above-introduced relevance of self-identity construction and the importance of the team as a source of identity in the dynamic work environment of a hybrid setting. Our case offers an excellent opportunity to examine the complex concept of identity by serving a highly interesting initial situation with regard to the implementation of the hybrid work model. Therefore, our study contributes in four ways:

Firstly, we contribute to the research in the field of organisational studies by illustrating how individuals construct their self-identities and balance their multiplicity according to the context of a hybrid team. Thereby we identify two contradicting self-identities: Whereas the Talker is socially oriented and mainly appears in the office, the Worker emerges in the home office and is shaped by task orientation.

Secondly, examine how this balancing act of multiple self-identities interacts with the team-identification process in a hybrid team. Thereby, we combine the theoretical concepts in a way that offers a new perspective on working together as a team in a hybrid setting.

Thirdly, given the recent popularity of hybrid work models as the solution to post-pandemic needs, our study is of contemporary relevance and adds to the body of research regarding the influence of the pandemic on organisational life.

Finally, our empirical study contributes on a practical level to raising awareness of identity challenges that are experienced in the day-to-day work within a hybrid team.

Therefore, the following research question has been developed as guidance throughout our research approach (and will be further outlined in section 2.4):

How are multiple self-identities balanced and team-identification processes experienced in a hybrid team setting?

1.4 Disposition

This **first chapter** outlined the background and research objective which serves as a guide for the following parts of the master thesis. In the **second chapter**, we will present our literature review, which offers further theoretical background and explains the theoretical frameworks we will operationalise in the discussion of our empirical findings. After setting the theoretical base, we will use the **third chapter** to demonstrate our methodological approach. Following the methodology, the **fourth chapter** point out our empirical findings from our case study at New Tech. In the **fifth chapter**, we will discuss those findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks that we outlined in the literature review to illustrate the theoretical contributions of our Master's thesis. The **sixth chapter** offers a conclusion as well as an outlook on future research regarding our topic.

2. Literature Review

As outlined by Stryker and Burke (2000), definitions of identity vary in the research literature: There is the non-distinctive use of the term as describing the culture of people, for instance interchangeably as to ethnicity (Calhoun, 1994), or the social identity theory that refers to the identification with a collective (Tajfel, 1982), or the identity theory which is based on the understanding of identity in relation to multiple roles that a person enacts in various contemporary societal contexts (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

In the following, we aim to give an overview of what seems to be commonly understood as the two important strands of identity: the internal process of forming a self-identity and the impact of social structures on identification (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Talking about social structures, we would like to mention that a psychological group is more than just an extension of relationships between individuals: Identification with a collective can happen even in the absence of interpersonal cohesiveness, likeness, or contact (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This means that, even with a lack of contact in a hybrid team setting, through identification, a cognitive mechanism known as social identity can still enable group identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Hence, social identity “is the cognitive mechanism which makes group identity possible” (Turner, 1982, p.21). This will be explained in this chapter as well as the development and current state of research on the topic of hybrid work.

2.1 Self-identity

Self-identity constitutes the way that persons form a version of themselves (Alvesson, 2001) and their underlying norms of how to behave (Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998). According to identity theory, identity is role-based, which means that it relates to a designated position in a social structure (Stets & Burke, 2000). Therefore, self-identity provides an answer to the question “Who am I?” depending on the situation persons find themselves in (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008). According to Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998), components of identity are “core beliefs or assumptions, values, attitudes, preferences, ... habits, [and] rules” (p.6). Thereby, they distinguish between identity as a compilation of rules and resources that create an anchor-like understanding of the self and identification as the behaviour that illustrates one’s attachment such as interaction. Rogers (1959) was a pioneer in the study of self-concept, or how people perceive themselves and their behaviour. He contends that individuals use their behaviour and performances to support the views they have about themselves. We will use the identity theory to point out behaviours, performances and work routines that form a certain role employees could take in.

2.1.1 Multiple Identities

Based on the perspective from which researchers view identity in the social, organisational and work context, different reflective ideas and concepts about self-

identity have been defined (Alvesson, 2010). Alvesson (2010) created seven different key images to categorise those ideas. Due to the hybrid setting within teams, the perspective of the surfer image suits this research. From this perspective, individuals do not have one unitary identity but rather “multiple, loosely coupled identities, [including potential] inherent conflicts between their demands” (p.154). It is assumed that self-identity is fluidly adaptive and thereby influenced by the observed discourses and diversity of social identities (Alvesson, 2010).

Accordingly, our research aligns with the aim of identity theory to examine what exactly increases the probability of a certain identity being activated in a particular situation (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008). Ashforth and Johnson (2012) explain that the salience of identity depends on how important the identity seems to the individual influenced by his/her goals, values or characteristics as well as how relevant it seems in a given situation. In addition, Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) speak of identity cues. They argue that cues such as clocking in for the workday, coming into the office or greeting a customer encourage the suitable identity to become salient. In this research, we assume that the setting (office or home office) and the social structure (working alone or as a team) serve as identity cues.

Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) state that beyond the establishment of various identities, it is crucial to highlight “the degree of compatibility and tension between and among them” (p.314). Given a high level of uncertainty and dependence on others in complex contemporary organisations, self-identity often must be changed for maintenance (Alvesson, 2001) through identification to reduce the disparity (Hogg & Mullin, 1999). When a self-identity does not match the demands of one’s surroundings, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016) speak of identity juggling. They describe it as a state of doubt and reflections on the content of one’s doing which generates a modest gap between self-identity and reality. They argue that this friction evokes identity uncertainty or even anxiety in individuals but is an overall manageable form of identity struggle because the majority of what they do still matches their self-perception. As a consequence of identity juggling, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016) find that individuals might not work solely in the way they wish, but still consider their work as decent. Though, if it becomes too difficult to keep a stable self-perception under the influence of contradicting ideals, the authors state that it might come to identity wrestling which entails frustration. The possible states are of high certainty and will be

highlighted in our research. Furthermore, having multiple identities raises questions about potential hypocrisy, selective forgetfulness, and dual standards (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). However, Mael and Ashforth (1992) voice that multiple identities do not necessarily have to overlap and therefore affect each other as they are “loosely coupled”. Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) agree with this and account identities for showing some independence. With these contradicting perspectives in mind, we assessed how juggling multiple identities was experienced among our interviewees in the hybrid setting.

2.1.2 Identity and Identification

To define more precisely what we aimed to examine, we have considered the interaction of identity and identification. As previously outlined, Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) differentiate between identity as the self-understanding and identification as the behaviour that shows one’s attachment to the identity. With regard to the assumption that someone can have multiple identities, they argue that depending on which identity is dominant, it is affecting the identification and vice versa – the identification with other things influences the dominant identity. Stryker and Burke (2000) support this by elaborating on identity salience as “the probability that an identity will be invoked across a variety of situations” (p.286). They argue that the more salient an identity is in relation to other identities of the self, the higher the alignment of the expressed behaviour with the expectations connected to the identity. In fact, they argue that identity salience reflects the commitment one feels to the respective role relations that are essential for this identity. At the same time, the authors warn that a gap between identity expectations and self-perception will cause a decrease in motivation and identification. This is in line with the early assumption of Foote (1951) that only those who are completely committed to their identity showcase motivation to the fullest.

By comparing identity theory and social identity theory, Stets and Burke (2000) state that a holistic theory of the self would encompass the role- and the team-based foundations of identity as well as identities grounded in the individual. According to them, those personally grounded identities give individuals consistency in fluidly switching between different identities across all discourses. Here it is worth mentioning, for giving a distinctive understanding, that identification refers to the self

in the context of social categories as opposed to internalisation referring to the assimilation of values, mindset, and other guiding principles into the self (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Therefore, accepting a category as an identity is not an indication that one accepts the values it represents (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). To give more background, Rogers (1959) views self-identity as influenced by a variety of other life aspects, such as social identity and self-esteem, which strengthens our perspective of the surfer image. This view is also following the social identity theory, which will be explained in the next section (Alvesson, 2010).

2.2 Team Identification

While identity theory describes identity as role-based, social identity theory recognises the group as a base for identity construction (Stets and Burke, 2000). Group identity offers a description of “Who are we?” (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008). Ashforth and Mael (1989) describe it as the impression of belonging to or being at one with a human aggregate. According to them, it can be associated with loyalty as well as pride and therefore influences cooperation. They voice that identification encourages the individual to engage in and feel satisfied by actions consistent with their self-identity, to see themselves as an example of the group, and to strengthen elements that are typically linked to the creation of groups. So, each identity makes up a person's self-concept developed from their membership in various social groups (Breakwell, 2015; Stryker & Serpe, 1982) to balance between inclusion and differentiation (Brewer, 1991). Our study will set focus on the relationship between self-identity and team identification.

2.2.1 Potential of Team Identification

In the context of the organisation, teams can constitute such a group, which we will further use for this single case. Ashforth and Johnson (2012) argue that working together as a team towards a common goal bears task interdependence and interaction on a local level which creates a sense of shared identity. According to Alvesson (2001), this means creating a community feeling by a “shared language, ... common way of relating to themselves and their world” (p.822). Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) also underline the great potential of teams as sources of identification by explaining that to firmly anchor the identity in one's self-image and to legitimise

oneself as a prototypical bearer of the identity, it needs to be lived out and socially confirmed. Hence, such identity does not occur on its own but is dependent on the perception of and interaction with others (Alvesson, 2001). Thereby an identity and perception of others are "relational and comparative" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p.16) as individuals define themselves relative to individuals in other categories, which will be explained in more detail later on.

The importance of social confirmation of one's identity is outlined as well in the refining of the identity theory by Stryker and Burke (2000). The authors explain that if an identity is positively confirmed by others, the awareness of the identity is strengthened whereas the lack of confirmation could significantly decrease the importance of that identity. Further, they emphasise that feeling connected is key to increasing the likeliness of activating the identity in a particular situation. Foucault (1981) calls this process normalisation through which people are disciplined and the norm of behaviours are explained. To explain how such group connections are formed, we will elaborate on the social identity theory in the following.

2.2.2 The Social Identity Theory

An early conception of team identification is developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986) with the social identity theory, which explains that parts of a person's self-identity derive from the groups they belong to. The authors' social identity theory confirms that a person may own multiple self-identities and behave differently in different social contexts depending on their group belonging. When a person identifies with a group, Tajfel and Turner (1986) categorise it as an ingroup, while they label other comparable groups with which the person does not feel part as outgroups. They added that the comparison of ingroups and outgroups provides group members with an evaluative aspect of "How good are we?" (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). They outline how this might lead to an "us" versus "them" mentality when it comes to ingroups and respective outgroups. They explain three processes for generating this mentality: social categorisation, social identification, and social comparison.

The first process according to the authors is social categorisation, where people categorise others to understand and classify them, for example, gender related as women or men. When people know which category they belong to, they can understand things about themselves and can identify appropriate behaviour according

to the group. Ashforth and Johnson (2012) further explain that it is important for employees to classify themselves and others in the organisational setting to understand the social identities of everyone involved. According to Foote (1951), this happens by looking for familiar signs in the situation that recall a suitable pattern of identity. Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) also point out that using positively connoted categorisations such as “teammates” or “colleagues” show the cognitive placement of oneself on an equal footing with others. At the same time, the authors outline that negatively connoted categorisations such as “rivals” or “enemies” can be used to disidentify with undesirable groups. In fact, the authors argue that disidentification is an important addition to social identity models because it completes the picture of opportunities for an individual to identify through strong connections or the lack of them. Given the complex structures of contemporary organisations, categorisations are not mutually exclusive as a person can belong to multiple groups at the same time (Tajfel & Turner 1986).

The second process of the social identity theory is established by Tajfel and Turner (1986) as social identification, which will be one of our focuses in the underlying theory. They describe that, in this process, people adopt the identity of the group to which they belong and behave as they believe the members of that group act. They give the example that if individuals identify as a Democrat, they will most likely behave within the norms of that specific group. As a result of the identification with that group, they describe an emotional attachment to that identification, and the person’s self-esteem depends on it.

As a third process, which we will also have a look at, Tajfel and Turner (1986) point out that after people have assigned and identified themselves as members of that group, social comparison takes place. Here, people tend to positively compare the group they belong to, the ingroup, with the outgroup to maintain their self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Overall, those processes explain how people classify groups, adopt the identity of the group they belong to (ingroup) and compare their group with other groups they do not identify with (outgroup) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) also draw upon the social identity theory and underline that behaviour of identification is indeed most meaningful in a social setting, which will be an observation point within this study. They add that even hypothesised

or retrospectively reflected interaction is essential to the identification process. As outlined above, the authors argue for the duality of identity and identification as reinforcing each other which also applies at the team level. Giving an example, one's statements about belonging to a work team may enhance that feeling of belonging which then initiates further behaviours of team identification. Moreover, identity and identification not only reproduce each other, but they also make sense of one another. Continuing the work team example, the authors describe how a work team identity may help an employee in expressing a lack of identification with this certain group if that person is unhappy in the team. Finally, they point out that identification may change over time, depending on the context and when the collective identity is challenged by change – we take this up by looking at the shift towards a hybrid team setting.

2.3 Hybrid Teams

In the following, we will provide a definition of hybrid teams as well as the status quo of research in relation to working in hybrid teams.

2.3.1 Definition

As we examine the concept of identity in the context of hybrid teams, we would like to define what this setting entails. First, we would like to outline our understanding of teams: Teams are organisational units with a shared purpose and employees who feel a sense of collective responsibility for the teams' outcomes (Kimble, 2011). Team members can build trust and a shared identity, which improves their capacity to communicate and learn from one another (Kimble, 2011). Consequently, they can expand upon one another's ideas and be innovative. Secondly, we would like to explain the term "hybrid". According to Cambridge Dictionary, "hybrid" can be understood as a mixture of two different things. For example, hybrid cars run on energy and petrol (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2023). Therefore, a hybrid team is a multifaceted concept, which describes that part of the employees work co-located at the office and the other part doing their jobs from home (Choudhury, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021; Knight, 2020).

This thesis makes a clear distinction from remote work. Remote work would contain a team that is dispersed across countries and employees are allowed to work from

anywhere, not essentially from their homes and would therefore generalise a broader, more complex range (Kniffin et al., 2021). We specifically look at hybrid teams working together in one department and individually choosing between the office and the home office as their working location for the day. Thereby, they cooperate over communication technologies to recreate meetings, chat and share their information over virtual clouds (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Chamakiotis, Panteli & Davison, 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021). Accordingly, the office building serves as a social meeting point, where the whole team is able to interact and connect in person (Fayard, Kahn & Weeks, 2021). This understanding of the hybrid team serves as a context for the interpretation of our empirical findings.

In the following, we will outline previous studies on working in the office or from home to give insights into the current state of research and what could be possible directions for the outcomes of this case study.

2.3.2 Working in Hybrid Teams

According to environmental studies, teleworking may benefit the environment (Lee, Park & Trimi, 2013). However, some organisational studies suggest that working remotely may have drawbacks for both employers and employees, including reduced group identification, diminished direct supervisory control over staff and diminished access to supervisors' and colleagues' support (Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006; Ramsower, 1985). Bradner and Mark (2002) found that geographic distance between people that collaborate but do not know each other, matters. They state that the openness to work together as well as the power to persuade each other declines with distance and even the element of video in communication technologies can not sufficiently compensate for that. Further drawbacks include social isolation, career stagnation, reduced knowledge sharing and work-family conflict (Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Gigauri, 2020).

To determine if those disadvantages also apply to the hybrid setting, we build upon a study by Biron and van Veldhoven (2016) comparing distinctions among part-time teleworkers on office and home office days. The study showed that the biggest disadvantage of social isolation during covid-times (Gigauri, 2020) is unlikely to be experienced because social contacts available during days spent working in the office make up for any loss of opportunities to interact socially with others when working from

home. Also, employees try to compensate for the home office days in the office through activities to reconnect or catch up on missed topics and being visible to the management (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). However, that is why the need for recovery time, defined as a person's need for momentary stressor relief to recharge his or her mental resources, is higher on office days than on home office days (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016). And while Golden, Veiga and Dino (2008) showed that one should not be concerned about social isolation influencing performance thanks to the major access to telecommunication tools, Bradner and Mark (2002) argue that those tools are not sufficient enough to fully substitute in-person relationship building. The authors suggest recurring interactions over the course of time to build trust among those who collaborate. Vischer, (2007) also explains that a space for teamwork such as shared meeting spaces or project rooms provides functional comfort.

Work-family conflict including psychological pressure, when multiple family members work from home (Gigauri, 2020) according to the study by Biron and van Veldhoven (2016), is also unlikely to occur as part-time teleworkers established strategies to separate those roles with separate spaces to work from as well as setting defined working hours and making it apparent to family members that they are not to be bothered during those hours.

Some studies showed that when employees have a certain amount of job control, meaning having autonomy and decision power while determining how to complete a task or when to take breaks, employee outcomes can be enhanced (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Spector, 1986). Such outcomes can be fulfilment, satisfaction, motivation, commitment and less stress and therefore shortened recovery (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016; Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Spector, 1986) Vischer (2007) also argues that letting people decide about their working space increases their feeling of ownership and belonging. However, when job control or ownership is very high, home office days are no longer perceived as less stressful and needed recovery time also increases (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016).

To stay concentrated in the office, employees must actively fade out distractions, which can be difficult by frequent interruptions or disruptions such as frequent spontaneous dialogue amongst co-workers, supporting others or overhearing

neighbouring conversations (Claessens et al., 2010). Several distractions may prohibit an employee from performing at their optimal level since they must restart their focus after each distraction, which can take up to 15 minutes (DeMarco & Lister, 1999). On the one hand support from co-workers and friendships at work can be valuable for improving employee morale and productivity as well as lowering withdrawal intent behaviours (Biron, 2013; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Nielsen, Jex & Adams, 2000). On the other hand, costs in the light of the social exchange theory arise when received support makes one consequently feel compelled to refund a favour, which makes it hard to say no when someone asks for help or even might feel anxious about the possibility of getting reliant on others (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Stokey, 1988; Seiger & Wiese, 2009). Part-time teleworkers have reported being more able to concentrate during home office days, as methods for being left alone by the family are established (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016) and fewer interactions with colleagues, without the decision-making being threatened, are happening (Olszewski & Mokhtarian, 1994). Supporting this focus, Singer-Velush, Sherman and Anderson (2020) showed an average reduction of 30 minutes of online meetings. More focus in the home office is expressed especially, when the office is created for interaction with colleagues and therefore has an open-plan space (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

However, in addition to the benefits to workers described above, employers are also said to benefit from the increased work intensity and long hours that come from decoupling work from place (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). In support of social exchange theory, there is evidence that remote workers put in more effort and conduct unpaid work in exchange for flexibility (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). They respond to having the ability to work flexibly by exerting additional effort, to return benefits to their employer and therefore use their saved time from not commuting as working time, without complaining about it (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). In line with being less distracted from office chats and being more concentrated at home, this enables them to intensify work for example on documents or analysing metadata (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

To sum up, previous studies suggest that working from home offers several benefits to both employees and employers while the assumed disadvantages of solely working from home can be compensated by incorporating office days that allow social interaction face-to-face. Therefore, the hybrid setting as a combination of both is a

highly relevant context to our research on self-identity and team identification. Within this thesis, we will consider how those findings occur in the context of our case study.

2.4 Research Question

Based on this literature review, we adopt the assumption that identity shapes and is shaped by context and group membership (Alvesson, 2010; Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Especially with the changed circumstances in the work setting when identities are likely to change, we are curious, similar to the approach of Nicholson and colleagues, how they might change: if a person himself or herself changed (absorption), or his/her role is adapted (determination), or both developed to a certain degree (exploration) or if they did not change at all (replication) (Nicholson, 1984; West, Nicholson & Arnold, 1987). In light of the surfer image, we predict that multiple and possibly contradicting identities could be developed when working from home versus in the office. Given the outlined studies on social interaction, concentration, and autonomy, we assume that an employee adopts different and contradicting self-identities based on the work location and underlying motivation to work from there. Considering the social identity theory, we wonder how team members can switch or juggle these contradicting identities when working together as a hybrid team. We assume that the process of social identification plays an important part in establishing a team identity that ensures smooth teamwork and think that multiple self-identities are influencing those identification processes. Hence, we may also find various team identification processes influenced by established self-identities. We are also curious to find out about challenges regarding social comparison in this context. Therefore, it becomes interesting how the hybrid team setting influences the well-being and productivity of employees on individual and team levels. This serves as the derivation of the research question already presented:

How are multiple self-identities balanced and team-identification processes experienced in a hybrid team setting?

3. Methodology

This chapter gives an in-depth understanding of how we undertook our research. First, an overview of our philosophical underpinnings is provided. Then, we will describe our

methodological approach including an introduction to the empirical context as well as an outline of our data collection and analysis. This will be concluded by reflections on the limitations of our methodology.

3.1 Philosophical Groundings

As we examine the phenomena of the dynamics in hybrid teams, our highest concern is the understanding of the employees being involved, their feelings and identifications. Because of this people-centred focus that includes paying special attention to the subjective meanings of individuals created about their team, we decided upon an interpretative research approach. Since we, as researchers, are a component of the study, we cannot be excluded. Our beliefs and values also have an impact on how we collect data. We conducted in-person and online interviews because we value face-to-face communication as well as giving the flexibility of how participation is favoured and suitable to one's working location of the day. We are fully aware that when using the interpretative tradition, it is essential to have an empathetic position toward the social environment of the interviewees (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). We were able to meet this requirement because we always ensured to have one researcher taking a more observing role whilst the other researcher was leading one specific interview part, which will be explained in more detail in the section on data gathering.

We always attempted to ensure conducting our study amongst the following quote: “[T]he researcher must enter the field with an open mind and a great deal of curiosity to be able to capture the moment when it all happens” (Styhre, 2013, p.56). Hence, we treated our interviewees with openness, and respect and welcomed them as the company New Tech did with us. We think this code of conduct helped us to get in-depth insights and established trustful conversations.

Furthermore, as self-, team-identity and team-identification are based on a bundle of both collective and individual subjective realities (Prasad, 2017), the subjectivism philosophy dictates that we as researchers must understand those interpretations to make sense of them (Prasad, 2017). In the words of Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), subjectivism refers to the awareness of "the meanings that individuals attach to social phenomena" (p.111). In addition to the interpretations of our interviewees, this study's conclusions are founded on our observations and interpretations. Hence, these conclusions follow a social constructivist perspective, which presupposes that

there is not a single truth to be discovered (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Still, we tried to be reflexive during the data collection and analysis to achieve valuable insights. In the following section, our research approach is continued.

3.2 Approach

To examine the impact of identity in a hybrid team setting based on our elaborated groundings, we conducted a qualitative case study inspired by the interpretative tradition of symbolic interactionism. As outlined by Prasad (2017), this tradition focuses on the diversity of meanings in any social situation from the perspective of the individuals in their everyday worlds. Thereby, symbolic interactionism pays close attention to the process of individual meaning-making. To showcase how realities are generated, this tradition draws upon concepts of role-taking and identity. Accordingly, multiple roles and identities are seen as socially constructed in and through language. Therefore, the symbolic interactionism tradition is in line with our theoretical lens of the surfer image and identity theory as well as with our philosophical grounding to look at the micro-level when examining the employee's perceptions of their identity in a hybrid team setting.

Within the interpretative tradition of symbolic interactionism, in-depth and meaning-centred interviews are typically used as research practice (Prasad, 2017). Those interviews consist of mainly how-questions to ensure sense-making and are open-ended, giving the interviewees the chance to direct the interview with their answers (Prasad, 2017). On this basis, we use semi-structured interviews that enable us to examine the subjective perceptions of employees individually and in-depth. In addition, the qualitative research approach offers the possibility to explore the concept of identity in the context of a hybrid team setting and thereby find previously unknown characteristics (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). It allows us to explore what this change to a hybrid team setting means to the employees (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). This way, deeper information content can be made possible as well as contradictions and tensions can be uncovered (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Consequently, our approach is of abductive nature as we draw upon existing theory to formulate open yet targeted interview questions, stay open to expand our theoretical understanding with additional relevant concepts during the empirical study, and finally

aim to supplement the theoretical conceptualisation during the analysis and discussion (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007).

3.3 Data Collection

Given the context, we conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve employees from four different teams that work together both from home and in the office of New Tech. Additionally, we spend a total of 23 days working on our thesis at New Tech where we were provided with an office space and included in team lunches and social breakfasts. The insights that we gathered from participating in office life have enhanced our understanding of the general attitudes and thoughts regarding the hybrid setting which allowed us to interpret our interview findings on a deeper level.

As previously outlined, we chose semi-structured interviews for an in-depth and meaning-centred approach that allows the participants to guide the interview with their answers (Prasad, 2017). In line with the abductive approach and the interpretive tradition, we used guiding questions as well as ad hoc follow-up questions to dive deeper into a topic and ensure our understanding of the interviewee's meaning when describing their experience (Kvale, 1996).

3.3.1 Sampling

The first step to conducting our interviews was defining a proper sample of interviewees. The selection of the interview participants was based on a conversation with our contact person Willy in which we gave a short briefing about our research motivation and clarified two desired criteria: that the employees belonged to the same team and represented different seniority as well as tenure within New Tech to collect varied interpretations of the same context. We anticipated that those criteria could influence the identification with the team because more experiences and memories are made within the team.

Based on these wishes, Willy suggested asking a few team managers within the research and development fields as well as operations if they allow their team members to participate in the interviews. Willy explained that these teams would be especially interesting to examine for our study because of their core function in this innovation-striving technology company. These teams are the origin of New Tech's

competitive advantage, so well-functioning hybrid teams that ensure idea-sharing are therefore of high interest. After the managers gave their consent, Willy provided us with a list of 45 names from four different teams. We contacted all the team members that were presented to us, clarified emerging queries and scheduled interviews with those who replied and were interested to participate. Thereby, our sample resulted in twelve team members with different roles and tenures from those four teams, which can be found in the table below. As the level of seniority is not solely based on years spent in certain fields, we added the tenure of being at New Tech as well.

Interview	Name	Role*	Tenure (years)	Team
1	Adam	Experienced Electronics Engineer	3-5	Team A
2	Oscar	Experienced Electronics Engineer	5-10	Team A
3	Elias	Senior Hardware Electronics Engineer	5-10	Team C
4	Lars	Experienced Software Engineer	5-10	Team C
5	Noah	Senior Mechanical Engineer Mechanical Lead	>10	Team B
6	Peter	Experienced Mechanical Engineer Lead	3-5	Team A
7	Jan	Experienced Hardware Electronics Engineer	3-5	Team A
8	Karl	Electronics Engineer	0-3	Team A
9	Hans	Senior Mechanical Engineer	>10	Team B
10	Nils	Experienced Mechanical Engineer	3-5	Team A
11	Wilma	Experienced Purchaser	5-10	Team D
12	Emma	Purchaser	0-3	Team D

Table 1: List of Interviewees

*Hierarchy: Engineer – Experienced Engineer – Senior Engineer – Senior Expert Engineer

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

We scheduled twelve interviews with team members in March 2023 and calculated 45 minutes for each interview. As shortly mentioned, the participants were given the option to meet face-to-face in the office or virtually on Google Meet. In total, we held five interviews online and seven interviews in person.

To ensure a purposeful structure for our interviews as suggested by Kvale (1996), the interviews were semi-structured, including guiding as well as follow-up questions

about the employees' perception of their identity within the team when working hybrid. The interview questionnaire can be found in Appendix A and the follow-up questions in Appendix B. Consequently, the interview process was the same for all interviews: We eased our participant into the conversation with some small talk off the record, introduced ourselves and gave a short and broad overview of our thesis project without mentioning the identity topic directly. We then asked for their consent to audio-record the interview for the purpose of transcribing it while guaranteeing anonymity. Once the recording started, we explained how we structured our questions into four parts: introductory questions, questions about their experience in the home office setting, questions about their experience in the office setting and specifying questions to conclude. We emphasised that the prepared questions are just for guidance and that we are completely open to going with the flow of the participant's input. With the background of the interpretative tradition, we split those four parts equally up. One interviewer was assigned to lead a part and asked the questions, while the other was observing the situation. After each interview, we transcribed the audio recording and some sentences have been edited for adequate language purposes, not content-wise. Additionally, we took notes on our observations during the interview, such as the participant's mood, body language or reaction to distractions. Hereby, it was of high interest not only to see what the interviewees say but also on how it was said. The developed transcripts built the starting point for our data analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

After executing our interviews and transcribing them, we followed Rennstam and Wästerfors' (2018) approach in sorting, reducing and arguing to prevent us from including too much and to focus on the most relevant topics for our research. During the sorting process, we used the transcripts, which served as the main data source for our analysis. Based on Kvale and Brinkmann's (2015) understanding of interpretation, we aimed to uncover the meanings between the lines and get a deeper insight into our research topic. According to them, this includes paying attention to what has been talked about as well as how it was expressed to generate a better feeling of the interviewees' truth of the story. As already mentioned, we covered this, with our observer role and added those observations as notes to the transcript. To follow an interpretative analysis, we began by codifying and identifying topics that were

discussed in the interview as well as finding relevant themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Therefore, we went transcript by transcript and marked remarkable quotes, added them to an Excel sheet, sorted them according to overall themes and named categories. In the reduction process, we carefully discarded themes that would hold less significance and choose themes that seemed most relevant to our research (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). In a second review, we looked further for the out-of-the-ordinary and meaningful themes, which resulted in a total of four categories including nine themes, which will be presented in chapter 4. We believe that those themes not only provide empirical evidence to support our research question but also make a compelling narrative and contribute to organisational research as a whole.

Moreover, we prepared our empirical material based on Rennstam & Wästerfors (2018) suggested arguing method, where they point out Emerson's excerpt-commentary unit style. They consider these units effective ways for demonstrating the relationship between empirical facts and theory in general and to show how empirical findings contribute to research. Thereby, each excerpt-commentary unit consists of a four-part structure: analytical point, orientation, empirical excerpt and analytical comment (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). We followed this structure throughout the preparation and writing of our empirical findings (chapter 4).

3.5 Reflections and Limitations

Before outlining our empirical findings, we would like to reflect on our research approach as suggested by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018), who raise awareness of the importance to consider the subjective nature of interpretations by researchers according to their individual contexts. Furthermore, they point out that the focus on a certain research tradition leads researchers to interpret their findings on a meta-level that is pre-suggested by the tradition.

First of all, the interviews were led in English, which is not the native language of either the researchers or the interviewees. We are familiar with the risk of information loss or misunderstanding as a result of holding them in a non-native language. However, we are under the impression that we could compensate for this language barrier with work-around explanations and repeating ourselves or rephrasing follow-up questions if something was not understood right away.

As previously explained in the philosophical grounding, we were aware that our personal experiences are influencing our interpretations. Given that we both used to work in a hybrid setting in which the home office was more heavily weighted and felt very positive about our experience, we found ourselves surprised by the strongly expressed preferences for the office setting of some of our first interviewees. This led us to ask more in-depth follow-up questions to fully understand the feelings of our interviewees in the context of this company. As we will outline in more depth in our discussion, the expressed importance of the office space for both task-oriented and social team identification has shifted our focus slightly to the office part of the hybrid working model. Therefore, the data collection guided our research more than our previous assumptions, which proves our abductive research approach and the purpose of our semi-structured interviews.

Reflecting on our research approach also led to the realisation that we only talked to employees who were pre-selected by Willy and voluntarily agreed to participate. This might imply a certain bias, both from Willy, who likely chose teams that would be eager to share their experience, as well as from the interviewees themselves, who might have agreed to participate because of their positive attitude towards the current hybrid working model. Relying on voluntary participation might also mean that we missed out on persons with an entirely different opinion. However, we decided that voluntary participation is essential to ensure the openness of the interviewees which determines the quality of the interviews.

Lastly, we reflected on the difference between the interview types. We recognised that virtually conducted interviews were of shorter duration on average than in-person interviews, mostly because the office setting seemed to invite participants to get more into a storytelling mood while the virtual setting had more of a meeting character. This reflection supports our empirical findings that will be outlined more in-depth, framing the office as a social meeting point and the home office as task-oriented.

4. Empirical Findings

We now present our findings from the 12 interviews with employees of New Tech according to the themes outlined above. Thereby, we uncover surprising outcomes and contradictions regarding self-identity when working in the office or from home.

Building on this, we will outline how the same tendencies translate to the team level and thereby illustrate the complex interrelation and balance of task-oriented and social team identification. Resulting from this, we demonstrate the challenge of feeling like an outgroup member when working hybrid.

4.1 Self-Identity

Our empirical findings point to the presence of three themes relating to self-identity which address the office space serving as a social meeting point, dominant task orientation in the home office and the variance in the perception of distraction in both settings. Thereby, we show the challenges and effects that were experienced by our interviewees when required to switch between being social or task-oriented.

4.1.1 Office as a Social Meeting Point

Early on during the interviews, we recognised that the office of New Tech functions as a space to meet in person for social interaction. In this context, all interviewees spoke very positively about working in the office. The high level of social interaction is appreciated as it makes them **feel less lonely**. Oscar, an experienced electronics engineer that has been with the company for 5-10 years, described that his colleagues are “*a huge part of [his] social life*” and staying home would feel too lonely for him. He mentions that his team eats lunch together in the office on a daily basis and that this is where they “*talk about what is close to [their] hearts.*” We observed that he chuckled when saying this which we interpret as an indication of reminiscences and his emotional attachment to those lunch breaks with his team. The interview with his team colleague Adam, an experienced electronics engineer, supports this finding, as he stated: “*We share a lot of laughs in our department, especially when we go to lunch breaks in a team rather than just alone.*”

Thereby, we understand that Adam also enjoys the casual atmosphere in collective breaks as a team. Wilma, an experienced purchaser from Team D also voiced that coming to the office is less lonely in comparison to working from home because her discussions have much more depth. Those statements show that the team is a big part of the interviewees’ social life and people feel like they can talk more about what matters to them while also sharing a laugh.

Furthermore, the social character of the New Tech office seems to have the effect that **team members encourage each other to take breaks**. As Wilma pointed out:

“So, for me, here, it's easier to take [breaks] because we also encourage each other. Okay, let's take a pause. ... Because sometimes we've been in the same meeting after meeting and they're like ... it's okay, you need to do something else.” - Wilma

This statement shows that the social office setting evokes an attitude of looking out for each other's attitude to take breaks and raises awareness of the importance to balance work and being social.

In connection with the social and caring atmosphere described above, it became apparent to us that our interviewees were **more relaxed about talking to their colleagues and asking for help** when seeing them in the office. Peter, an experienced mechanical engineer lead, expressed his appreciation of this openness:

“You come up if you get stuck with something and then, you know, you can just go into their office, knock, and if they're not busy, just go in and ask them. And we're all happy to help each other out. It's much faster that way.” - Peter

Thereby, Peter also indicates that the proximity and visibility of his colleagues are beneficial to his work progress. His team colleague Jan, an experienced hardware electronics engineer also pointed out his perception that *“it's easier to reach them”* and that he can better tell if they are busy or not. From these quotes, we interpret that there is a common understanding of helping each other in the office which makes people more comfortable taking time to talk to each other and ask someone for help.

While these empirical findings underline the function of the office as a social meeting point, it also bears some struggles when it comes to distraction. This will be outlined further in the third sub-theme. First, we shed light on our empirical findings related to self-identity when working in the home office.

4.1.2 Task Orientation in the Home Office

As opposed to the focus on social interaction in the office, there is a strong task orientation among the employees when working from home. For instance, **taking**

breaks is voiced to be much harder. Peter makes such a comparison when he states:

“... [Y]ou don't get these breaks as you would if you came to the office. ... [Y]ou take a break when you want. And more times you just end up not taking a break.” - Peter

This indicates that without the social setting of the office, it is left to him to take a break which then seems to be less of a priority for him. Wilma, whom we quoted earlier in her statement about the encouragement to take breaks in the office, also admitted that she finds it difficult to take actual breaks at home. Her attitude in the home office is *“Let's do it now and then I can chill afterwards.”* She repeats this again by saying *“I want to get it done. And then when I leave the work, I'm finished.”* This repetition emphasises her strong mindset to get things done in the home office. She further supports this by elaborating on what she does when she actually takes a break: *“When you're at home, you do the laundry, you do something else. So, you don't let yourself fully rest.”* This underlines her task orientation in the home office which is mirrored again by Peter:

“So, it's nice to be home because then, yeah, you can focus and you don't have people that come knocking and wanting something and sometimes you need those days to get things done.” - Peter

Consequently, Peter enjoys working from home as he can **concentrate on individually assigned tasks**. His team colleague Nils, an experienced mechanical engineer, also states that he uses the home office as a way to finish up an issue. When asked to reflect on an occasion where he regretted his choice of workplace, he admits that he sometimes feels like he could have gotten more individual things done if he worked from home that day. Emma, who works as a purchaser in Wilma's team, shares this feeling and perceives it as an accomplishment when finishing up a task at home. In the way that she used laughs and gestures to underline her words, we observed an expression of almost “longing” to get things done. Almost all of our interviewees view the home office as a good option to choose when needing to finish up their assigned tasks.

However, in the interview with Noah who works as a senior mechanical engineer and project leader, we understood that there is a certain **pressure to constantly show availability and productivity** due to the blurred lines between work and private life:

“... [I]f someone asks you a question like in the evening, you answer that immediately. That would never happen when you work from the office and when you're leaving the office, then you don't need to answer anything. ... I work a lot more when I'm working from home than in the office.” - Noah

By this example, we see that the task orientation is not always intrinsically motivated as for Peter, Nils or Emma. It can also be evoked under pressure to prove that one is working. When asked to reflect on why he feels this pressure, he refers to the blurred boundaries between work and private life as well as the lack of visibility:

“Because it's so easy to do other things when you're at home. ... [Y]ou think that someone is going to look up on you or wonder why you weren't answering while you were in the bathroom. You go to the bathroom at the office as well, but others see that you do so, it is without question. So, you keep on working to prove it.” - Noah

Thereby, we interpret that the lack of visibility makes Noah feel anxious about proving his productivity in the home office. He even states that he sometimes works on his tasks while listening to a not-highly-relevant meeting:

“If you have a one-hour meeting, maybe 10 minutes are focussed on the area that you're handling and there's a lot of other things that you only need to hear, but you don't need to be fully focussed. Then it's much easier to have the meeting on teams because then you can work at the same time ...” - Noah

From this, we interpret that his task orientation in the home office seems to be so high that there is a tendency to multitask during a less focus-requiring meeting.

In fact, the **opportunity to join the meeting virtually** seems to be a relief for Noah. His team colleague Hans, a senior mechanical engineer, also thinks that “*sync meetings*” can be easily done via Teams from home. Nils is in agreement as he states: “*I try to be home either when I have a lot of meetings because then it's easier and I can just take the meeting from home.*” Wilma enjoys taking many meetings virtually from home as well:

"Having the opportunity to work at home feels actually pretty good because there are days where I am fully booked with meetings and these days are pretty nice to have at home." - Wilma

Here it becomes obvious that a packed workday is more easily doable from home thanks to being able to fully focus on individually assigned meetings and tasks. This seems to help the interviewees to cope with the amount of work. However, we also found that some interviewees struggle with taking meetings virtually when it comes to solving complex problems as a team or when they are the only person joining a meeting virtually from home. This will be further explained regarding task-oriented team identification (section 4.3).

Besides meetings, there seems to be a **common understanding of which tasks can be done from home**. Hans elaborates that he can work well on presentations or strategic planning that is more long-term. Emma also uses home office days for her work analysis. Nils says that working on his solitary tasks from home suits him well as those tasks are computer-based and do not require interaction with his team. Many interviewees confirmed this by mentioning as well that they mainly do administrative tasks like calculations, schematics or documentation in the home office.

Overall, it became clear across all interviews that the home office is a setting to focus on one's work tasks and get things done, especially when a deadline needs to be met.

4.1.3 Perception of Distraction

While sharing their experiences of working in the office versus working from home with us, the interviewees reflected mixed feelings about focus and distraction. These empirical findings pointed to the presence of a third sub-theme that addresses the balance of task orientation and social interaction in the hybrid setting.

First, we would like to point out the **balancing act of quick communication and distraction in the office space**. Many of the team members we interviewed work together in a so-called "landscape" which is an open-space setting. Elias, a senior hardware electronics engineer, admits that there is constantly someone talking in the landscape. He expresses his understanding that this might be annoying for some people while he emphasises that it is no problem for him. If he needs to concentrate, he wears his noise-cancelling headphones:

"... I put [them] on and listen to music a lot, and that works for me quite well. It puts me in a little bubble. When someone comes, looks and knocks on my desk, it's very quick to take them off and just shout or just talk across directly to the colleagues." - Elias

Here, Elias describes a situation in which he quickly switches between focusing on a task to talking with his colleagues. We interpret that this situation requires him to switch from being task-oriented to being social in seconds. Interestingly, he does not seem to perceive this as a challenge, as he states: *"That's the kind of landscape that I like, that's creative and it's quick and it's, ehm, it's good for communication within the group."*

The fact that he enjoys this quick communication across his team shows that he does not perceive interruptions as disturbing when he is in the office. On the contrary, Noah perceives interruptions or distractions as the downsides of working in the office. He states:

"And then someone else finds you. The work you should do yourself isn't getting done by anyone. So that's the downside of it, that it could be that the whole day goes to something completely different. You're then behind on the stuff that you need to deliver." - Noah

This statement clearly shows Noah's task orientation which seems to mismatch with the social behaviour of his colleagues. We interpret that Noah is struggling with his dominant task orientation in the office as the environment requires him to be social.

In the **home office setting, direct calls** seem to be perceived as much more disturbing than a face-to-face inquiry in the office. Elias explains it like this:

"... [W]hen I'm at home and someone's calling me on teams, then that would go into my bubble because they would call me into my headphones. But here [in the office] they have to physically knock on me ... I think it's still easier here even though I am in the bubble. Easier than to call." - Elias

Therefore, distraction happens at home through direct calls into his headphones which he perceives as disturbing his focus. In the office, his colleagues see that he is busy when he has his headphones on. However, they still rather knock on his desk in the

office than call him in the home office which Elias views as “*easier*”. So, overall, more disturbance happens in the office, but it is not necessarily perceived as such.

4.2 Social Team Identification

The balance of social interaction and task orientation is also evident in our empirical findings at the level of the team. When asked what makes the interviewees truly feel part of their team, we found that they experience a feeling of belonging and great team spirit both on a social and task-oriented base. Therefore, as a second central theme, we will now outline our empirical findings regarding social team identification.

Overall, the interviewees talked very positively about their team and their colleagues as they enjoy chatting with each other. In reflection on why they get along so well, it was expressed that they **share the same interests and humour** which makes working together fun. We will further elaborate on the element of humour as a team connector in our next sub-theme.

Consequently, a highly relevant social element seemed to be **non-work-related conversations during daily breakfasts, lunches or fika** together. We will use the next but one sub-theme to go into detail about how the integration of social gatherings makes room for showing one’s authentic personality which results in an overall community feeling.

4.2.1 Sharing the Same Humour

Early on during the interviews, we noticed that **sharing the same humour** was mentioned a lot in relation to great team spirit. Especially the members of Team A described that they laugh together. For example, Adam states: “*We share a lot of laughs in our department ... and it is quite fun.*” His team colleague Jan also appreciates the good atmosphere in the team:

“We have a good atmosphere in our group. I mean, we laugh several times a day and can make fun of each other. And yeah, it really doesn't feel like going to work. We have a good time here.” - Jan

Nils is from the same team and also reflects “*We have a good dynamic together and we just have a lot of fun together.*” We understand from these statements that having the same humour and laughing together makes working more fun.

Emma from Team C also mentions humour as **positively influencing the atmosphere** in big team meetings and social gatherings. She describes it as such:

"It's difficult with 50 people in one meeting. It's not always easy, but when we do have them, that is actually really good conversation and discussions we have on different subjects. And of course, we laugh a lot. Especially when we have events, where we have meetings and eat and drink" - Emma

Accordingly, Emma's team seems to lighten up big meetings with jokes and enjoys laughing together at social team events. Therefore, humour seems to enhance team spirit as the interviewees feel more connected.

4.2.2 Community Feeling

The connection within a team seems to be based on a community feeling. Some interviewees even went as far as to **call their team "friends" or "family"**. Karl, an electronics engineer in Team A, states that he enjoys going into the office because of that established team feeling. He says that it is a nice environment as *"it feels like home."* His team colleague Peter shares this perception as he elaborates: *"I feel very close with [my team] and the department as a whole. We have a sense of, like, family"*. Jan, who also works in Team A, told us that he and some team members also play in a band together once a week. Nils also confirms this for Team A: *"We are good friends, all of us."* Apart from the members of Team A, Noah from Team B also describes it as *"more like a family feel when you're at the office."* Lars, an experienced software engineer, from Team C also reflected on the passion for the same technical topics that he shares with his team colleagues. From these statements, we interpret that sharing the same interests helps to build family and friends connections which makes the office feel like home.

In relation to this friendly atmosphere, some interviewees mentioned that they feel safe and **comfortable being themselves** in their team. Peter explains this based on the fact that the team is *"very familiar and comfortable with each other"*. Emma also thinks that she and her team colleagues are good at being themselves:

"There is always a very open dialogue with every experiment and we are not afraid of sharing our thoughts that might be completely different to someone else's thinking." – Emma

Her team colleague Wilma agrees with this strongly as she states:

“It's okay to be different, feel different, think differently. ... [W]e've always said to ask any questions you have. Stupid or not, they're more than welcome and just be open about whatever fault you have, or problem or issues and we don't judge each other or something.” – Wilma

Based on these statements we understand that feeling free to say what they think within the team makes the team a safe space and that enhances the experience of expressing one's identity in this social setting.

The practice of **daily breakfasts and lunch breaks** as a team makes sure that this community feeling is lived out. Elias especially acknowledges the Fridays in the office when the team has a cup of coffee and cake together and they “*just chat about everything*”. Hans appreciates the lunch breaks and goes as far as to say “*That's quite holy for most people I know.*” Nils explains that these gatherings help to get to know each other better. He explains:

“I think one of the things that [New Tech] is good at is having breakfast together each morning. I think that's a good way to develop team spirit because to me, having a good relationship with teammates is a big part of that. There's also knowing sort of who they are and what they do in their spare time and what goes on in that person's life.” – Nils

Accordingly, he appreciates the opportunity to socialise with his colleagues to get to know each other on a personal level. He further argues that this also makes it easier to work together on work-related topics afterwards. Consequently, a mix of non-work-related social conversations and work-related discussions seems to be beneficial for the team. We will now go in-depth with the work-related elements of team identification in our next central theme.

4.3 Task-oriented Team Identification

In interrelation with social team identification, our empirical findings also pointed out several task-oriented aspects that foster team spirit and a feeling of belonging. As we are looking at the team level, the task orientation is now directed towards team tasks that need to be solved together. We present this as our third central theme: task-oriented team identification.

Overall, the interviews emphasised the importance of **sharing information** as much as possible helps to keep each other “in the loop”. For example, Hans believes that having the same base of information helps to understand each other better and brings team projects further because more people can help by thinking about solutions together. We will outline in-depth how short ways of communication play into this in the next sub-theme.

Moreover, the interviewees all expressed how **discussing problems and finding solutions together** fosters their team spirit. Especially when the idea of an individual is backed up by the whole team, Hans thinks that it creates an atmosphere of encouragement and cohesiveness. When listening to and pushing ideas generates a **common achievement**, the interviewees feel an even greater team spirit. In Peter’s words, helping each other out creates a “*connection*”. Noah thinks that especially on long-lasting projects or new tasks that no one did before, achievements get the team spirit up. Therefore, we will go into detail on how problem-solving as a team occurs in the next but one sub-theme.

4.3.1 Short Ways of Communication

As introduced above, short ways of communication are an accelerator of the task-oriented identification process. When we asked our interviewees how their team is distributed in the office, a lot of them described the setting as a landscape where the **team is closely sitting together** like Wilma and Peter:

“Where I sit [it] is like half of us have offices and half of us are in our open landscape. But the rooms are beside each other. So, it's quite easy to just gather everyone”- Wilma

“We have four main project rooms where all the mechanics, who are involved in the specific project, sit in that same room and then all the other project resources, the disciplines, electronics, software, firmware, etc. sit somewhere on the same floor.” - Peter

The quotes above described a setting, where teams are brought together to ensure short ways and to enhance communication. Sometimes these landscapes have also a functional factor because labs and measurements are in the middle and offices are distributed around them.

In addition to the setting, we identified something like an **open-door policy**, which we by the way also experienced while writing our thesis at New Tech. Peter connected this to a core value of New Tech and surprisingly mentioned some downsides while recounting:

“We're encouraged to have our door open. And whenever someone wants help with something, you welcome them and discuss it. And that's really nice. It's a really nice culture and work environment. But the disadvantage is that sometimes you just get sort of a wave of people wanting to talk about things and discuss and help, and you never get a chance to yourself.” - Peter

Here, it is worth mentioning that his voice took on a different more serious tone while including this drawback of having the door open. Interestingly, Elias illustrates a situation with full body movement, where he used the open-door policy as a reason to keep a question to himself until the team member is back in the office:

“I'm doing something and then I'm thinking: Oh, the other guy, he knows about this. So, I look up and oh, [I see that] he's not there. Should I contact him? Call him? No, it's too much. So, I do it tomorrow when he is back.” - Elias

These findings outline how the open-door policy enhances communication but also hinders focused work and can also lead to hesitating to call someone in the home office. The office seems to be the place where the **shorter communication ways are used for quick questions**. For Jan the office is the place, where “*it's easier to get instant help*” and for Lars, it also is an easier way to reach out to someone:

“If you have a question of something that you want to talk over with somebody, ... the number of steps that you need to take is much fewer in an office compared to home” - Lars

Emma confirms this experience of faster communication ways:

“When you're in the office, you can just go to them. I mean, if you have a question regarding something you can go to a specific person ... just ask the question and you get it solved. And if you write from home, then you may need to make a call or immediately send an email! ... It's a different conversation when you talk face to face to any person.” - Emma

Noah deepens this statement about having a different conversation and brings in a new perspective on how team spirit is built up:

“You're much happier because also then you can talk about different things and you meet people and you don't need to call them up. ... So, what you're doing is we can there (in the office) talk about silly stuff. ... Then you get the team spirit again and you can understand why someone is in the work ... then you get the whole picture easier.” - Noah

He further elaborates with finger-pointing how it is for him as a project responsible to balance control:

“[Compared w]hen working from home, for me: I was more the big brother trying to elaborate. What you're doing? Are you done? Is it finished? While at the office it is more. How's it going? What can we do to fix this? Should we help each other? ... It's easier to get the whole group going in one direction instead of just being the one pointing: You should do that. So, you feel more like a bad guy when working from home” - Noah

All those statements show that the barrier to talking to colleagues and asking small questions is lower in the office because employees physically see the person including their reaction and availability.

Moreover, employees frequently mentioned the **coffee machine as a place to exchange ideas and problems**. Hans sums up the idea of small talk at the coffee machine:

“All those small things, all the decisions, all the small talk you have between meetings. ... I mean, it's a cliché, but the coffee machine is where you speak with someone and they come up with something.” - Hans

Wilma added by talking about the importance of spontaneously meeting each other for knowledge sharing: “... [Y]ou can discuss a lot more innovation because you can get a lot of ideas when you discuss with your colleagues.” Because in such circumstances more possibilities and willingness to share ideas happen, which leads to innovation. This is something we experienced ourselves whilst attending Friday's thesis student breakfasts, where the newest research topics have been discussed.

4.3.2 Problem-solving as a Team

Supporting our task-oriented team identification, we noticed the problem-solving attitude of our interviewees early on during the interviews, which developed into our second sub-theme. Especially in the office with the short communication ways as described above, they all had a **common understanding of helping each other** to solve problems together. Peter said: *“I’m in the office so I’m available for people to help out”*, which clearly states again that being in the office means being available for support. When asked about team spirit, Peter even connected it to this feeling, with a certain sparkle in his eyes:

“Even if we’re not on the same projects, we help each other with advice. It’s something really good that we’ve established. That’s really when you see sort of the team spirit, ... it’s just ... really nice.” - Peter

Karl, an electronics engineer, explained as well how difficult it is to describe something virtual over the screen but how much easier it is to discuss a problem in the office. He and his team members seemed to have similar feelings about the reflection of each other’s problems:

“And maybe when you present your problem and we have discussed that maybe one week later, someone comes to you and says, I thought about your problem and you should/you need to do that.” - Karl

Those quotes above highlight the solution orientation in the office that all team members seem to identify with, which makes it possible for helping each other out and reflect on problems together.

Besides the problem-solving attitude, we have experienced that the interviewees tend to favour discussing **complex problems at in-depth meetings onsite to for instance show around prototypes**. Peter gave some insights into how such weekly meetings with presenting problems can take place:

“For us, it is important to show other people what we’re working with physically. I mean, you can show them ... the 3D model online, but it’s very, very different to see it in reality when you print it out and hold it in your hand and when you feel it, touch it. It’s a very different experience. ... Even though we could show

a representation on a computer ... [i]t's very important that they actually see it. ... I mean, your appreciation is completely different.” - Peter

In addition, Hans, a Senior Mechanical Engineer outlined the importance of going to a supplier, when a common understanding and strategy needs to be developed:

“If I go to the suppliers and we sit in an office the whole day, the whole team, ... it is much better in person because it's so unknown territory that everything really needs to understand. And you need body language, therefore. ... For example, the Chinese say ... we can't fix it but then you look around and see people that are up to something. Also, you can see it by their face if other problems arise” - Hans

To sum it up, those statements showed that it is important to have some visual prototypes for generating a different experience, understanding as well as being able to support each other as a team. Interestingly, as highlighted by Hans it can be easier as a moderator of such meetings to guide the direction of problems through observing body language and side conversations. The importance of being present therefore seems to be an issue for team members joining a hybrid meeting virtually and will be analysed in the next theme.

4.4 Feeling like an Outgroup

During our interviews, it became apparent to us that working hybrid has its challenges. The interviewees honoured the opportunity but still talk very concerned about it in certain situations and usually never work more than two days a week from home, which will be outlined in the following.

As mentioned before on the individual level, the home office is sometimes perceived **negatively in relation to having fun** which will now be highlighted on the team level. Noah voiced that *“It's not as fun as when you're at home and nothing happens just by chance”*, for Karl it is *“... [b]oring to sit at home”* and Emma sometimes even *“...feel[s] a little bit lonely at home.”* Not being able to interact, or meet spontaneously can lead to a lack of energy, a feeling of loneliness and in the worst case a loss of team spirit.

Another reason, why working from home is not used more than two days a week is that many interviewees have a **fear of missing out on important team decisions**

when working from home. They do not like the feeling when they do not know 100% what is going on. To put it into Hans' words:

“Especially like, if you were decision making and then you kind of feeling you are missing out on something. You don't have to - but you can't influence it that much. Trusting people around you helps with that. So, I don't seem to have full control, even if I like it quite a lot, but I think that's a balance. ... I enjoy being at the office.” - Hans

Accordingly, working at home means lacking the possibility of meeting spontaneously and contributing to every single decision. However, Hans mentions that it helps to have built up trust and maintain a balance of working in the office and from home.

Even **chat messages**, where you usually have the possibility to give input, **bear difficulties** amongst the interviewees because of the missing body expression and reaction. Noah pointed out:

“... [I]n a chat you can answer questions. But how you sound and how you pronounce and show things, it's a completely different thing because you can say a word or you can write the word and it can be misunderstood. Sometimes you feel this person is angry at me, but that wasn't the intention.” - Noah

As Noah indicates, misunderstandings due to missing the tone can lead to conflicts. This underlines the importance to understand the context between the lines to work well as a team.

4.4.1 Participation in Hybrid Meetings

Moreover, to enable the flexibility of working from the office and home, all of the teams have hybrid meetings established, which is highly appreciated by the interviewees. However, being the one joining virtually mostly gives the **feeling of isolation, when not having the possibility to give as much input.**

Elias for example feels excluded when joining meetings virtually because “... *you feel outside. It's hard to get into the group and most of the action is in the office room.*” Lars is frustrated about the loss of spontaneous impulses that makes him feel excluded:

“If you had something to say and you couldn't interrupt at the moment. [Y]ou can still say it later on, but you lose the spontaneity ... it's a little bit frustrating.”

- Lars

Above, Hans described how it is for him as a moderator to solve problems in hybrid meetings with the crucial factor of body language. In comparison, Lars illustrated the difficulty of hybrid meetings by how the missing body language is experienced as a virtual participant:

“[Y]ou cannot really get the vibes from the audience or the team-mates ... because they're all like, static in some small picture somewhere, where they dance on and then you don't know: Are they talking to interact or talking to somebody? ... It's very difficult to know if the other people were bored or interested. ... And the person joining virtually is on a small picture in the room as well: So, it's kind of easy to forget that person” - Lars

During his explanation, he jumped quite a lot in his thoughts, which even more underlines the complexity of such hybrid meetings even though technology can bring people with pictures together. Participants joining the meeting onsite also described to us how difficult it is to include the offsite virtual person but could not come up with an idea why it is so and what could be done about it.

Emma, who seemed quite relaxed about and used to hybrid meetings because she joined the company during the pandemic, just voiced a downside: *“Maybe it will take a longer time to discuss or to find the solution.”*

Overall, the examples above show that not meeting spontaneously or joining a hybrid meeting as the only virtual person, whereas the majority are in one room together, can lead to issues of understanding the situation and giving no input or contributing to the decision. Thereby, the feeling of an outgroup member arises.

4.4.2. Building Trust and a Common Understanding

To potentially overcome the outgroup member feeling and ensure the team spirit in the home office setting where the social element is missing, we found that **building trust** is viewed as essential. Peter describes it as that *“sort of trust that [team members] will get back to you.”* He thinks that once a working relationship is established with someone in the office by working next to each other, trust is quickly built and feeling

connected over distance is possible. Accordingly, we interpret that trust needs to be established while working together in the office to be able to successfully work from home to reduce the barrier of lacking social interaction.

Another helpful practice to enhance team spirit was mentioned by Elias. He shared his experience of a **team reflection session** with us. This session was dedicated to talking about their team's feedback culture. He explains how this session benefited the team:

"We have been working together with our manager and a consulting team to strengthen our team as such. And then we discussed those topics about how we cooperate, how we interact with each other, how we feedback to each other ... and just discussing that makes a very strong team as such." – Elias

Hence, Elias appreciates the practice of coming together as a team to discuss how to operate on a personal level and believes that this strengthens the team spirit, which could help to give guidance about how to interact in hybrid meetings. While sharing this experience, he reflected also on growth and respect:

"Just to discuss that, those topics, how we give and take feedback, is extremely interesting. It makes you grow as a person. And do we grow as a team as well? Yeah, because it increases respect for each other." – Elias

This illustrates the importance of giving feedback as it not only makes a single person grow, even the whole team grows together.

In sum, feeling like an outgroup member can appear in the home office when there is a loss of fun, lack of spontaneous interactions, and fear of missing out on opportunities. Further, one cannot hear the tone of voice or see gestures over chat messages as much as in in-person meetings which might lead to disparities. In hybrid meetings, where complex problems are discussed, joining virtually also shows difficulties in understanding the situation and giving input. Building trust with your colleagues can help to erase the feeling of missing out and, in combination with reflection sessions, potentially establish a good working relationship.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, we will discuss our empirical findings in further interpretations and broader positions. Based on Foote`s (1952) suggestion, we observed the hybrid team setting as a situation in which identity itself can become problematic to examine its impact on behaviour. Due to the single case study, we cannot generalise how every employee would behave in a hybrid team. Our New Tech case serves as an example and highlights empirical findings for particular teams within that company.

As a guide for the reader throughout our discussion, we have created a visualisation of how we understand and connected our empirical findings (Figure 1). First, based on identity theory regarding multiple self-identities, we will outline how two different self-identities, named Talker and Worker, occur according to the working location such as office and home office as well as social structures (Stets & Burke, 2000). Then we take distractions from outside the self into account, that can challenge the individual to uphold the Talker or Worker identity and therefore cause identity juggling (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). On this basis, we have also identified two different team identification tracks, social and task-oriented, which enable a common team identity that underlies the team. Thereby the two different self-identities, Talker and Worker, can support achieving one or both of the tracks. Finally, we will discuss the complex situation of a hybrid team which bears the risk that employees cannot identify with their team, meaning that they can neither use the social nor task-oriented track. This may evoke the feeling of being an outgroup member with an observing role.

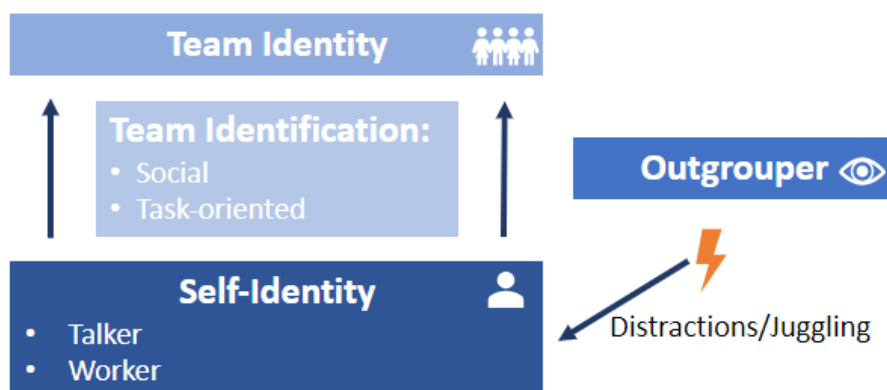


Figure 1: Visualisation of Findings

Each of the following sections will refer to the elements of this visualisation in more detail.

5.1 Talker versus Worker

As our main focus of this study was to find out potentially different self-identities that employees can take in when working in a hybrid context, we used the surfer image perspective that allows individuals to have “multiple, loosely coupled identities...” (Alvesson, 2010, p.154). Thereby we provide an answer to the question “Who am I?” depending on the situation employees find themselves in (Ashforts, Harrison & Corley, 2008) by asking questions about their behaviour (Rogers, 1959). Our findings confirm our assumption that when the working location switches, the employees have different behaviour and different tasks. Therefore, we found the identities of a Talker and Worker, shown at the base of our visualiation, to answer the first part of our research question: ***How are multiple self-identities balanced and team-identification processes experienced in a hybrid team setting?***

First, we would like to outline what the Talker identity in the office entails. As the office serves as a social meeting point, the interviewees feel less lonely and, as Oscar stated, the colleagues are “*a huge part of the social life*” and they enjoy having lunch together. We interpret that they have a high emotional attachment to the office as the described landscape office space and the dedicated joint breaks are originally created for that interaction (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Furthermore, they balance work and being social in this setting as they encourage each other on a regular basis to take breaks. Through such a caring atmosphere and the opportunity to spontaneously meet each other, the interviewees described multiple situations where they asked each other for help and talked to each other not only about work-related but rather more private topics, or as Oscar described it, “*about what is close to [their] hearts.*” This focus on social interaction confirms our assumption of a Talker identity when working in the office. In comparison, we would like to discuss the behaviour reflecting the Worker identity in the home office. When it comes to the perceived work experience in the home office, we have found similar findings as provided by the literature. We cannot say that the time in meetings has been reduced (Singer-Velush, Sherman and Anderson, 2020), but overall working in the home office was chosen to focus more on what is important (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010) and getting individually assigned tasks done as the concentration tends to be higher compared to the office (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016). Moreover, we can confirm that the work intensity and working hours have risen (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016; Felstead & Henseke, 2017): Our

interviewees used the saved time from commuting for starting work early and described how difficult it is to take proper breaks or how they sometimes do not take them on purpose according to Wilma's motto: "*Let's do it now and then I can chill afterwards*". Besides that, work intensification is shown by the understanding of what tasks that do not need much interaction, such as administrative tasks, complex calculations or schematics can be done from home. Kelliher and Anderson (2010) describe this additional effort of working as a return for the benefit of having the flexibility to decide where to work. Our illustrations above let us assume that this is here the case as well. This dominant task orientation with an additional effort by not taking breaks and intensifying work is what we view as the Worker identity in the home office.

We agree with Ashfort and Mael (1989) that those two identities of the Talker and the Worker are a dual standard as they include different orientations and tasks such as asking questions and talking about ideas or calculating and working with meta-data. According to Foote (1951), this phenomenon is referred to as implicit role-taking, which necessitates silently assuming a role that corresponds to the identity of the other in the given situation as closely as one can infer that identity. The Talker and Worker are based on different working locations, are developed through observing others and vary in taking breaks, show contradicting engagement on meeting people or having less social interaction to focus. Because Talker and Worker are so different in the grounding we believe that they show some independence (Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998). Hence, they are "loosely coupled" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and become salient based on the working location and social structure that serve as identity cues (Ashforth, Harrison, Corley 2008).

Both identities have their downsides. As a Talker one is not being able to get things done because of the high interaction. As a Worker, there is the pressure of showing extra effort and visibility in exchange for flexibility regarding the work location (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). However, these downsides seem to compensate for each other at the same time. For instance, the lack of social interaction to focus in the home office is compensated on office days (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016), wherefore the pressure to work intensively is lower.

Overall, we found out that the hybrid-working employee is required to switch between a Talker identity in the office and a Worker identity in the home office. Creating a balance between those can bear some challenges as we will outline in the following.

5.2 Juggling

By using the surfer image by Alvesson (2010) as a lens throughout this research, we view the Talker and the Worker identity as “multiple, loosely coupled identities” and shed light on “inherent conflicts between their demands” (p.154).

Such an inherent conflict became evident in our empirical findings regarding the perception of distraction (section 4.1.3) when we outlined Noah’s struggle to concentrate on his tasks in the social environment of the office because of frequent interruptions by colleagues asking for help. We interpret that Noah’s Worker identity was so strong in the described situation, that it made him perceive interruptions from colleagues negatively as distractions. The social environment of the office requires him to switch to the Talker identity which he seemingly did not appreciate because of his dominant orientation towards his own tasks. We would categorise his struggle as identity juggling because his self-identity did not match the demands of his surrounding so he could not work purely how he wished and expressed some anxiety about getting his tasks done (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). However, as Noah spoke quite casually about it in the interview, we assume that his frustration was not so high that his self-concept would be fully undermined so we would not classify it as identity wrestling (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). His inherent conflict of acting out the Talker identity despite the preferred Worker identity seemed rather manageable based on how he reflected it to us, so we see it as an example of identity juggling (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016).

A different experience of juggling multiple identities can be derived from the example of Elias. He did not seem to have any trouble going from focused work to quick communication when working in the landscape. We interpret that Elias thus had a dominant Talker identity that matched the quick communication environment in the office well. When he needed to concentrate on tasks and therefore switch to the Worker identity, he used noise-cancelling headphones to create a “*bubble*”. We believe that he uses the headphones not only as a concentration technique for himself but simultaneously also as a signal for his team members that he is focusing on his

tasks or, when he puts the headphones off, that he is ready for communication. Thereby, he enacts his Worker or Talker identity in a way that his team knows when to approach him best, which could be seen as an example of identity expression in the sense that he positions himself (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Moreover, the use of headphones in the office can be interpreted as an identity cue for the Worker in this setting whereas an open door or sitting in the landscape could serve as identity cues for the Talker in this case (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008). Hence, we argue that, within the work setting identity cue, there are certain sub-identity cues such as headphones that help the employees to switch between the Worker and Talker.

Taking both contradicting examples into account, we found that what you perceive as a distraction depends on the identity that you currently act out. Accordingly, we interpret that the experience of switching between being social and being task-oriented is perceived differently depending on the active identity: Talker or Worker.

5.3 Multiple Team Identification Processes

To generate a holistic picture, as Stets and Burke (2000) described, team identification needs to be addressed as well. They say that personally grounded identities, such as the Talker and Worker in our study, give individuals consistency in fluidly switching between different identities across all discourses. As we will outline in this section, we believe that the identity, meaning, in this case, Talker or Worker, influences in which way of identification an employee is identifying with the team. Hence, this is answering the question “Who are we?” (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008). In the same way, identification with the team influences the individual to engage and feel satisfied by actions consistent with the current self-identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Based on the two standards on the self-identity level, we found that the interviewees also identified with the team over social-oriented team identification or task-oriented team identification. The only difference is that the perspective now lies in achieving team identity, which includes focusing on team tasks rather than individual tasks. These findings explicitly answer the second part of our research question: *How are multiple self-identities balanced and **team-identification processes experienced** in a hybrid team setting?* This is illustrated in the visualisation by the two different tracks from the self-identity up to the team identity.

To uncover the social and task-oriented team identification processes in depth, we draw upon the second process of the social identity theory, social identification, by comparing our findings about the behaviour and norms within the hybrid teams (Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Firstly, we would like to elaborate on social team identification. A big attitude that forms a norm for social team identification, besides having the same interests, is sharing the same humour. Laughing together and joking around has set a good atmosphere in every team and helps to socially identify with the team in the office. With the statements from Team A, we saw that having a good social team identification can lead to seeing work as “*fun*”, “*a good time*” and therefore “[*it*] *really doesn't feel like going to work*”. Furthermore, as we illustrated in section 4.2.2 Community Feeling, being in the office and having breaks together as a team strengthens the friendly bond. Moreover, it can lead to a family feeling described as being “*very familiar and comfortable with each other*”, which makes them feel comfortable being themselves, and benefits the social team identification even more. Therefore, we suppose that the motivation or “pull factor” for social team identification can be described as a community feeling and best achieved by being a Talker.

As a counterpart, our findings pointed out task-oriented team identification. This supports our assumption of having multiple ways of identification that are temporary and unstable (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008). The main behaviours for this track of identification are sharing information, discussing problems, helping each other out and finding solutions to have a common achievement. In combination with the landscape office area that enhances short ways of communication, we identified the unwritten open-door policy, described by Peter as “*whenever someone wants help with something, you welcome them and discuss it.*” This rule supports talking to each other, asking for help and solving problems faster. Those quick communication ways and casual talks can assist a project manager to generate a better overview of the project status quo as well as guiding everyone in the same direction, without being “*a bad guy*” as mentioned by Noah. Consequently, a mix of non-work-related social conversations and work-related discussions seems to impact task-oriented team identification positively. In our view, the coffee machine is not only a place for social interaction, moreover, this “*cliché*”, named by Hans, encourages task-oriented team identification as here the employees talk about ideas and “*discuss a lot more*

innovation". When we experienced the combination of social gatherings and task orientation by ourselves while attending Friday's thesis student breakfasts, we came to the conclusion that not only the Talker self-identity, that employees usually take in the office as outlined earlier, is necessary for task orientation team identification. A Worker self-identity, which usually occurs in the home office setting, is also needed to create that balance and identify over task orientation with the team. The underlying Worker came likewise apparent to us when the interviewees described onsite team meetings, where they solve complex problems together as a team and thereby felt team spirit.

In sum, for successful team identification to occur it is beneficial to experience both social team identification through a community feeling and non-work-related communication as well as task-orientated team identification through having a common understanding of helping each other out and communication about new ideas or complex problems. We have stated a dominant Talker identity leads to the social team identification track whilst task-oriented team identification requires again a balance between Talker and Worker because good communication is needed to work together for explaining problems, finding solutions and new ideas. Therefore, the Worker not only occurs in the home office.

In the next section, we will have another look at the hybrid meetings and what happens if none of the team identification processes can be activated.

5.4 Lack of Team Identification

In the last section of our empirical findings, we have illustrated some challenges that can arise in the hybrid team setting that we want to discuss further.

First of all, we said that working from home is associated with not having fun because "*nothing happens just by chance*", as Karl explained. We figured out that not being able to interact and meet spontaneously can lead to a lack of energy. Moreover, a feeling of loneliness can arise and in the worst case, a loss of team spirit is generated. From that standpoint, we argue that a social barrier occurs in the home office that hinders the social team identification track.

Besides the social barrier, another reason could be that being social is not the intention as working from home usually evokes Worker self-identity with orientation on individual

assigned tasks. However, not being able to socially identify with the team should not be disregarded because the social barrier can also lead to the anxiety of “*missing out on something*” and not being part of important decisions as Hans stated. Therefore, we voice that the social barrier can also lead to not being able to identify with the team over the task-oriented team identification track as not being present in the office sometimes means not being able to hold a Talker nor a Worker identity with team task orientation. A solution approach was provided by the interview with Peter, who said that building trust through working closely together in the office can establish a good working relationship. Therefore, trust can ensure feeling connected over distance and reduce the anxiety of missing out on spontaneous opportunities to contribute to decisions.

Even if an employee that works from home tries to contribute, therefore extending the Worker identity with team task orientation and trying to overcome the social barrier by staying connected through chat messages, the full package is missing which might hinder task-oriented team identification. Meeting in person “... *is a completely different thing*” as Noah said and can lead to misunderstandings. These findings make us agree with Bradner and Mark, who argued that telecommunication tools are not sufficient enough to fully substitute in-person relationship building (2002).

Hybrid meetings create a similar problem with regard to the team identification processes. We have described that being the one joining virtually mostly gives the feeling of isolation because the lack of understanding of what is going on due to missing out on body language leads to not having the possibility to give input. Lars said it can be “... *a little bit frustrating*” when you miss out on the spontaneous impulses to contribute because you do not want to interrupt. Even though participants can join with the video in order to kind of create a social connection, the element of video can also not compensate for joining in person (Brander & Mark, 2002). We figured out that the “us” versus “them” mentality described by Tajfel and Turner in the social comparison process (1986) did not occur in this case but the outgroup arises in the home office when the one joining virtually tries to balance Worker and Talker, but both team identification processes are not sufficiently enough achieved to be able to fully identify with the team and contribute in the hybrid meeting. Hence, we propose a purposeful extension to the social identity framework, by saying that the outgroup not only arises by comparing your ingroup with outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), but

it can also arise when you cannot identify with your ingroup at all. Being an outgroup member is a serious situation because if there is a gap between identity expectations and the actual self-perception it will cause a decrease in motivation and identification with the team (Stryker & Burke, 2000). As there is no identification with the team shown, we separated the outgroup member box in our visualisation. The interview with Emma, who was quite relaxed about those meetings as she was used to them, kept us wondering if practice with hybrid meetings will help to build up a successful team identification and therefore solve the outgroup member problem.

We want to point out the described reflection session from Elisas, where talking about the feedback culture led to individual growth and respect. We argue that such sessions, where you talk about how to interact with one another can benefit the social team identification process as they provide rules on how to make everyone heard and feel able to contribute. Hence, it seems also favourable for generating a common team identity and potentially declining the situations of feeling like an outgroup member.

In this discussion, we have explained in what situations one or more team identification processes cannot be achieved in the hybrid setting. If neither social nor task-oriented team identification can be accomplished, the outgroup member arises, who feels frustrated, isolated, unmotivated and lacks team spirit, as no team identity can be established. Based on the ideas of the interviewees we have pointed out orientations to potentially overcome the outgroup member feeling by building up trust and using reflection sessions.

6. Conclusion

We would like to conclude our thesis by recalling the research problem on which our study is based. The case of New Tech served as an opportunity to research the complex concept of identity regarding the post-pandemic emerging hybrid work model. Adding to the rich research on self-identity in the organisational context, we determined the potential to focus on the interrelation of self-identity and team identification in the context of the hybrid work setting. Previous research predominantly focused on the interrelation of self-identity and organisational identity. The relevance of team identification was confirmed by recent literature that pointed out the tendency to identify with proximal targets (Ashfort, Moser & Bubbenzer, 2020) as well as our contact person Willy of the case company, that had a specific interest in how the hybrid

setting was experienced from a team perspective. Moreover, the concept of identity seemed to be examined so far more in a purely virtual work setting and not yet in a hybrid working model that combines working in the office and the home office.

We will outline in the following, how this setting served as a highly interesting context for our research objective and which theoretical contributions, as well as practical implications, can be gathered from this study. Finally, we will provide an outlook for scholars on potential future research.

6.1 Research Objective

With this study, we looked through “identity” glasses in the newly established hybrid team setting. Thereby, we took different perspectives within this setting to combine the opposing self and team level to understand certain behaviours and motivations with the purpose of generating a whole picture. Our following research question guided us through this process:

How are multiple self-identities balanced and team-identification processes experienced in a hybrid team setting?

By conducting our empirical research, we were able to combine the fields of self-identity, team identification, team identity and hybrid teams as shown in our visualisation. We were able to figure out that the identities changed within roles, meaning a determination took place (Nicholson, 1984; West, Nicholson & Arnold, 1987). Further, we were able to look at interrelations, which are outlined as our theoretical contributions in the next section.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution

Our study confirms that identification varies according to context (Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998). In line with identity theory (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008; Stryker & Burke, 2000) and the surfer image (Alvesson, 2010), the interviewees showcased multiple identities depending on working from home or in the office. Moreover, they identified in different ways with their team as suggested by the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Guided by our research question, our master thesis contributes to this theoretical background in four ways:

Firstly, our study contributes to the research in the field of organisational studies by illustrating how individuals construct their self-identities and balance their multiplicity according to the context of a hybrid team. We found that the office setting evokes a Talker identity which focuses on social interaction whereas the home office unleashes a Worker identity that is characterised by task orientation. We outlined how individuals balance the Talker and the Worker identity using identity cues such as noise-cancelling headphones that allow Elias to create a concentration bubble in the office setting or an open-door policy that welcomes social interaction. Further, we demonstrated that this balancing act can also be a challenge when the setting requires an individual to activate an identity that is not matching with their personally preferred identity in that situation, such as with Noah's dominant Worker identity in the office space.

Secondly, we examined how this balancing act of multiple self-identities interacts with the team-identification process in a hybrid team. We demonstrated that whether someone enacts the Talker or Worker identity also influences the track to team identification. We have stated that a dominant Talker identity leads to the social team identification track whilst the task-oriented team identification requires again a balance between Talker and Worker because good communication is needed to solve complex problems collectively. Hence, in the name of our title, balancing a Talker and Worker to ensure the synergy between identity and identification. Thereby, we combined the theoretical concepts in a way that offers a new perspective on working together as a team in a hybrid setting.

Thirdly, our study is of contemporary relevance given the recent popularity of hybrid work models as the solution to post-pandemic needs. Specifically, we provide an understanding of which setting evokes which self-identity, how the switch between the office and the home office is experienced and what this means for the team. Thereby, our study adds to the body of research regarding the influence of the pandemic on organisational life.

Finally, we make use of our empirical findings to contribute on a practical level to raising awareness of identity challenges that are experienced in the day-to-day work within a hybrid team. The study intends to help managers in determining the factors

for identity challenges and how to support their team to foster identification. The next section will further elaborate on the practical implications of this study.

6.3 Practical Implications

Overall, we raised the awareness of how hybrid working employees might find themselves in hybrid teams to give them as well as managers a better understanding of interactions. Thereby we identified potential challenges, such as identity juggling or even identity wrestling that might occur.

Another practical implication we pointed out, is practices that encourage the Talker and Worker self-identity, which then support team identification tracks of social and task-oriented to encourage team identity. These findings suggest that the management team can trust employees in the home office. Due to the Worker identity, they still will be productive in the home office as they choose it for task orientation. We stress, that both a Talker and a Worker are crucial to achieving team identification in situations like solving complex problems together as a team, disregarding the working location.

With this thesis, we guided attention towards identity cues that are supporting self-identities or switching those. Not only do identity cues occur in regards to the setting (office or home office) as well as the social structure (working alone or as a team), moreover headphones have been established as one identity cue that is used within the office to shift in the Worker. We argue it might be helpful to determine those and further identity cues within the team to ensure their visibility and handling.

Lastly, we shed light on hybrid team meetings, where experience and uncertainty lead to not knowing how to correctly behave for making everyone heard and giving the ability to contribute. Hence, establishing a fruitful discussion as it potentially would occur in the office. One reason is the lack of body language which makes it for all participants difficult to understand the situation correctly. Therefore, guiding the discussion as well as giving input can be stressful. Some solution-oriented interviewees pointed out potential paths such as building trust or reflection sessions to work on feeling comfortable with those meetings.

However, we would like to emphasise that we cannot offer best practices or outline success factors within the scope of our study but contribute on a theoretical level to the understanding of interactions and practices.

6.4 Limitations

Before outlining possible paths for future research, we would like to express our awareness of certain limitations of this study. Within the scope of our thesis, we shed light on self-identity and team identification in the hybrid work setting from the field of organisational studies. Our case company, however, usually hosts thesis students from the field of mechanical engineering and information technology. Therefore, we had the feeling that some of our interviewees were not familiar with the interview method and the intentions underlying our questions which made it sometimes hard for them to give reflective answers ad hoc.

Further methodological limitations, as previously outlined (section 3.6), included the necessity of some explanations during the interviews as they were held in English which is not the native language of either the employees or us. Moreover, the interviewees were pre-selected by Willy and their participation was based on voluntary acceptance of our inquiry. Also, as mentioned, we came into the interviews with a certain bias of our own work experience in a hybrid setting and therefore focused several questions on the potential of working from home.

However, the nature of the interviewee's work limited their option to work from home to project phases as their projects require them to work in the lab at times. Moreover, New Tech as a company encourages employees to work in the office as they spread their belief that innovation is created through interaction. Consequently, the answers of our interviewees might be slightly influenced by the predominant company culture. In the next section, we will outline how this factor could be included in further research.

6.5 Opportunities for Further Research

As mentioned in the limitations, a specific scope was set for our study. Therefore, we suggest doing similar research within a company where the focus is more on working from home for example in knowledge-intensive companies to have a comparison. We strongly believe other identities and identification processes could be found there.

Nevertheless, during our single case study, we gained a variety of insights that are interesting for future research:

Firstly, we would like to suggest extending our visualisation with another dimension and including the organisational identity. Therefore, it would be interesting to include an observation of the company's purpose and values that lead to behaviour on the team and individual level influenced by the culture. This would generate an even broader picture and could point out connections that are beneficial to know.

Secondly and connecting to the first opportunity, we invite future research to focus on normative control within this setting. During our interviews, we did have the feeling that all interviewees are influenced by the term innovation that they were focused very much on being open, communicative, discussing ideas, and sharing complex problems. Hence, they seem to have already internalised this mindset into the self (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and further seem to be employer branded to a certain extent by representing innovation with every thought.

Thirdly, it would be interesting to research if those identities and identification processes change over time once hybrid working employees are more used to working within this setting.

Fourthly, the study could be extended to more teams within other departments to generate a picture of the whole company or also ask for the manager's perspective on how they lead such teams to grasp the best practices that make hybrid teams work. Hence, fashionable ways of working can be identified.

Fifthly, it would be interesting to take the research on a quantitative level by measuring the productivity within task-oriented and social team identification. Therefore, two separate studies would be needed as those processes have different underlying parameters such as smaller task fulfilments to ensure that a full project is completed by the deadline or measurements based on peer assessment and feedback, wherefore good communication and a relaxed atmosphere is needed.

With these opportunities for further research, we encourage scholars as well as practitioners to take identity and specifically team identification into consideration when discussing the hybrid work setting with all its opportunities and challenges.

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8. Appendix

A. Interview Questionnaire

Name:

Date:

Situation/Observation:

1. Introducing ourselves

- ✓ Mention anonymity
- ✓ Ask for permission to record the interview

2. Introducing our research topic:

- We are looking into experiences in a hybrid team setting that has become a popular work environment. By a “hybrid team setting” we mean that you are working together with your team both in the office and from home.
- The structure we want to follow includes some introductory questions, followed by questions to the home office. Then we want to talk about work in the office and close the interview with some specifying questions.

3. Introductory questions:

- What is your current job role at New Tech AB?
- How long have you worked for New Tech AB?
- How is your team set up? Can you tell us who you are currently working with?
- In your team, what are the rules for working from home/office?
 - Are there specific office/home office days or is it flexible?
- Can you tell me about a moment when you felt great team spirit with your co-workers?

4. Home Office

- Can you describe a normal work day in the home office? How is your day structured? What are your tasks?
 - How do you feel working from home?

- What are the advantages of working from home in your opinion?
- What are the downsides of working from home in your opinion?
- How do you feel when you are in the HO and part of your team is in the office?
- Are there any tools/rituals or meetings that help you to stay connected with your team?
 - How do you communicate with your team at the beginning, during, and at the end of your work day?

5. Office:

- Can you tell me how your team is distributed in the office?
- How is your working day in the office looking differently compared to the HO-Day? What are your tasks here? Can you describe a normal day in the office?
 - How do you communicate with your team at the beginning, during, and at the end of your work day?
- Compared to the home office, how do you feel working in the office?
 - What are the advantages of coming to the office in your opinion?
 - What are the downsides of working in the office in your opinion?

6. Specifying/ Final questions:

- Do you remember an occasion when you thought coming to the office would have been better?
- How are the dynamics with your colleagues when you work from home vs. from the office?
 - When do you feel the most connected to your team during the week?
- Could you describe in as much detail as possible a situation in which you felt disconnected from your team?
 - What did you actually do when you felt disconnected from your team?
- Do you see any connections between the situation in which you felt disconnected and the fact that you didn't work together in the same place?
- All in all, would you say that you truly feel like part of your team? When more, when less?

7. Thank you so much for your responses and your time!

B. Spontaneous Follow-Up Questions

(Kvale, 1996)

Probing Questions:

- "Could you say something more about that?"
- "Can you give a more detailed description of what happened?"
- "Do you have further examples of this?"

Specifying Questions:

- "What did you think then?"
- "What did you actually do when you felt...?"
- "How did your body react?"
- "Have you also experienced this yourself?"

Interpreting Questions:

- "You then mean that...?"
- "Is it correct that you feel that...?"
- "Does the expression...cover what you have just expressed?"
- More speculative: "Do you see any connections between the situations where...?"
- Does this mean that, in that way, you identify with the team?