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Breaking the Comfort Zone

A Case Study of How Software Engineers' Organizational Identification and Motivation are Impacted in the Post-Covid and Post-Acquisition Business Setting

By

Nguyen Ngoc Ly Huong

Job van den Bijgaart

Supervisor: Daniel Hjorth

Examiner: Anna Jonsson

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Abstract

Title	Breaking the Comfort Zone: A case study on how software engineers' identification and motivation are impacted in the post-Covid and post-acquisition business setting
Authors	Nguyen Ngoc Ly Huong and Job van den Bijgaart
Supervisor	Daniel Hjorth
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Purpose	The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of how software engineers' identification and motivation are impacted in both the post-Covid and post-acquisition business setting. Further we aim to discover how software engineers typically think in relation to motivation and identification.
Theoretical perspective	The theoretical framework refers to literature grounded in software engineers, organizational identification, organizational culture, and employee motivation. We also outline research in relation to working-from-home and organizational culture with regards to acquisition and Covid pandemic literature.
Methodology	This research is a single case study of qualitative character that followed an interpretative and abductive research approach. The empirical data consists of thirteen semi-structured interviews and observations at our case organization's office.
Contribution	This research contributes to literature on software engineers in relation to organizational identification and employee motivation by examining this specific profession' characteristics as well as how they identify with their organization in a post-Covid & post-acquisition business setting. As well as how Software engineers are motivated in a post-Covid working-from-home business that gets acquired.
Key Words	Software engineer, organizational identification, identification, organizational culture, employee motivation, acquisition, Covid, working from home

Acknowledgement

Definitions

Covid-19 pandemic   The World Health Organization (WHO) defined covid as "*The Covid-19 pandemic is a global outbreak of coronavirus, an infectious disease caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) Virus*" (WHO, 2023). In this study, the Covid-19 pandemic is referred to as the pandemic, epidemic, Covid, Covid-19 and Covid pandemic.

Going back to normal   Going back to normal is a subjective term in the sense that it is difficult to justify what is normal and what used to be normal, considering the global covid-19 pandemic. In this study, going back to normal refers to working in the office, without Covid restrictions or rules, and operating in a way that is mostly similar to before the Covid-19 pandemic.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Problem background

Employee identification and motivation has grown in importance over the years. Research highlights the potential impact of both of these factors on businesses. For example, employee identification (towards the organization they work for) is commonly associated with greater job satisfaction, lower retention, and higher contextual and task performance (Fuchs, 2012). Employee motivation is simultaneously associated with better organizational performance (Dobre, 2013). The importance of employee motivation and identification is thus logical since the potential impact for business and its workers can be significant. In a publication in Harvard business review, four basic emotional needs/drivers were linked towards employee motivation, namely, drives to acquire, bond, comprehend and defend (Nohria, Groysberg, & Lee, 2008). These driving factors could be impacted by changes in the way we work, for example bonding (explained as connecting to individuals and groups) could be impacted by working from home, as bounding might be more difficult with physical distance. The Covid-19 pandemic is a phenomenon that had major implications for the world and its workers, people had to live in "isolation" and work from home when possible (WHO., 2020). After the Covid-19 pandemic many companies and their workers remained to work from home, this is also reflected in research stating that working from home has increased after Covid (Bick, Blandin, & Mertens, 2021). Could the post covid setting have an influence on the organizational identification and motivation of employees? This question was something that interested us as master students. There are mixed opinions around working from home from both the side of employers and from employees. It is difficult to make judgements or make sense of the post Covid phenomenon homogeneously, this study focuses on a specific case namely a consulting firm that outsources software engineering consultants. Priorly to covid there were already jobs and industries where working from home was possible. The software engineering consultants (we will also refer to them as; software engineers) could already work from home priorly to Covid; in addition, these types of consultants worked at the clients' offices as well. This interests us as we expect a more mature from of working from home or working at another location than the company office. Within this case there was thus already before Covid a situation where employees spend less time in the employer's office, something that is shared with the post covid work environment. Therefore, this study focuses on how software engineers' organizational identification and motivation was impacted by the post covid setting. In addition, this case has another unique factor, during the start of 2022 the company (based in

Sweden), we will refer to this company as "company X" was acquired by a much bigger firm within the same industry based in Germany, we will refer to the acquirer as "company Y". An acquisition that takes place while in a post-Covid setting is a new phenomenon as we never experienced acquisitions post-Covid before.

1.2. Problematization

Organizational identification and motivation are factors that can have an impact on business as there is a connection between organizational identification, motivation, and company performance (Fuchs, 2012; Dobre, 2013). The post-Covid and post-acquisition setting are problematic in the sense that these are new phenomena that could have an influence on employee identification and motivation. The world has never experienced a pandemic during the time that there were technological possibilities to make it possible to work from home. In addition, it is worth mentioning that today's economy is different from a century ago, nowadays people mostly use their knowledge and work with their head instead of their hands (Hislop, 2013). Both the knowledge intensive economy and the technological capabilities make it thus possible to work from home. Working from home increased during Covid, yet in the post covid setting it seems that the increase in working from home seems to be permanent (Saad, & Wigert, 2021). In the problem background section, factors contributing towards employee motivation such as Bonding were already mentioned to be more difficult to do while working from home (Nohria et al. 2008). Bonding is related to organizational culture literature, and it is thought that bonding plays an important role within organizational culture (Tuan, 2010). Organizational culture on the other hand has an influence on organizational identification and motivation from employees (Nohria et al. 2008). Moreover, organizational identification is a process that relies on communication (Cheney, & Tompkins, 1987), yet communication shifted towards a more digital format during Covid. This might thus create problems for the organizational identification process as there is a lower level of "social presence" within digital communication (Nguyen, Gruber, Marler, Hunsaker, Fuchs, & Hargittai, 2022). Online communication does not necessarily provide the same level of interaction or feeling that people have when meeting in real life (Aropah, Sarma, & Sumertajaya, 2020). The more permanent character of working from home that the world experiences in the post-Covid setting could thus be problematic as it could negatively influence organizational Identification and motivation of employees as well as organizational culture.

1.3.   Research question

Because of the vast impact Covid-19 had on the way we organized work during the pandemic and the influence we inherited from Covid in today's post-Covid setting we became motivated to study this phenomenon. The post-Covid setting is expected to influence organizational identification and employee motivation. We want to know how this happens in real life. Furthermore, it is one of the first opportunities to study acquisitions in a post-Covid setting. To research this unique case we drafted the following research question: How are post-Covid hybrid working software engineers' organizational identification and motivation impacted in a post-acquisition business setting?

1.4. The aim of study

The aim for this study is to get an in-depth understanding about how organizational identification and employee motivation has been impacted in the post-Covid working environment. Besides, this study investigates what it means to do an acquisition in a post covid setting and what implications this has on employee identification and motivation.

We want to study software engineers specifically as a profession because within research organizational identity more attention is devoted towards more general groups of professions such as managers, professional service workers or engineers in general. However, software engineering is something that is under considerable debate in terms of whether we could truly see it as engineering as it is not bound by the laws of physics and a higher degree of the art influences software engineering (Laplante, & Kassab, 2022). In addition, we study software engineering consultants, yet we doubt whether they could be generalized under the umbrella of consultants, their end goal "consulting towards a client" might be similar yet we expect very different personalities to be present among software engineering consultants compared to other types of consultants. Therefore, we hope to contribute towards literature on this profession specifically.

1.5. Research Outline

After this introduction, **chapter 2** will present relevant literature relating towards the phenomenon that we want to research. At the end of our literature review we will propose our theoretical framework and re-state the research question in relation towards the proposed literature review. In **chapter 3,** the methodology is discussed, this should give the readers a clear idea on how we constructed our research and explain why qualitative research as well as

other research traditions were chosen as methods for this thesis. Appendix 3,4,5 show our interview guides, hence these appendixes can be useful for a deeper understanding of what questions were prepared priorly towards the interviews. **Chapter 4** unveils our empirical findings, where we highlight how we view the software engineers that we interviewed, just as well as how the software engineers experience the post-Covid work environment as well as the post-acquisition setting. In **chapter 5,** the results from the empirical section will be discussed in relation towards our theoretical framework, the experiences we obtained from our research will support and add towards the theoretical framework we stated after the literature review, in the discussion we will propose a revised theoretical framework to explain our experiences during the interviews. Finally, in **chapter 6** the conclusion of our thesis will be made. Here the empirical findings, theoretical contributions, practical implications as well as the limitations and recommendations for future research will conclude what we found during our research.

2. Literature Review

Our own interpretation of the research question influences the literature chosen for the literature review. We interpret organizational identification as a process, we believe that this process is influenced through the post-Covid and post-acquisition setting, for example through a change in communication from more physical towards more digital communication. For this reason, we looked into literature that relates towards communication and the organizational identification process specifically. Furthermore, we researched software engineering consultants, because this profession is so specific it is hard to find research directly referring to this group of workers, therefore we dug into literature on knowledge workers as software-engineering is considered a knowledge intensive profession. In terms of motivation, we are aware that different kind of motivational factors can play a role, however we took into account that we research a post-Covid and post-acquisition setting specifically therefore we choose to focus on motivation in general and different factors/types of motivation that resonate around social interactions as motivating factor, inner motivation and potential rewards and opportunities that can motivate and individual. Finally, we believe that organizational culture is connected towards both organizational identification as well as employee motivation, here we focused on organizations "as a culture" as opposed to organizations that are a culture.

2.1. Organizational identification

2.1.1. The origins of organizational identification

The origin of organizational identification can be traced back for a long time; however, for this thesis we view the 1980s as a starting point of organizational identification as we know it today. Phillip Tompkins and George Cheney proposed a theory on organizational identification where organizational identification was separated from organizational commitment (Cheney, et al, 1987). Priorly to their research, the term organizational identification was already mentioned; however, the meaning was not the same, organizational identification and organizational commitment were often intertwined (Boroş, 2008). For example, one of the earliest research articles that argued organizational identification contributes to employee motivation, uses commitment & identification simultaneously (Foote, 1951). Other researchers similarly used commitment and identification simultaneously as well (Becker, & Carper, 1956; Gouldner, 1960; Rotondi, 1980). For example, *the identification of different forms of organizational commitment should also contribute to our understanding of such group attributes as cohesion"* (Gouldner, 1960). Cheney and Tompkins (1987) argued that organizational identity is a process (organizational identity development) where members of the organization adopt beliefs, values and symbols of the organization and let this influence their behavior (Cheney, et al., 1987). Researchers adopted the definition and thus the separation between organizational identification and commitment proposed by Cheney and Tompkins (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Keh, & Xie, 2009; Edwards, 2005; Fiol, 2002). Nevertheless, even after the proposed separation between organizational identification and commitment, still some researchers remained to use the terms intertwined (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). For this thesis, we define organizational identification in line with Cheney and Tompkins (1987) definition as a process where members of the organization adopt beliefs, values and symbols of the organization and let this influence their behavior, the identity mirrors an individual towards a group or organization. To continue from this definition as "a process" the next paragraph will discuss identity literature related to the process of identification.

2.1.2. Organizational identification as a process

Leon Anderson and David Snow researched homeless people and their identification and concluded that identification is a process, furthermore the concept of "self" was discussed (Snow, & Anderson, 1987). In terms of identification as a process, homeless people did not identify as homeless when they were living on the streets; however, after they lived on the

streets for longer, they did identify themselves as homeless (Snow, etal., 1987). In terms of "self-view" society was argued to have a negative view on homeless people, whereas Homeless people themselves appeared to have more positive views on who they are (Snow, etal., 1987). The thought of identification as a process was already described and noted by researchers before the homeless study (Foote, 1951; Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970; Kagan, 1958). Nevertheless, the homeless study from Snow and Anderson is still popular in today's identity literature, primarily to illustrate the process of identification, the self-view and the difference that can exist between one's self-view and how others perceive this (Brown, 2015). The self-view is a concept within identity literature that relates back to the question "Who am I". It is relevant for individuals to have an understanding about oneself as this is relevant in identifying with a certain group or organization (Brown, 2017). Within literature there is a wide consensus that organizational identification is a process; however, how that process is framed to theoretically work is something open for considerable debate. Andrew Brown argues that the process of organizational identification can be distinct into different forms, namely, discursive, dramaturgical, symbolic, socio-cognitive, and psychodynamic (Brown, 2017). Other researchers stressed the significance of vertical and horizontal communication, where vertical communication seemed to contribute more strongly towards organizational identification (Bartels, Peters, De Jong, Pruyn, & van der Molen, 2010). Various other research articles emphasize that feelings of trust, ethical leadership, corporate social responsibility, organizational justice all contribute to organizational identification (Al-Shalabi, 2019; Kia, Halvorsen, & Bartram, 2019; De Roeck, Marique, Stinglhamber, & Swaen, 2014; Fuchs, & Edwards, 2012). Clearly, organizational identification is a process that heavily relies on communication, as all of the above mentioned elements require communication in one way or another, which is something acknowledged by the previously mentioned group of researchers as well (Brown, 2017; Bartels, et al, 2010; Al-Shalabi, 2019; Kia, et al, 2019; De Roeck,et al, 2014; Fuchs, et al, 2012). In addition, it can be noted that terms used require personal judgment as organizational members have their own individual norms, values, and perceptions. This relates back towards the concept of self-view that can be explained as *"a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieu in which they live their lives"* (Watson, 2008, p.129).

To summarize the literature on organizational identification as a process a quote from the book *Identity in organizations, Building theory through conversations,* written by David Whetten

and Paul Godfrey reflects the literature quite well: *'Whereas identity is often concerned with the question "Who am I?" identification asks "How do I come to know who I am in relation to you?"'* (Whetten, & Godfrey, 1998, p.171). After the quote, the writers also emphasize that "you" could refer to organizations and "I" refers to the participant within such an organization (Whetten, et al., 1998, p.171). Because identification is a process where communication plays a central role, Covid-19 was seen as a factor influencing this process (people work from home rather than from the office). Therefore, literature on the difference between forms of communication, primarily digital v/s physical communication will be discussed in the next paragraph.

2.1.3. The influence of Covid-19 on communication

Covid-19 (also known as Coronavirus, Sars-Cov-2, or Corona) had a significant impact on the world and its workers (WHO, 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was advised to work from home when possible, quarantine when infected with the Virus and furthermore a wide range of restrictions where implemented in a domestic or local level (WHO, 2020). Literature on Covid-19 is still relatively scarce however some researchers have already published articles related to Covid-19. For instance, a study found that during times of the pandemic "higher social presence media" was more important in connecting individuals digitally compared to "lower social presence media" (Nguyen, et al., 2022). E-mail, social media, and games were categorized as lower social presence media, whereas text messaging, voice calls, and video calls were seen as medium to high social presence media (Nguyen, et al., 2022). Various research article related to Covid-19 communication argued that there are inequalities within digital-communication, furthermore all research articles concluded that digital communication increased for the great majority of participants in the study (Nguyen, Hargittai, & Marler, 2021; Katz, Jordan, & Ognyanova, 2021; Chu, Alam, Larson, & Lin, L, 2020). However, taking into account the nature of work as a software engineer, it seems that digital inequality is not something that is of interest for this thesis as software engineers have a high level of digital skills because both the development as well as the "customer/user needs" of software are part of their work (Humphrey, 1988).

2.1.4. Communication from a psychological viewpoint

As mentioned in the previous paragraph regarding organizational identification as a process, communication plays a central role in this process, thus it is relevant to look at communication science in general and have an understanding about the concept of communication. Both

sociological and psychological approaches exist within communication literature (Luhmann, 1992). Within sociological streams of communication literature, the emphasis is more about what communication means towards society and what kinds of communication systems exist within our society (Leydesdorff, 2001; McQuail, 1985). Social psychological literature was defined as *"the ways in which people affect, and are affected by others"* (Krauss, & Fussell, 1996). It was similarly suggested that communication is one of the ways that one affects another (Krauss, et al, 1996). In psychological literature on communication, the effect that communication has on an individual is thus the primary interest (Krauss, et al., 1996; Miller, 1967; Beattie, & Ellis, 2017). For this thesis, the interest focuses on software engineers as individuals; the psychological stream of communication literature is thus of relevance for this thesis. Within this branch of literature, there is the idea that physical communication has a higher effect on individuals than digital communication. Furthermore, physical communication is known to be more effective to create personal bonds (Kick, Contacos-Sawyer, & Thomas, 2015; Chambers, 2013). Research from Saint Francis University highlighted that due to the increase in usage of digital communication channels of generation Z, this group of workers might lack interpersonal communication skills, and this could negatively affect the creation of bonds/interpersonal connections at the workplace (Kick, et al, 2015). The research regarding generation Z was compiled before Covid-19, nowadays digital communication has increased as a result of Covid. This provides food-for-thought as people's interpersonal communication skills and bonds at the workplace could thus be under pressure at least according to research from Saint Francis University (Kick, et al, 2015). In the next paragraph, research on software engineers will be discussed to get a deeper understanding of what was already studied about this particular group.

2.1.5. The software engineer as knowledge worker

The primary group of interest for this thesis are software engineers. Software engineering is a verb that was defined as "*the disciplined application of engineering, scientific, and mathematical principles and methods to the economical production of quality software*". A software engineer is thus the person that engages in such activities for a profession (Humphrey, 1988). Coding is a term that occurred in every interview of this thesis, coding can be explained as; writing that occurs in computer programs to instruct computers (computer science.org., 2022). These definitions should provide an idea of what software engineers do. In the next part

of the literature review there will be a focus on how software engineers can be viewed as a person from a theoretical viewpoint.

Software engineers could be identified as knowledge workers, whose work is categorized as intellectual, creative, non-routine and involving both using knowledge as well as creating new knowledge (Hislop, 2013, p.71). In fact, software engineers are even named as an example of knowledge workers in the book "Knowledge management in organizations" authored by Donald Hislop (Hislop, 2013, p.71). Theory on knowledge workers is thus also applicable to software engineers. This is also reflected by various interview-based qualitative studies on software engineers. These studies do not directly call software engineers knowledge workers, but they all stress that software engineers actively use knowledge in their work, develop/use new knowledge which resonates with the definition of a knowledge intensive worker (Li, Ko, & Zhu, 2015; Lethbridge, Sim, & Singer, 2005; Pinto, Ferreira, Souza, Steinmacher, & Meirelles, 2019). Within knowledge worker literature, there is an extensive literature based on communities of practice. These communities of practice are defined as "*A group of people who have a particular activity in common, and as a consequence have some common knowledge, a sense of community, and some element of overlapping values*" (Hislop, 2013, p.157). Software engineers form a community of practice too, various researchers investigated software engineers in relation to communities of practice and confirmed this (Wenger, & Snyder, 2000; Wasko, & Faraj, 2000; Li, Grimshaw, Nielsen, Judd, Coyte, & Graham, 2009). Hislop emphasizes that communities of practice have "a shared sense of identity" (Hislop, 2013, p.159) This is relevant for this particular thesis as one of the points for investigation is identification amongst software engineers.

2.1.6. The influence of post-acquisition setting on organizational identification

The case that is investigated for this thesis is unique in the sense that we study software engineers in a post-Covid setting. Moreover, during the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, the company where all software engineers that were interviewed worked, got acquired by a much bigger international firm that has similar operations (outsourcing software engineers as consultants). Both software engineers and Covid were already discussed together with relevant literature, so now it is time to review some literature around mergers and acquisitions.

Theoretically a relationship between mergers and acquisitions towards organizational identification is already established by researchers. It was primarily found that during such times employees need time to adapt towards such changes and re-identify with the new

company they work for (Ullrich, Wieseke, & Dick, 2005; Cartwright, & Schoenberg, 2006). Ulrich, Van Dick and Tissington (2006) found constructed a model regarding organizational identification within mergers and acquisitions that took into account the following factors: pre-merger identification, communication, socio-emotional orientation, continuity, post-merger identification, Job security, Job satisfaction, turnover intentions, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and health complaints. This model will be used for this thesis as a theoretical background as it resonates with other literature that was discussed in prior paragraphs, the model can be found in the Appendix number 1. The model resonates with literature on organizational identification as a process, since the model acknowledges the importance of communication within the process of organizational identification (Van Dick, et al, 2006; Foote, 1951; Hall, et al, 1970; Kagan, 1958.). What is more, the concept of self-view resonates with socio-emotional orientation as this is part of one's self-view and could be part of the answer towards the question "who am I?" that is prevalent within self-view literature (Van Dick, et al, 2006; Brown, 2017). For these reasons, the model was selected, and it should form a theoretical foundation regarding the merger and acquisition setting of this thesis.

2.2. Motivation

2.2.1. Motivation at a glance

Motivation has been the topic of research interests over years. Motivation is generally regarded as a "factor driving behavior" (Hidayah & Nazaruddin, 2017, p.257), which provides guidance for individuals to perform a particular activity or behave in specific ways to gain certain goals and satisfaction (Clayton, 2002; Lolowang, Troena, Djazuli & Aisjah, 2019). According to Ivancevich, Konopaske & Matteson (2008, p.111), motivation is explained as "being made up of the last three distinct components: direction, intensity, and persistence". In relation to employment, work motivation is defined as a series of energetic forces initiated from both within the employees and beyond their individual being (Pinder, 1998). This has been supported in the view that motivation is regarded as the psychological process created by the interaction between individual employees and the surrounding environment (Latham & Pinder, 2005; Engström & Zidén, 2020), which refers to the working environment in regard to motivation for work. Among numerous literatures discussing different motivation classifications, Alvesson and Kärreman (2018)'s study will be substantially analyzed in this research. Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) summarizes three main forms of motivation theories,

including the intrinsic motivation (also known as humanistic psychology), instrumental motivation, and interactive motivation.

2.2.2. Inner motivation

The inner motivation, or humanistic psychology, refers to the demands, expectations and driving forces of individuals (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2018). Within this motivational psychology tradition, Maslow's Need theory (1943) is well recognized, which hierarchically classified human needs in the form of the pyramid, including physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. In this study, Maslow claimed that behavior is motivated by the lower need until it is fulfilled, and then, the next higher need in the pyramid plays the role of motivator. Nonetheless, researchers argue that the needs do not necessarily occur in the hierarchical order as suggested by Maslow. Specifically, individuals tend to move up and down the hierarchy, without waiting for the lower needs to be satisfied to proceed to the next level (Pheysey, 1993). Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) agrees that Maslow's theory seems to interpret human behaviors in a mechanical approach while in reality, there might be a combination of motives involved in a particular situation. Another famous motivation study in this tradition is Herzberg's two-factor theory published in 1959, which consists of *hygiene factors* (or *dissatisfiers*) and *motivation factors* (or *satisfiers*) (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1959). Hygiene factors relate to the conditions, the context or environment in which people perform their work, such as the leadership styles, organization culture, interpersonal relations, working conditions, salaries, and policies. On the other hand, the motivation factors relate to the content of the work itself. These factors drive satisfaction for an individual's needs for self-fulfillment in one's work, which include achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and personal growth (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2018; Furnham, 2012). Though the two-factor theory corresponds well with Maslow's theory, researchers argue that Herzberg's study ignored individual differences in employees' job preference, or the overlapped factors as sources of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Furnham, 2012).

2.2.3. Instrumental motivation

The instrumental motivation puts emphasis on people's orientation towards obtaining rewards and averting punishments. This motivation perspective strongly influences the expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), in which the importance of understanding people's expectation, rather

than their needs, is highlighted (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2018). Vroom (1964) claimed the proposition of his motivation theory as:

> *The force on a person to exert a given amount of effort in performance of his job is a monotonically increasing function of the algebraic sum of the products of the valences of different levels of performance and his expectancies that this amount of effort will be followed by their attainment (Vroom, 1964, p.284).*

Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) found that the motivational strength in the expectancy theory heavily depends on the importance of the goal and individual's expectation of the profitability resulting from realizing this goal. Furthermore, as Vroom (1964) acknowledges the probable difference in individual's preference, this theory is not completely a mechanically conditioned behavior, which also works as the foundation for many studies in expectancy theories afterwards.

2.2.4. Interactive motivation

In this motivation form, Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) points out the importance of the social dimensions of motivation, which concerns the interrelation between individuals and the social groups and standards. The interactive motivational factors are classified as norms, reciprocity, and identity.

Firstly, norms guide the standards or ideal set of behaviors that one is supposed to have in a particular context, for instance the framework of an organization or profession (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2018). Although norms vary depending on different organization, industry, and social cultures, they are also concerned with instrumental conditioning. As people generally expect to feel "normal" and are at the same pace with the commonplace standards to which they profess, following norms is perceived as a vital driving force for individual's behavior and actions to look like others and not deviate in their particular profession, organization or social cultural contexts (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2018).

The second motivational factor is reciprocity, which is perceived as one of the universal norms in a variety of social contexts. Specifically, the rule of reciprocity indicates that one may give positive responses to those who have done, supported, or given something to that individual (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2018). With regard to employment, the extent and relevance of the positivity and negativity associated with employees' job greatly depend on how they make

sense of it, which is influenced by not only the employees themselves but also the people surrounding them in organizations. Accordingly, Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) conclude that reciprocity constitutes the moral dimension and alludes to the expected norms and reasonable perceptions that one is supposed to follow, such as in the framework of organizational culture or social interaction at the workplace.

The identity of individuals is the third motivational factor in Alvesson and Kärreman (2018)'s study. By answering questions like who I am and how should I behave, the individuals construct their identity through self-perception, which guides their thoughts, feelings, values, and actions in a certain way. This is in line with Mitchell, Rediker, and Beach (1986)'s report that one's particular self-image and interpretation usually impact his or her decisions. In the context of the workplace, the individuals' identity at work is generally concerned with the employee identity at their organization, which together with the social relationships among employees, profession, organization, and its culture, constitutes the source of identity. Moreover, as individuals are highly flexible, it is essential to be aware that identity is perceived as a process, rather than a fixed set of characteristics (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2018). Another study by Kärreman and Alvesson (2009) also found that it is natural from individuals' perspective to respond to certain norms, standards, and expectations at the workplace as a result of identity and conformity. Nevertheless, employees may be relatively independent from the workplace-related norms. In this regard, it is essential to distinguish the concept of social identity, which is referred to the associations or categories with which people identify such as organizations, unit, professions, gender (Turner, 1984 cited in Alvesson and Kärreman, 2018), from things that are embraced by the values and norms associated with a specific context. Particularly, an individual may refer to social identity as a starting point for his or her self-categorization and perception; however, it does not necessarily direct a specific value orientation. Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) also concludes from the interactive motivations that there is commonly an interaction between the different elements, which involve organization norms, reciprocity as part of the employer - employee relationship, work-related identity, and other conditions, that influences not only the motivation but also the view of these specific elements.

2.2.5. The influence of Covid-19 on motivation

Covid and post-Covid has led to significant changes in the way people relate to work via place, and this, in turn, can have implications on employee motivation. Studies on workspace have

found working in office, working from home, and hybrid working as the common forms of working conditions nowadays. To begin with, working in the office, which involves a traditional physical space where employees can come to perform their task on a regular basis, is considered as the most traditional way among the three forms of workspace (Scholtholt and Tran, 2022). This workspace generally includes tools for employees to perform their tasks, such as desks, chairs, telephones, computers, etc. Some workplaces may have interchangeable rooms to be flexibly adjusted to meet the demands of people working in the office. Secondly, working from home enables employees to work remotely outside of the office. In daily context, people sometimes use "working from home" and "remote working" interchangeably. However, there might be a slight difference as remote working is defined by Kniffin et al. (2020) as "*work from anywhere*" that could be any different locations outside of the office and not necessarily from home (Kraaij & Spenner Crona, 2021). Hybrid working is considered as the combination between working in offices and working from home, which is generally believed to provide employees with more flexibility in space between in-office and at home. Prior to Covid pandemic, in-office working is traditionally considered as the dominant workspace, provided that many employees might not have space to work from home, and businesses are concerned about employees' efficiency, difficulties in management, or risk of data breach. Nonetheless, the Covid pandemic has made working from home increase on a larger scale than ever before and become gradually common (Kniffin et al., 2020; Streitfeld, 2021).

With the widespread of Covid pandemic and changes in workspace, Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon (2013) reports that working from home has a negative impact on employee motivation and job satisfaction. A study by Zhang (2015) cited in Scholtholt and Tran (2022) also highlights the relation between changes in workspace and employee's work satisfaction, of which social relations and work-life balance are considered among key influential factors. As there is a strong relationship between job satisfaction and employee motivation (Scheers & Botha, 2014), changes in workspace may have influence on employee motivation through such job satisfaction factors.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCED) (2021), sentiments of loneliness and disconnection from society increased between mid-2020 and the first half of 2021 as an impact of Covid. Specifically, recent research revealed that up to 20 percent of people in 22 European OECD nations had the feeling of loneliness most or even all of the time in early 2021, which has increased from the ratio of 1 in 7 people during the period

April – June 2020. In addition, the percentage of people feeling left "out of society" has soared dramatically, from only 1 in 13 people as of 2016 to 1 in 3 people, as of Mar 2021 (OECD, 2021). The increasing percentage of loneliness and disconnection probably becomes more challenging in the context of working from home where social interactions with colleagues are limited compared to traditional working in office, which implies influences on the extrinsic motivational factors for employee's work. The social facilitation aspect has also been supported by Forsyth (1998) that distance between co-workers can change employee motivation for work (Scholtholt and Tran, 2022).

Another dimension that might impact employee motivation in the post-Covid is the work-life balance. OECD (2021) indicated that employee's work-life balance is potentially negatively impacted during remote work when their work seemed more likely to seep into personal life. Zhang et al. (2021) also agreed that working from home during Covid potentially blur the frontiers between professional work and personal life, which is likely to create more mental problems for employees. Besides, a number of studies have highlighted that the work-from-home mode resulting from Covid epidemic would increase workload from the employees' perspectives, which probably induces them to alter their working habits or to work faster (Wang et al., 2020; Ingusci et al., 2021). Although the above studies mainly concentrate on working from home during the Covid pandemic, which probably associates with higher stress and less social interactions with colleagues compared to the hybrid working applying post- Covid, these researches still have implications on employee motivation due to changing in the workspace, provided that there is limited literature available in this relation. Accordingly, businesses and researchers can further examine motivation and workspace in this respect.

2.2.6. The influence of post-acquisition setting on motivation

As mergers and acquisitions incur the shift in business ownership, there are probably the changes in organizational cultures and leadership, which traditionally have been the source of tension and uncertainty that impact employee motivation. Specifically, Schweizer and Patzelt (2012) found that the integration procedure after acquisition brings about enormous uncertainties associated with the change of existing organization structures, cultures, working relationships, etc., which many individual employees try to avoid. Moreover, it may take a lengthy process to build trust between the employees with the new organization (Stahl and Sitkin, 2005), which again results in individual's uncertainties and questions about their identity, belief, and assumptions associated with the new organization identity. A study of

Kummer (2008) also reports that motivational factors including the environment, goals, and employee wellbeing are significantly influenced by acquisitions. Accordingly, an individual's work motivation is impacted as a result of the changes and uncertainties in the motivational factors discussed in previous literature.

2.3. Organizational culture

Another part that is both connected towards organizational identification and employee motivation is organizational culture. Research proposed a conceptual framework where disrupting external changes were linked towards organizational culture. The organizational culture influenced organizational identification as the members of the organization questioned "what is the organization really about" also during times of disruptive changes (Ravasi, & Schultz, 2006). This connection obviously exists no matter the external circumstances; however, the point of the research article in particular is that during times of disruptive changes people will re-assess and ask the identifying questions again due to a change in situation (Ravasi, et al, 2006). In terms of motivation, culture has been acknowledged as a factor that could drive employee motivation, which establishes a link between both motivation and organizational culture (Nohria, et al, 2008). Because of the link between the two main concepts of this thesis and organizational culture, it is relevant to have a deeper understanding of organizational culture itself. Within organizational culture literature, two major streams distinguish themselves. One stream of literature focuses on the idea that organizations have a culture while another stream of literature focuses on organizations as a culture. In research from Linda Smircich, a wide range of cultural views in relation to organization studies are presented (Smircich, 1983). Three primary thoughts around organizational culture are analyzed and compared by Smircich (1983), namely culture as an independent variable, culture as an internal variable, and culture as a root (metaphor). Culture as an independent variable views organizational culture as a contextual factor of organizations. For example, differences in management attitudes within organizations are studied in relation towards culture. Culture could thus influence the attitudes of the members that are part of this organizational culture (Smircich, 1983). Within the stream of culture as an internal variable, organizational culture is seen as a produced by-product from organizations, for example famous individuals, rituals, or ceremonies (Smircich, 1983). Besides, it is believed that these symbolic parts of the produced culture can contribute to the organization's performance, as organizational members come to share values, beliefs, and social ideals (Smircich, L., 1983). This organizational culture as a

by-product, is argued to work as "normative glue" that holds the organization together (Smircich, 1983). The third thought, "culture as a root" differentiates from the culture as a variable stream in the way that culture as a root views organization studies as a social phenomenon, and organizational culture is a particular form of human expression (Smircich, 1983).

To continue, other researchers argued that organizations do not have a culture, but organizations are a culture. This stream of literature argues "organizations are created by their daily performance" and within this daily performance culture is seen as the most powerful operating process (Czarniawska-Joerges, & Wolff, 1991). This resonates with other literature discussed in our literature review where employee motivation (part of a company's daily performance) is influenced through organizational culture (Nohria, et al, 2008). Priorly organizational identification was defined as a process where members of the organization adopt beliefs, values and Symbols of the organization and let this influence their behavior, the identity mirrors an individual towards a group or organization (Cheney, et al, 1987). Similar wording is used in literature on organizational identification as with organizational culture; as within both, beliefs, values, symbols of the organization are acknowledged to have an influence on the members within these organizations, linking the two concepts (Cheney, et al, 1987; Smircich, 1983). Overall, organizational culture is seen as an influential factor on both organizational identification and motivation (Ravasi, et al, 2006; Nohria, et al, 2008). In the next section the theoretical framework will be discussed.

2.4. Theoretical framework

In this section, the theoretical framework proposed for this thesis will be further elaborated on. Below there is also a visual overview of how major parts of the theoretical framework are connected and create the theoretical framework as a whole. The post-Covid setting and the post-acquisition setting are expected to negatively influence employee motivation and organizational identification. This negative influence would be explained through the impact of both the post-Covid setting and the post-acquisition setting on the organizational culture, resulting in a lower level of organizational identification and motivation, as both employee motivation and organizational identification are connected towards organizational culture (Ravasi, et al, 2006; Nohria, et al, 2008). In addition, culture has a central role within acquisitions, and it can determine the success or failure towards a large extent (Bouwman, 2013). A conceptual model proposed in other research already connected disrupting external

to have an impact on organizational culture (Ravasi, et al, 2006). An acquisition and the Covid pandemic can be seen as such disrupting factors, we thus expect to find a relationship between these concepts. Due to an expected increase in working from home and a change in communication from in person communication towards online communication, it is expected that organizational identification will decrease as digital communication does not have the same level of "social presence" as compared to in person communication (Nguyen, et al, 2022; Nguyen, et al, 2021; Katz, et al, 2021; Chu, et al, 2020). In terms of motivation, research emphasizes that working from home negatively affects job satisfaction and employee motivation. It is thus in line with expectations of the negative influence of Covid according to Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon (2013), Scholtholt and Tran (2022). In terms of the post-acquisition setting, Kummer (2008) emphasized that motivational factors are influenced by a change such as an acquisition, there is thus a relationship between these factors. After an acquisition, it takes a long time to re-built trust and settle uncertainties (Stahl, et al, 2005; Schweizer, Lars & Patzelt, Holger, 2012), which possibly has adverse influence on employee motivation as well. Moreover, Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) claimed that the identity of individuals is one of motivational factors affecting their decisions by guiding their thoughts, values, and actions. In the workplace context, organizational identification, which may concern profession, organization culture, relationships with colleagues, can influence and impact how employees are motivated. Therefore, the decreased organizational identification may lessen employee motivation. It is thus in line with expectations that the post-Covid setting and post-acquisition setting will negatively affect organizational identification and employee motivation. Below a visual representation of the theoretical framework is shown where all concepts are demonstrated in connection creating the empirical framework as a whole for this research.

Theoretical framework

Organisational culture

Post-covid setting

Post acquisition setting

Organisational identification

Employee motivation
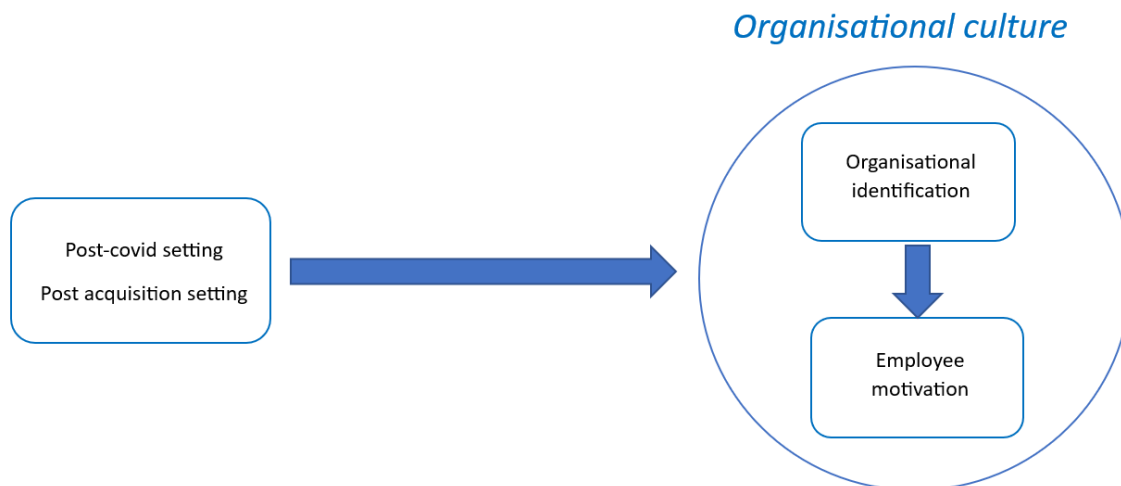
Research question

With the discussed theoretical concepts and framework on employee motivation and identification, the paper aims to address the research question that how post-Covid hybrid working software engineers' identification and motivation are impacted in a post-acquisition business setting.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, research methodology is to be discussed in detail to equip readers with an understanding of the strategy and method of research to find solutions for the research questions. First, the chapter discusses the philosophical grounding, research approaches and reasons behind these chosen methods, which are qualitative methods and interpretive tradition. Second, we present the research designs, process and how the empirical data was collected and analyzed. Finally, the reflexivity and ethical consideration of the research will be addressed at the end of this chapter.

3.1. Philosophical grounding

The purpose of our study is to gain an in-depth understanding of how individual's identification with the business and motivation for working are impacted in the changing contexts. Specifically, we aim to examine the software engineers and their ways of making sense of the identification and motivation for their hybrid working business that gets acquired in post-Covid

setting. As identification is strongly associated with how employees create meaning of their organization and profession throughout changes, it is broadly subjective depending on an individual's perception of values and norms from time to time. Furthermore, employee motivation might be defined and interpreted subjectively according to individual's different priorities and evaluation which employees attach to their work and employer. Accordingly, the interpretivism, in which the "reality" is socially constructed through acts of interpretation (Prasad, 2018), is found suitable in the view that it respects differences between individuals and the natural science's objects and thus enables researchers to comprehend the subjective meaning of social actions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Moreover, the *Verstehen* approach, one of the intellectual heritages of interpretivism, is appropriate to embrace both explanation and interpretative understanding of the social action to come up with the causal explanation of the causes and effects (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Weber, 1947), which is therefore in line with the study's goal to understand the meaning of identification and motivation for those software engineers involved in the contextual situation.

The symbolic interactionism (SI) tradition, which is characterized by the view that all social phenomena are symbolic, and that events, objects and actions hold meanings for different individuals, was strongly influential in our approach (Prasad, 2018). Symbolic interactionism, in which "*objects and events have no intrinsic meaning apart from those assigned to them by individuals in the course of everyday social interaction*" (Prasad, 2018, p.21), acknowledges different perspectives and is characterized by considering the negotiation of these different perspectives in real life (Prasad, 2018). In this study, not only different employees can have different understanding of meaning attached to the concept of identification and motivation but also these connotations can also change over time, especially in the post-Covid and post-acquisition business setting. This also aligns with SI's emphasis on the significance of the *self* when constructing reality (Martindale, 1981) and the "*multiplicity of realities within any situation*" (Prasad, 2018, p.22). Observation and interviews are the two favorable methods in the symbolic interactionism tradition and were substantially utilized in our research. Specifically, we try to become "more *participative* in nature" (Prasad, 2018, p.25) to observe the typical working day of software engineers, how they interact with each other, and the organizational culture to understand as much as possible their sense making process. In terms of interviews, we focused on in-depth and open-ended interviews which enables interviewees a great extent of control over the direction of the interviews. Additionally, the questions were designed to emphasize on the "how" respondents perceive and interpret the changing social

situations rather than the "what" is or was happening (Prasad, 2018), which enables us to explore insightful and tacit understanding of the software engineers and their self-identity and sense making in the post-Covid and post-acquisition setting.

3.2. Research approach

Our research is mainly influenced by qualitative research approaches in the symbolic interactionism tradition. Qualitative research has been described by Patton (1985, p.1) as "*an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there…The analysis strives for depth of understanding*". By attempting to understand the sense-making and interpretations of reality at a particular time and context (Merriam, 2002), the qualitative research supported by semi-structured interviews for a specific case study is believed to provide comprehensive understanding for our research question. Besides, the earlier discussed *verstehen* approach with emphasis on the interpretive understanding of social action as "*being meaningful to actors and therefore needing to be interpreted from their point of view*" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.20; Weber, 1947) supports our research in comprehending the meanings that individual software engineers attach to their identification and motivation at work. This has been supported by Seaman (1999) in the view that qualitative methods increase the diversity and the richness of data collected for software engineers particularly. Also, though these concepts have become commonplace in literature, the qualitative approach motives us to broaden the meaning of these social phenomena and examine them in great details by putting them in the new context (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018), which is the unique combination of the recent post-Covid hybrid working and post-acquisition business setting.

The abduction approach, which is considered as the movement between deduction and induction, is primarily applied in this research. With the process involving the application of the established theory, the observation of empirical phenomena, and the imaginative causal explanation of the new interpretive theory (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007), the abductive method is believed to provide flexibility between theory and empirical facts. By encouraging novel thinking from empirical findings, abduction approach does not simply validate theories but strongly contributes to "*the suggestion of relationships and connections that had not previously been suspected, relationships that change actions and perspectives*" (Weick, 1989, p.524 cited in Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). Alvesson & Sköldberg (2018) also supported the view that the abductive approach continuously makes sense and reinterprets between theoretical concepts

and empirical data. Accordingly, abduction is appropriate in our research as this approach does not constrain us within a limited literature, but rather brings about a flexible theoretical framework for us to sufficiently interpret and observe the phenomenon as the "*opportunities for breakdowns and problematization*" (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007, p.1269). In the meantime, instead of simply letting the empirical data lead us, we are supposed to continuously inspire the construction and framing of these empirical findings by actively engaging in the languages and theories, which are central in the abductive approach (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). Therefore, the abduction method substantially facilitates a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of how software engineers' identification and motivation are impacted in the post-acquisition business setting after Covid pandemic.

To gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, we decided to research a single case study applying semi-structured interviews and observation. Case study is perceived by Elliott and Lukes (2008) as a research genre, which focuses on capturing "*the complexity of relationships, beliefs and attitudes within a bounded unit*" (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p.8). Studying a specific case study enables us to dig into the real context for in-depth comprehension of an individual's perception, in this case the software engineers, rather than just "*simply providing decontextualized 'evidence'*" (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p.4). Furthermore, Bell, Bryman & Harley (2019) agrees that compared to multiple case organizations, concentrating on a single case study at an organization enables researchers to have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, we believe researching a case study targeting a software company that gets acquired is the most appropriate to examine how post-Covid hybrid working software engineers' identification and motivation are impacted in such a changing environment.

3.3. Research context

Our research started with the attempts to figure out how employee's motivation and identification are impacted when working-from-home becomes commonplace in the post-Covid. The Covid pandemic and post-Covid has changed the way people relate to work regarding workplace, work schedule, flexibility, which is believed to influence how individuals identify with their company and how they are motivated for work. Thus, we looked for a business that adopts the hybrid working model and ideally has project-based employees working onsite at the client's office, which is perceived as more challenging for businesses in terms of employee motivation and identification management. At the same time, companies in

the field of information technology (IT) services have been our area of interest because of their knowledge-intensive nature, agility to keep up with technology trends, and substantial development prospects in future. Keeping these criteria in mind, we approached company X and successfully arranged an appointment with the manager at Malmo office to further discuss our research plan. In order to ensure the full anonymity of the company and its employees participating in the research, "X" is used as a pseudonym in our study.

As a brief introduction, X is an IT service company specialized in programming and digital solutions. Company X has approximately over 60 employees, mostly software engineers, with five offices in Sweden and Denmark. X is considered as a flat organization with a few layers of leadership, typically including the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), software engineers, and some office employees. Prior to the Covid pandemic, X already applied the hybrid working in which employees can work from home, work at the office, or work at the client's premises depending on the scopes of work. At the moment, the firm continues applying the work-from-home approach that employees can opt for their favorable working conditions, and they are required to be present at the office only once a month for the two-hour compulsory meeting on Friday afternoons. Compared to the situation before Covid pandemic in which no software engineers work more than 90% from home, the percentage of employees working from home has increased significantly that some software engineers fully work remotely.

Back to our communication with company X, our first meeting with the COO was conducted at the company's office in Malmo in Mar 2023. During the meeting, we introduced our interests in researching the company, the planned research topics, and also had a chance to understand more about the company's expectation, its business, current working-from-home model, and its recent acquisition. Particularly, company X was acquired by company Y, whose name is used as a pseudonym for anonymity purpose, in the second quarter of 2022. Y is an IT service provider with headquarters in Germany and twelve subsidiaries in Europe (including the newly acquired business X). After the acquisition, the key stakeholders of X continue to lead the business in Sweden and Denmark under the framework of company Y. In addition to the post-Covid setting discussed earlier, we realized the acquisition, which probably incurs the change in organizational culture and leadership style, is another interesting aspect that has implications on how employees identify with their new employer and how motivation is related. Understanding the uniqueness of the case, we decided to specifically target the software

engineers in Malmo office to get a deeper understanding how their motivation and identification are impacted in the context of both post-Covid and post-acquisition. After finalizing the research purpose, we emailed the research proposal to the Malmo site manager and scheduled for another onsite meeting. During the second appointment, we quickly reached an agreement on the research question, research approach, timelines as well as the requirements for the group of interviewees. We were also introduced to the software engineers at company X, had some small conversations with them, and were guided with an office tour to observe in detail the office's design and how employees interact with each other in preparation for the next phase of research data collection.

3.4. Data collection

As data is considered as the raw material on which the research findings and analysis are based (Styhre, 2013), the data collection process will be explained as follows. The empirical data will be collected through office observation and 13 semi-structured interviews, of which each interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes. The interview process was conducted within a month, starting from March 2023.

In preparation for the interview, we discussed and aligned on the interview goal, target interview groups, criteria for interviewees as well as the list of questionnaires. In order to gain a diverse perspective from the software engineers, we tried to seek for interviewees with different backgrounds, including the age, nationality, tenure of work, scopes of work (whether one mainly works on site with client or works independently with internal colleagues), and current working condition (whether one has more hybrid working or completely remote working). Furthermore, we applied the mix of interview methods that combine both the offline and online interviews, in which we strived to conduct the face-to-face interviews as much as possible to better engage, build connection as well as observe the non-verbal gestures of the interviewees. To gain the overview of employee motivation and identification from both the employer and the employee perspectives, we decided to conduct interviews into two stages for three groups of employees: (1) ten software engineers in Malmo office, (2) two people managers of company X, and (3) one HR manager of company Y in Germany. In the first stage, the software engineers were asked about how they experienced the Covid pandemic and the post-acquisition and whether this has resulted in a changed perception of motivation and identification. After interviewing this group, we reviewed again the interview guidelines for the managers and HR group to reflect additional questions on how they perceive certain

comments/ insights from the responses of software engineers during past interviews. Accordingly, for the second and the third groups of people manager at company X and Y in the second stage, the interview focuses on their perspectives towards the hybrid working post covid how they view the employees' feedback regarding employee motivation and identification concerning workplace, culture, and the acquisition. In addition to the interviews, careful observation is conducted during our four times visiting the office in Malmo to evaluate the organization culture as well as how the employees engage with each other.

3.5. Data analysis

The interviews, which were all in English, were recorded where possible and then transcribed to capture all the conversation. To enrich the data quality, we also noted down the observation during the interview in regards of eye contacts, body language, the voice tone, and ways of responding to the questions. Then, the empirical material will be reduced and analyzed from both perspectives: "what" topics are discussed and the "how" information is communicated. Observation also plays an important role in this process as it may reveal implicit insights from the interviewees' behaviors such as eye-contact, voice tone, body gesture. Based on this, we sit together to discuss findings that we found interesting related to the research topic and to figure out the similarities from the interviews. Accordingly, possible themes were created when multiple interviewees shared their view or made sense of social reality in similar ways. Moreover, note-taking from office observations was reviewed to see if there were contradictions or similarities in how the interviewees made sense of social reality in an organization context compared to the earlier results from the interview. The continuous discussion among us also played a vital role in facilitating creative and critical ideas, which helped sharpen our themes for the analysis parts.

3.6. Reflexivity and ethical consideration

Considering that the abductive approach and interpretivism are applied in our research, the reflexivity of the study is therefore in need of consideration. According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018), reflection and interpretation are two essential dimensions to be considered in qualitative research. During our data collection process, the external factors that might impact the empirical findings were taken into consideration. Accordingly, we strived to interpret the collected data from an objective standpoint with minimal pre-assumption or bias by the theoretical assumptions or feelings. Moreover, the reflexive was constantly

demonstrated during our work of data collection and interpretation. Specifically, critical thinking, reflection, and open discussion were encouraged during our cooperation to ensure not only the mutual understanding from "what" the interviewees said but also the reflective and objective perspective on "how" the information was interpreted. Furthermore, we found that our cultural differences between the Western and Asian styles helped us supplement and strengthen each other's argument in order to come up with a more diverse interpretation.

Ethical consideration is an important factor to be taken into consideration. In this research, we clearly showed commitment in keeping all responses completely anonymous and confidential to ensure information privacy of both the research company and the participants. Moreover, before every interview we tried to clearly mention the purpose of the interview, re-emphasize the anonymous characteristics of the interview, and ask for record permission so that the interviewees were completely willing and comfortable to share their opinions.

4. Empirical findings

During the empirical data analysis process, we noted certain themes that were repeatedly mentioned and demonstrated throughout the interviews and office observation. This chapter will discuss the key themes that frame our empirical findings regarding the organizational identification and motivation of software engineers. Firstly, we present the key themes that were identified as influential factors impacting how software engineers relate to work and how they are motivated, which are informality, culture, and the "social bubble". Then, the section continues to discuss the struggle in relation to the workplace from the side of both employees and employer, as in the context of post-Covid working from home became increasingly common. Furthermore, we dig deeper into the impact of the post-Covid and the post-acquisition setting and the identification and motivation of software engineers. Finally, a brief conclusion is presented to give readers the overall assessment from our empirical findings.

4.1. Informality is the comfort zone of software engineers

During our interviews a few things were shared amongst all the software engineers. Firstly but not surprisingly, software engineers just want to do their work and not be bothered too much with anything else. All software engineers agreed that "*the most boring part of my work is administration and documentation". I*n addition to this, many software engineers shared that they think meetings are boring too, and that they actually prefer to be working on their codes.

However, this all being said coding can be done everywhere, whether it is from home, in the company office, in the client's office or just pretty much anywhere. This was also reflected by the software engineers themselves that most of the software engineers did not prefer the client's office location (they only go when it is demanded). Furthermore, there was a wide range of preferences, ranging from dark cold cellar rooms to beach side restaurants with an ocean view. Some interviewees choose to go to the office, but this was primarily because their home office was either not existing (no space) or the environment was not right for them, in which young children were mostly given as an example of distracting factors that disrupts concentration at home.

> *"There's a coffee house in the south of Sweden, way out on the east which is like during this time of year when it's winter, there are no tourists. There is nothing so it starts at 11. I go there and I tell them that you can put anything on my tab, I set up my computers on the top floor, which is completely empty, and it has like panorama views over the ocean. It's like my living room and they just bring me coffee and I work, and they bring me lunch and everything." – Erik*

> *"I have a special workplace which is not exactly at home, but rather in a cold dark cellar room, which I rent. This is excellent because I'm not disturbed by other family members." – Martin*

This comfort goes beyond the work location, it is also about the connection that the software engineers have towards the company's norms and values, which facilitates a sense of comfort too. For example, family and friends are seen as an important aspect of life, both the company management and the software engineers emphasized this. The company managers stressed that the office is a place where your friends and family are welcome, you can bring them here if you want to, of course there are social limits to it, but everyone is welcome and so far, no misuse has occurred according to the company management. This was observed during one of the interviews as well when two small children were walking by the conference room where we conducted interviews to play video games and have some snacks in the office kitchen. For us as interviewers this was somewhat of a strange occurrence, yet our interviewee waved towards the girls and explained that it is okay to bring your kids to work if this is convenient for you.

Informality observed within the office decoration

During our office visits, we observed the entire office, and we found a very informal atmosphere was in place at the company office. When entering the office, the first thing that we could see was a big wooden bar with decorations on it and a poster quoting "*no working during drinking hours*". In the afternoon, the lights decorated on the ceiling turn on with pink, purple, and blue lights making it the real entertainment atmosphere. In addition to the bar, there was also a ping pong table and boxing ball in the central room of the office. The office felt more like a playroom or man-cave rather than a professional or formal office. At the company's kitchen, there was an arcade game situated where we actually observed that the CEO was playing the arcade game there in the afternoon. Furthermore, the coffee kitchen is equipped with a globe bar, an opened bottle of bourbon, and a lot of fruits, candies, and snacks. Overall, the office is not a gray and sterile box to work, but rather an informal and playful design that categorizes the office best. In the next section, we will further dig into the company culture as this was the most important element the company facilitated according to the software engineers.

4.2. Culture is the tie that connects software engineers towards their company

In today's society, software engineers have quite a solid position as the demand for experts in this area is high and the people who have experience/are knowledgeable in this field are scarce. All the software engineers were aware of their strong position on the labor market and argued that they could easily start a business on their own as a "sole consultant" or they could work somewhere else if they wanted. In addition, the software engineers explained that they could earn more money when starting a business for themselves or hop to different employers. A few software engineers thought about starting a business for themselves, but they did not seem to be convinced yet. Interestingly, nobody wanted to work somewhere else despite acknowledging that salaries could be up to 10% higher for job hopping. The argument for staying with company X was mainly the culture. When we asked to describe the culture, similar answers kept turning back, feelings of trust, openness, work life balance, a flat hierarchy and a sense of fun are all frequently mentioned and acknowledged by all software engineers. Some quotes below show their thoughts around the question *"How would you describe the company culture here?"*.

"So, openness and honesty. It's also like the flat organization like I only have two bosses more or less, it's otherwise there's no one else."– Alexander

"It's very informal, low ceiling, that's probably the big part. And the people that work there. They like to kind of party and drink together and I like that." – William

The bar - culture living within company X

The bar is a meeting spot, and everybody loves the bar, which was even built by employees themselves. The bar is free for everyone, and there is a beverage to everybody's preference. Here trust was emphasized as well, because obviously when employees get wasted or overuse/misuse the bar, it will be closed, yet it works like this, and everybody likes it. One employee once went towards an event from a client, and here they received consumption coupons. This felt impersonal, and despite that in the end people might end up consuming the same, the idea of a free bar and not having coupons is better received. (As all the interviewees answered that they do not over consume drinks in the bar).

> *Interviewer: "So you were talking about a bar, do you use it often?"*
> *Alexander: "Oh yeah ha ha, I built it, together with ****, we were the ones that built the bar."*
> *Interviewer: "So you built it as well, what does it mean to you in the office?"*
> *Alexander: "Well yeah, it's personal, for me to be part of that."*

The culture ties the company together, and this is acknowledged by the software engineers. It is because of the culture that they work at company X, and if not for the culture they would have left to work elsewhere. As researchers, we also found it weird that everybody emphasizes the culture so much, but at the same time most employees work from home these days and are not physically present. When asking about the cultural ties in the post pandemic setting, all employees thought the culture was negatively impacted through the pandemic. However, the post pandemic setting was something that most accepted as the "new normal" as this could happen in other offices as well. What is more, the company has monthly "mandatory" sessions in the office where best practices are shared, an annual company trip, and sometimes people attend a conference, and there is an occasional hackathon. These events are thus the primary moments of bonding with fellow colleagues.

"Before Covid I was at the office every day. There were a lot of interactions with other people, and we looked more like a team doing things together. Draw the whiteboard, stop and do it all the time. But then Covid hit, it was very lonely in the beginning, but I mean you get used to everything. But it was tough in the beginning." – Jan

Interviewer: "Do you feel that this culture is endangered when people go to the office less?"
Interviewee: "Once a month on Friday we have our tech after-work. One or two colleagues present something from the work life or whatever. And that's a mandatory thing because that happens on work time. But then afterwards we have dinner, we have normal after-work. Nowadays, we've been down to two - three people. So, something's happened there when we used to be 15 plus almost everybody at some point. Something has definitely happened [post-Covid]." – Simon

In the post-Covid setting, the culture was negatively impacted as employee happiness went down when people go less towards the office and have less fun with each other. This post-Covid development was something somewhat unexpected as the culture was emphasized to be very strong, and it seemed to tie the organization together. In addition to this, it appears as if there are different groups or "bubbles" in the organization. Some software engineers work at home all the time and do not necessarily feel the desire to be at the office or socialize with their colleagues while others talk about colleagues as friends and value the social aspect of work. In the next section, we will discuss these social bubbles that we experienced during our interviews.

4.3. The social "bubble"

Different software engineers have different social bubbles, about which they talked during the interviews. Software engineers view that they belong to a certain bubble and identify and connect with the people in that specific bubble. For software engineers who work only with people from the client's side and do not cooperate much with the home company (company X), colleagues in their day-to-day work are not so much part of the company X's bubble, as compared to software engineers who do cooperate with colleagues from company X. Furthermore, one software engineer identified and engaged more with the colleagues at the client's side rather than those in their home company. He was quite sad to be not invited to a party at his client's office because he is a consultant from company X rather than a "real" employee of the client company. Another example would be a fully remote working software

engineer that he does not really identify with company X. He enjoys his work from home behind the computer, and once he finishes the work, he will go gaming with his friends (on the same computer) who constitute the social bubble which this software engineer identifies with. Overall though company X, bubbles are a big part of the company culture. This similarly affects the motivation and identification of the software engineers. Those software engineers who are not in the bubble have a lower organizational identification and motivation towards the company. As we realized this strong effect of the bubble on identification and motivation, we were interested to see how the post-Covid setting and post-acquisition setting have impacted this bubble. Covid negatively impacts the bubble as less people come towards the office, resulting in less social activity, which damages the social bubble in place at the company. One software engineer, Simon, was in particular expressive around the social bubble, and the impact on this related to the post-Covid and post-acquisition setting.

> *"Some key members of the kind of the bubble left. Okay, so I would say that the bubble is still there, but it's small. More people were in it before. I've told my friends I can't come because I want to hang out with my colleagues. I want to get that kind of feeling back." - Simon*

The bubble becomes smaller because more people work from home, and some software engineers left the company. A big part of the company culture and the social bubble that we talk about is the company management, which is crucial to the bubble. The post-acquisition setting has an influence on the bubble in the way that people have uncertainties about the future. In addition, it should be mentioned that during an interview with Emma, an HR manager from the acquirer (company Y), it was acknowledged that the employees at company X sit comfortably within their "Swedish bubble". Emma perceived that this was fine, and other software engineering companies that they acquired have their own bubbles as well. Besides, what is perhaps missing here is the context of the hybrid working software engineers as they don't know what is really going on in terms of the acquisition. Despite management remaining contracted for another term, software engineers are scared that their managers might leave the company or be fired in economic turbulent times.

> *Interviewer: "Are you afraid of any changes in the leadership?"*

Interviewee: "If they [the managers] would leave I would definitely say that's a big problem in many ways. I would go as far to say like if one of them would leave, I will probably consider leaving myself." - Simon

It should be noted here that the answer to this question comes from the expectation that this might happen. Instead of answering whether he was afraid or not, the software engineer immediately jumped towards emphasizing that when one of the managers would leave, he would consider leaving company X too. All software engineers seemed to think that the acquisition puts more pressure on their "beloved" managers. Furthermore, commonly they saw it as a risk that people could be fired. Both the acquisition and the post-Covid setting seem to have a negative impact on the "social bubbles"; however, when people have such a strong bubble, why do less and less people come towards the office? This is something that we dig into during the interviews, and it will be discussed in the following section.

4.4. Colleagues as a driver towards and away from the office

In our study, we found that colleagues (fellow software engineers) are both the reason to come towards the office for socializing, yet at the same time these colleagues are experienced as a distracting factor that software engineers dislike as it interferes/distracts them away from their work. Software engineering is a knowledge intensive job that requires focus; hence, the software engineers do not want to be disturbed while they are coding. However, within the office, life distractions are part of the daily reality. During Covid pandemic, software engineers worked from home and found peace, quiet and convenience in their home offices, so they do not want to give this up. As a result, the threshold to go back towards the office is high, and it results in struggles to the "going back to normal" and people working from home after all. Moreover, software engineers are convinced that working from home is more efficient and effective for simply getting work done.

"Here's more noise and stuff like that. I think that's why I maybe prefer it at home. One of the reasons, I think, is because here is more distraction. And it's not that easy, because I don't see my coworkers that often, so oh, we can talk to each other. And I will talk to **** and I will talk to that one. I like to socialize with colleagues, but then I don't get that much work done here, that I maybe should have when I come home." – Karl

After a couple of interviews when this contradiction kept popping up, we decided to confront interviewees with their contradicting answers. The software engineer noticed the irony within it, but they stuck towards what they said, and it did not change their reasoning.

"Yeah, I want to be social but also isolated. It's kind of weird." – David

It should be noted that priorly to Covid it was possible to work from home, however it was less accepted. For example, the clients from the software engineers changed their policies regarding mandatory presence in the office and stuck towards these policies in the post covid setting. The choice no longer lies with the employer; nowadays it is up to the software engineers themselves to decide whether they want to be in the office or work from home. However, do the software engineers know what they want? The contradictions continue as software engineers explained that they actually went to the office, but when they did this, no other colleagues were there. Accordingly, they reasoned that they might as well work from home after all. Reflecting on this, people are thus both a distracting factor in the office, yet when the office is empty there is no distraction but no social aspect either. The complexity and contradictions create a struggle for the software engineers that is primarily caused due to the post Covid setting. For management, this is experienced as a struggle as well and in the next section we will take a deeper look into that specifically.

4.5. The struggle for an "ideal" workspace
4.5.1. Perspective of employees

The Covid and post-Covid have changed the way people relate to workspace with the increasing adoption of working from home in many businesses. In the previous part, we have discussed the contradiction in software engineers' view regarding their colleagues as the reason for both going towards and away from the office. So, what would be an "ideal" workspace for them in the post-Covid context?

Almost all the interviewees perceive working from home and the hybrid working is the future of workspace for software engineers as they can both focus more on the work while at the same time have more time to balance between working and personal life. Working from home seems to be an ideal workspace for software engineers as this option is widely considered to bring them more freedom, convenience, and flexibility.

"I absolutely love it [working from home] … There's an obvious win in time, but also, the freedom of working from home is fantastic… Let's say I have to run some kinds of errand in a 15-minute thing. That's no problem to do for me at all during the day. As long as I have no meeting, I can do it whenever, like just working 15 minutes extra or taking comfortable time or whatever, it doesn't matter… The general life working is much easier if I'm working from home… And for me, I get panicky when I sit in meetings, and it's not productive. So now I can work on the side, and they can see me and it's perfect." – William

"It's much more freedom and I can just take a walk and take a break anytime I want. I can do that at office as well, but you don't usually just go away for half an hour and then work overtime for a half an hour. Office usually tries to keep some office hours. But with remote, it's much more flexible … I can work in the evening if I want for example as long as I do the task I'm given, and I think that's easier if it's remote work." – David

All the software engineers acknowledge and very much enjoy the benefits of working from home that things are just simply *"easier"* for them; accordingly, there is no necessity to really make an effort to go to the office. In addition to the favorable feelings associated with working from home, effectiveness is another dimension mentioned by many software engineers. Specifically, while some software engineers claimed that it depends on the assignment they are handling to conclude if working from home is more or less effective than working at the office, many of them believed that their effectiveness increases significantly when being at home with less distraction.

"Personally, that [effectiveness] depends on what work I'm doing. If I'm doing the manager work, as I said before, I need to be at work because of the people and stuff. If I'm only doing things like I'm doing now…, I can work from wherever." – Erik

Nevertheless, this software engineer, again, pointed out the challenges that hinder his effectiveness when working at the office.

"It's absolutely impossible. I can't work in open spaces when I need to focus so I need to go away from there. I'm basically forced away from the office … open offices don't work for development…. I can tell you a number on how much less effective I become

> *when I had an office and not have an office. I'm about 20 to 25% less effective when I write code and do focused work."* – Erik

The similar viewpoint was shared by Simon in terms of effectiveness that "*I become more efficient working from home. Life is just simpler.*" Another software engineer, Thomas, also agreed that *"I can be more productive at home".* Although the interviewees found working from home is just easier, more effective and time saving compared to working at the office, many of them turned out to work more at home.

> *"I'm fairly bad at taking breaks. Generally, I would say maybe I'll take more breaks when I'm here [at the office] actually."* – Christian

> *"When I was sitting eating dinner then one of the bosses asked just in general if someone could help fix something and I had done my hours. I was done… but then later I took the laptop to fix and so that happens…. It never happened before [when I worked at the office]."* – Simon

This probably poses some contradictions in the view that even the software engineers may have to work more hours for unplanned assignments or for just the feeling "to get the thing done", they still want to work from home. When we asked the interviewees how they resonated around these struggles to find an "ideal" workspace, we were once more surprised by contradictions. Although software engineers acknowledge the value in going towards the office, like interactions with their social "bubble" and knowledge-sharing, no one really takes action for that. Moreover, in terms of office design, almost all interviewees agreed that their office in Malmo has an excellent location that is just a walking distance from Malmo Central station, and the free bar is just something so *"unique"* for them. In evaluation of the general office, Karl also concluded that "*I'm happy with the home office".* Despite these factors, the arguments provided for not going to office are of practical characteristics which are stressed that their project's team-members work at different locations, there are limited conference rooms, they have a long commute, the train tickets were also recognized as being expensive. The point however is that these reasons for not going towards the office didn't change because of Covid. The team was similar as they worked on a long-term project, the train ticket had to be paid before Covid as well, and the commute did not really change but more their perceptions around these topics probably changed. Furthermore, regarding the workspace design, some interviewees mentioned factors like more conference rooms, the heating in the winter, or

private workspace for individuals when being asked for the improvement points of the office. This also arouses a doubt for us whether the software engineers are really willing to go to the office frequently if the company would indeed make all these renovations, regardless of considering the financial feasibility in this respect.

One interviewee, Simon, perhaps demonstrates the contradiction of an "ideal" workspace at best. This software engineer stressed that he works from home approximately 95% of the time, which causes "*a problem*" to interact and truly understand his colleagues at the client side. He described that *"One of the big problems is we have very little social interaction".* Meanwhile, Simon also has close connections with colleagues at the home office, and he highly recognizes the value of being in the office. He revealed that there was a kind of voting system where they collectively voted if they should have mandatory office days, the majority votes would count for everybody. Strikingly, that software engineer voted against mandatory office days. The logic was simply not there and when we confronted him with this, Simon acknowledged that his voting behavior was strange and probably he just did not like something mandatory.

> *"Yeah, I know it's very contradicting. I've been thinking about it myself as well. Because we've had multiple times every year, we've taken this up like should we change something, should we have a mandatory two days, one day etc. And the team has always voted in keeping it the way it is. And I've also been voting that to, I don't know."– Simon*

Then when we questioned what his ideal workspace would look like, the answer somewhat surprised us that he would like to continue working at home 95%, or even 100% of the time. This was reflected as the struggle between expectation and habits. Another employee, who used to enjoy going to the client's office despite the long commute, explained the change in his working preference as:

> *"I have an assignment, and it was pre pandemic. So the culture was you work in the office, but when I was there [the client's office], I felt that nobody cares if I was there or not… They only care if I do my work. So then why? Half an hour commute and maybe you start getting stuck in traffic on the way home over there." – Karl*

In Karl's opinion, the dominant working culture before the pandemic is working at the office, so he just simply followed the practice even though he found it did not add much value. After that, the post-Covid setting changed how people relate to workspace and there are far more opportunities to work from home, so the "lazier" option is thus preferred.

"Yes, laziness. I think I prefer the home office more." – Karl

"For me I would have no good reason to be working from home except just laziness."
– William

4.5.2. Perspective of managers

The previously mentioned struggle between software engineers themselves can be extended towards the management side as well. Maria, the Chief Operating Officer (COO), shared doubts about the increasing practice of working from home at the company that some software engineers even desire to work 100% remotely. However, due to the consultancy character of the business it was argued by Maria too that *"as long as the customers are happy with our consultants, I am happy as well"*. From the people management perspective, she sees concentration as the strong advantage of working from home while going to office has a positive impact on employees' personal and professional life, including getting to know each other more easily, sharing and discussing the knowledge to make work decisions more effectively, especially in the tech industry. Maria also concerns if too much remote work would negatively impact the software engineers' mental aspect in the long run that they probably *"miss out on social opportunities that people need in life"*. Accordingly, the COO has doubts whether the management should do more engagement activities or re-arrange the office design and the workspace differently to find solutions for the question *"what is really the best for them?"*.

> *"I think to meet in person once a week would really be beneficial for the team spirit, but among the others that it's difficult to schedule or to organize it so that it works well. Most of the times it's randomly like many of them come in at the same day and the office is super busy. It's too many people here. And then the next day it's too few people there, it's totally empty and very quiet. So, to find the balance when it's a good like number of people here but they are not they don't like to be told when to come in." – Maria*

While acknowledging the benefits of coming to the office, Maria also observes the struggle in the arrangement here that sometimes the office is too crowded while at the other time it is too quiet. This is in line with the software engineers' contradiction we discussed in the previous part that the colleagues at office work as both the driving factor for coming towards the office and the distracting factor for not coming to office. And it is hard to arrange a good combination

of the working schedule at the office as the software engineers do not want something "*mandatory*"; instead, it should be random, flexible but fit!

From the interview with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), we notice that although he shared a similar opinion with the COO in the view that the quality of work delivered to clients is most important, there is also a different perspective within the management side. Specifically, while Maria expresses concerns if employees should work more in the office, the CEO does not.

> *"I don't have any specific standpoints [on employees working from home] as long as deliveries are met. To be quite frank I don't care. And that's really as long as we don't hear anything negative from customers, we don't have an opinion…. No, absolutely not mind… I don't have an opinion [in favor of any way], I think I'm good with either way."*
> *– Oskar*

It is interesting that while Maria still demonstrates some concerns in this respect, it does not matter for Oskar if the employees are working from home or at the office, as long as they can perform best. It is probably explained from the different backgrounds and their related identity in the view that Maria is more from the people management perspectives while perhaps Oskar regards this phenomenon more from the profession of software engineers. As the CEO's background is the software engineer, it might be the higher possibilities that he shares similar characteristics of their identity and motivational values, which emphasize the informality as previous analysis.

Effectiveness is another aspect which has been widely mentioned during the interviews that we pay attention to. Not only do the software engineers find themselves more focused and effective when working at home, the COO also shares the same opinion.

> *"If I'm guessing, I think they are more effective working from home because they don't have to commute. They can just get dressed or half-dressed or whatever they prefer and then they start, so it's less hours and that really no one is talking to them or interfering or so. I think they can be really depending. Of course, then they would have to have a nice, good office at home… But the ones that are sitting a lot of time at home, they made their own offices with multiple screens, good desks and so on. And I think it's working."*
> *– Maria*

From the business perspectives, if working from home indeed makes the software engineers more effective and could reduce operating costs, as mentioned by Oskar as *"if we didn't need an office, we could save some money"*, would it be an ideal solution for the future of software engineers' workspace? Although there are numerous factors to be discussed about the benefits of working at the office such as identity, connection, knowledge sharing, etc., this could also raise the interesting points for employers to consider in both short-term and long-term prospects if businesses should encourage, or at least continue, remote working. Furthermore, the definition and standards of "effectiveness" is another point of consideration, do employers and employees share the same definition?

4.6. The influence of the post-Covid setting on software engineers

So far, much of the analysis on empirical data is about the comfort zone and values that software engineers associate with the workspace, which influences the way they identify themselves and stay motivated at work. In this section, we will discuss in detail how the post-Covid setting impacts the identification and motivation of software engineers.

4.6.1. Organizational identification

In terms of identification, it is commonly perceived that Covid and the post-Covid raises urgency for the software engineers to work from home more than ever before, making them come less to the office and interact less with their colleagues as a result. In this context, the office could be considered as the source of organization identification to which software engineers relate. The role of the company office in boosting identification has also been emphasized by the CEO.

> *"I think it's extremely important. It [the office] is also something I brought in from the start… It looks a little bit more like an apartment or home and that is also the essential idea with it. It has to bring identity, and you have to know that even though you have different contracts or you're at different customer sites, I always say that this is your employer. You can change the job many times, but you still have the same employer. And if we're going to live up to that we need to have a strong identity, and you need to know that there is always a home somewhere you can go." – Oskar*

Undertaking the importance of the office in employee identification, Oskar takes effort to build the workplace as a "home" which demonstrates the organizational culture and strengthens the connections among colleagues, the company and its software engineers.

> *"We've never been calling this a working place. We call it a meeting place. That's something I've found from the start of the company. That was very important for me because even though I came from a strong brand consultancy firm ... Still people didn't sort of meet at the office; they worked at the office. I think that's very important, so we've always said that you should be able to come here with a couple of friends having a couple of beers in a decent level. It's not like a party place where you go when there're free beers, but you should be able to meet up or actually just after work you should be able to have a beer…play some games, do whatever you like, and it's not working anymore… It's a lot about the identity, that's also why we put a lot of effort into the brand X."* – Oskar

Obviously, when the software engineers do not come to office as regularly as before the pandemic, they may feel less involved with the culture, have less face-to-face interactions and networking opportunities with their fellow colleagues and leaders which all constitute the image of organization identification. Consequently, the post-Covid and working from home might hinder the software engineers' identification with organization due to looser connection with the people in organization, its culture, and the "home" feeling designated to the office. This is also demonstrated by one software engineer that:

> *"It [connection with employer] just has been less. I will say less connected to co-workers… but I think we can blame the pandemic."* – Karl

In addition to the organization identification, the identity software engineers relate to their profession is another aspect to be considered post-Covid. It is noticed that the interviewees widely share a common characteristic, which is their love for coding and software engineering as a profession. Many of them mentioned that their primary driver is the work itself and that they like to do coding rather than meetings or administrative tasks, which is regarded as "*the most boring part*" in their work.

> *"I love coding and things like that. I do my stuff in the morning and then just sit down and do my stuff behind the computer. So I don't get down during the pandemic."* – Karl

Therefore, with the less interactions and distraction from social interaction while being at home, software engineers tend to be more focused and effective in their coding work, which they seem to enjoy a lot. This may also imply that software engineers are more identified with their profession while their identification with organization is weaker in the post-Covid setting.

4.6.2. Motivation

The changing workspace impacts how software engineers are motivated in the post-Covid setting in the following aspects. Firstly, working from home poses certain challenges for the business to retain high culture spirit among their employees. As discussed earlier, culture, which is a highly regarded value of company X, is the tie that connects and engages the software engineers towards the company. Within a large frame of organizational culture, individual employees have the tendency to stick to their own social "bubble" which strongly frames their motivation at work. Nevertheless, working from home would reduce the existence of leadership, interactions, networking, and knowledge sharing events from both professional and personal, which negatively impacts software engineers' motivation.

> *"We had bowling. We did go-kart. It's kind of fun, so it depends. I just remember it's been two years we haven't had that many activities, even three years." – Martin*

> *"The boring part? Right now, it is those after-works. The social interactions are on the low side… People not being here [after-works] as much." – Simon*

It is noticed that the software engineers miss the social activities and the traditions of "*after-work*", events when they hang out, have dinner and drinks together after the monthly meeting, which brings a lot of fun and meaning to them. Accordingly, employees' happiness and motivation at work is commonly seen as decreasing from the cultural aspect. Erik exemplified this via his evaluation that before Covid, the company met 100% of his expectations of a happy workplace, but "*things have changed*" and now in the post-Covid the percentage is about 80%. Then when we questioned if the "*100% happy workplace*" would come back again, he elaborated that:

> *"No, I don't think so. It is also one of these things that I have to accept as part of our company evolving. Because of time, you know, actually because of Covid, because of the state of the world, I have to accept that it will not be 100% anymore. Because I don't think that the company and any other companies can do that either." – Erik*

In addition to the culture and social interaction, the informality at work is another aspect to be discussed in relation to the post-Covid context. We have discussed at the beginning that informality is the comfort zone of the software engineers and working from home is believed to bring more flexibility, informality and just ease for them compared to the traditional working conditions at the company office.

> *"I have become lazy so it's easy to essentially stay at home." – Martin*
> *"You're getting lazy ... I think lazier than before." – Karl*

Thus, the remote working post-Covid setting offers the software engineers a workspace that is informal and easy, enabling them to be simply "*lazy*" in their comfort zone to focus on their favorite activity - coding. Once the software engineers are allowed to work in their most convenient working conditions without paying much attention to the office's formality such as expected office behaviors or dressing for example, the software engineers can focus better and truly evolve into their work. This contributes to their motivation as software engineers are motivated from the nature of work. More formal work settings or mandatory office hours that were considered "normal" prior to Covid seem to negatively affect their motivation as this is not something the software engineers enjoy or find contribution to their "coding" work.

4.7. The influence of post-acquisition setting on software engineers

Acquisition incurs the shift in ownership and possible change of culture, way of working, or leadership style, which is traditionally believed to impact on how software engineers identify with their new employer and how this relates to motivation.

4.7.1. Organizational identification

While it has been a year since company X was purchased by company Y, almost all the software engineers still identified themselves with company X. Many of them affirmed "*I see myself as an employee of X".* Specifically, the interviewees demonstrated no real identification with company Y, in their opinion, the negatives and positives seemed to even out. Concerning the acquisition, most of the software engineers expressed strong hopes for bigger projects with clients or room for *"internal projects"* to develop the systems and applications. This aspiration would certainly engage them more to the new projects at the new company, and at the same time imply software engineers' strong identification with their software engineering profession. By emphasizing many times the hope for future *"internal projects"*, they seem to identify

themselves more as a software engineer rather than an employee of company Y. Moreover, it is also noticed that these software engineers do not actively communicate or express these expectations with company Y. Instead, they just silently observe if there are upcoming changes in future, which is probably because of the weak identification they associated with company Y at the moment.

Furthermore, communication was mentioned as a factor making the software engineers feel less identified with company Y. Many interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the language barrier in the view that company communication emails are sent in German. Besides, the online training resources available in the internal training system are mainly in German, and even though the translation is in process, it is still considered limited. The anger arising from the language barrier was expressed by Simon as follows.

> *"They're still in that direction [German as the company communication language]. I don't feel like I'm the Y's employee. There is no connection at all to these- the German side… I don't take the time to read it even though there's like a Click Here link to get an English version, it's not working." - Simon*

In addition to the language barrier, unclear communication in the sense that there are many questions that remain unanswered for the Swedish software engineers, such as whether there are any future changes in their job, or what the future plan would be for them, also hinder their identification towards company Y.

Culture is another important aspect that has been repeated throughout this research. Culturally there does not seem to be a very active approach from both sides. When looking at how software engineers describe the culture from company X and Y, we heard a similar story that the interviewees felt similarities between the culture of Y and their company, which was described as open and trustful. Nevertheless, in real life there is limited interaction between software engineers in Sweden and Germany until now, and the Swedish employees' everyday work did not change.

Furthermore, the complicated procedure and longer lead time in laptop provision do not appear to match the values associated with their organizational identification, which are described as flat, informal, and flexible. Many software engineers complained that it required a long lead time for the regional IT team in Germany to set up and deliver the laptops to employees in Malmo. Also, there are certain restrictions in the types of applications installed on the laptop,

these applications are inconvenient in executing their daily work. From the view of software engineers, these new laptops are unnecessary and a waste of money. As a result, they responded to this laptop policy by not using the provided laptops because their complaints about the laptop policy were not taken with promptly corrective actions in Germany. It is quite ironic since the most important thing for a software engineer is the laptop/computer, and there seems to be some miscommunication here around the most important tool to do their work. The irony continues when taking into account the emphasis on financial performance, there are high costs connected to approximately 75 laptops (75 employees worked in Sweden) while these laptops do not contribute much to the software engineer's work. Besides, the laptop policy example raises a concern for us as we find it contradictory towards the cultural values described by company Y, which are openness, welcoming feedback, and easy communications.

From the management view, both the CEO and COO were not surprised when we revealed the interviews' finding that most software engineers still identified themselves as employees of the previous company X. Interestingly, the HR manager in Germany resonated this as a normal situation.

> *"That's absolutely fine for us if they think it's still in the X culture. Because we never want to change a culture. It's the same. And as long as it is that way, that's absolutely fine. We don't change the culture, the people, the things they do. But usually we acquire companies that have the same culture that's very important, we would never acquire a company that has a completely different culture." – Emma*

This probably indicates that it needs time for the software engineers to establish trust to strengthen their identification with the new organization, which has been well acknowledged from the Swedish and Germany management team.

4.7.2. Motivation

While the everyday work of software engineers has not changed after the acquisition, there are some positive and negative points that they relate to the acquisition. In terms of emotions, many interviewees firstly associated the acquisition news with a mixed feeling of how the future of their work and the company would be. Later on, when being asked about the advantages and disadvantages associated with the acquisition, many software engineers perceive the acquisition with more positive sides. Specifically, becoming a larger firm brings opportunities for more financial backup and stronger employer branding. More importantly, many

interviewees feel motivated by the possibility of bigger consulting projects, more technical resources and increased learning opportunities, which gives them opportunities to devote to and grow in their software engineering profession.

Nonetheless, the increased emphasis on financial performance and the fear of losing their job when the performance is down were mentioned as the drawbacks from the acquisition. During the conversations, we also perceived an unconscious tension and subtle reluctance from the employees. For instance, the interviewee either expressed fears or implicitly showed a concern during the conversation if there would be any future changes in the current leadership team.

> *"Maybe management will quit because I think being a part of this [company Y] is going to require a different kind of management. So, there's a risk that this will happen." – Erik*

The software engineers were also concerned about changes in the company culture that they really valued now, which for sure adversely impacts their motivation at work. When being asked how they felt about the culture of company Y, many software engineers evaluated that they shared many similarities with their company in cultures, such as the openness. On the contrary, some perceived potential cultural difference in the hierarchy in the sense that the German style is more hierarchical with more seniority layers in team structure compared to the Swedish style of flat organization. This somewhat differs from their current working culture, which is just "*like a family*" where the employees see their bosses just like a colleague at work.

Moreover, the more complicated procedure and possibly more reports and paperwork required in the new operating process are considered as opposed to the software engineers comfort zone of informality. As during the interviews, paperwork, documentation, and meetings are commonly mentioned as "*the most boring part*" in their job. Accordingly, if the post-acquisition integration process is not taken properly, it is more likely to have a negative influence on software engineers' motivation.

4.8. An endangered culture

Overall, we found that the post-Covid and post-acquisition setting endangers the culture within the company. In the post-Covid setting, software engineers rather work comfortably from their home office, which makes it hard to "go back to normal'' and take the effort to go towards the office. The positive side on Covid is that the software engineers can truly focus on their work,

and there are less distractions from coding, so they feel more effective, which positively affects their motivation. In the long term, however, we see a potentially endangered culture as people come less towards the office and say they feel the culture within office life has been negatively affected by less people showing up. There are various reasons to stay home, and it is argued that this way of working is the future, but what does this then mean for the company culture in the long run? The strong roots that were created over the years still stand, but when people stay at home the culture will not bloom fully again.

Furthermore, the post-acquisition setting does not provide a necessarily strong basis for the culture to bloom again. Within the first year after the acquisition the initial moment of an exciting new opportunity was changed for a "let's see attitude", some negative experiences such as a language barrier and the laptop issues made the software engineers more skeptical. This skepticism is additionally grounded as many questions remain unanswered, such as Do we get an internal project? Does the local management remain? Will the control from Germany increase or do we keep our autonomy? The answers to these questions will most likely break or make their motivation and organizational identification. This break-point also relates to the company culture. For instance, when no internal project will come the software engineers might feel disappointed. When the local management would leave the firm, various software engineers will consider this too, and when administrative tasks are increased the software engineers will dislike this. Obviously, this could work the other way around as well: an internal project could unite fellow employees, stable local management could emphasize trust, and no increase in administrative procedures will be a relief. Currently the company culture has worsened due to the post-Covid and post-acquisition setting. The culture is in danger if things keep following this downward trend. The culture is a key part in creating organizational identification and influences the software engineer's motivation, an endangered culture is something serious.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, further implications of the empirical findings will be discussed regarding our theoretical framework. Specifically, we will relate how the identification and motivation of software engineers are impacted in the context of post-Covid and post-acquisition from both the empirical and theoretical perspectives. From these findings, the theoretical framework will be resonated and revised on the basis of the study's result.

5.1. Declining organizational identification

5.1.1. Software engineering - a craft on its own

During the interviews we spoke intensively towards ten software engineers and three managers, and here it became clear that software engineering is a craft on its own. Hislop framed both software engineering and consultancy work as a knowledge intensive job (Hislop, 2013, p.71). For this thesis we researched software engineers that work as consultants, we can thus speak of knowledge intensive work. During the interviews, the application of knowledge, creation of new knowledge, concentration and finding solutions for clients where commonly discussed as part of the daily work of software engineers, which resonates with the definition of knowledge intensive work proposed by Hislop as "*intellectual, creative, non-routine and involving both using knowledge as well as creating new knowledge*" (Hislop, 2013, p.71). However, the stigma that the social relationship between client and consultant is central to the consultancy work (Hislop, 2002) does not seem to apply to the case of software engineers. During the interviews software engineers explained that they dislike meetings, find people in the office a distracting factor and just want to concentrate on getting their coding work done. Software engineering seems to be a craft on its own, and the "typical" software engineer deviates from the "typical" consultant or knowledge worker in that aspect.

Software engineers viewed themselves as "lazy" and gave this as one of the reasons that they did not come towards the office. Furthermore, the software engineers were not so much concerned with their pay or "making career" as they rather comfortably stick to place and position they have. Only a minority of the software engineers had thought about a more managerial position when we asked about their future career while most of the software engineers just wanted to keep "coding" and continuously learn but did not have the desire to advance their career in any other way. This resonates with our empirical material on the software engineer in their comfort zone; however, this is different compared to other knowledge working professions and especially with other types of consultants. One research article that investigated management consultants found that these types of consultants are motivated by an "elite identity" that is fueled by high consultancy payments, achievements, and elite status, just as research that highlights the desire to become a partner at a professional service firm (Gill, 2015; Stumpf, 2002). Furthermore, these types of consultants, view work differently, work is prioritized above family life, clients and the social ties to these clients are important just as their elite status which management consultants are even scared to lose. The

software engineering consultants we spoke to seemed to be completely on the other spectrum as they highly valued a work life balance, and they did not like hierarchies or status but preferred flat organizations. It thus seems that software engineers that work as consultants are different from other consultants and have quite contradicting self-views and identities. Software engineering is a craft on its own, and it is not easily comparable to other (consultancy) professions.

5.1.2.   Working from home weakens the cultural ties

The software engineers that we interviewed all increasingly work from home in the post-Covid setting. The software engineers seem to like it this way and portray that the future of software engineering is most likely in a hybrid or work from home setting. At the same time, they view that the organizational culture and organizational identification worsened due to the increase in working from home. Prior to Covid, it was already possible to work from home but not to the extent that they experience today that quite a number of software engineers work from home 95-100% of the time. Working from home was argued to be more effective according to the software engineers. This finding is in line with research on knowledge workers during the Covid pandemic; furthermore, it is argued that the experience of an increased effectiveness trough working from home during covid is positively related to a working from home preferences post-Covid (Wong, Cheung, & Chen, 2020).

Similarly, research states that disruptive changes have an influence on organizational culture and organizational identification (Ravasi, et al, 2006). Moreover, organizational culture is considered as an influential factor on both organizational identification and motivation (Ravasi, et al, 2006; Nohria, et al, 2008). In our research, we experienced this influence both on the culture and on organizational identification. Research thus explains the connection within our theoretical framework that the post-Covid setting negatively impacts organizational culture, resulting in a lower organizational identification. For us a famous takeaway from an interview is that for one employee this sense of a happy workplace decreased from 100% towards 80% and he never expects the happiness to become 100% again. When looking at organizational culture literature that views "organizations as a culture", it is seen that "organizations are created by their daily performance" (Czarniawska-Joerges, et al, 1991). However, in the post-Covid setting, the performance happens at home rather than at the organization, so what is then left of this organization created by everyday performance? This is also reflected in research where it was stated that organizational culture can function as a "normative glue" that holds

the organization, yet this social glue is constructed through "values or social ideals and the beliefs that organization members come to share together" (Smircich, 1983). Yet in the post-acquisition setting, two different groups of employees, in this case from company X and Y have to re-share their similarities in terms of values, social ideals and beliefs. In addition, due to the post-Covid setting this sharing process happens under a physical distance rather than in-person. This could explain the negative impact on organizational culture that we experience at company X.

To be honest we are truly convinced that company X is an example of organizations as a culture rather than just having a culture. When we looked at the office design, the family orientation, the alignment between norms and values, and for example the bar that was built by employees or the small children that we noticed in the office this organization is a culture. However, due to the increase in working from home, this culture is endangered. What will be left of the bar when it is not used as much, what happens to the family feeling when you do not see the family as much in real life anymore, the cultural ties will become less, and this is also acknowledged by the software engineers themselves. The post-Covid setting thus negatively impacted organizational culture, resulting in a decrease in organizational identification. In the following section, this relationship will be discussed regarding the post-acquisition setting.

5.1.3. Language as a communication barrier for organizational identification

Within the literature review it was discussed that organizational identification is a process that heavily relies on communication (Brown, 2017; Bartels, et al, 2010; Al-Shalabi, 2019; Kia, et al, 2019; De Roeck, et al, 2014; Fuchs, et al, 2012). In the previous paragraph, it was already stressed out that organizational identification decreased because of the post-Covid setting. To continue, this research emphasizes that digital forms of communication are less effective in creating personal bonds as compared to physical communication (Kick, et al, 2015; Chambers, 2013). The change from physical towards digital communication could thus explain lower levels of bounding which in place could affect organizational culture as interpersonal bonds are an important part of culture within organizations (Tuan, 2010). Besides digital communication, we also see symbolic communication, the symbolic communication occurs through gestures or behaviors, for example, rather than verbal communication (Seidenberg, & Petitto, 1987). In this thesis, we spotted a behavior change in the post covid setting, the decrease

in people showing up into the office could symbolically communicate towards others that it is not important anymore to be at the office and socialize.

Apart from the post-Covid setting, we also conclude that the post-acquisition setting negatively influences the organizational identification. All software engineers identified more with their original company X rather than the acquirer company Y. This might be seen as natural and part of identification as a process, however in terms of communication we noticed some things that could negatively influence the software engineer's identification towards the new acquirer. Language wise the most obvious phenomenon was the fact that the language of communication was in German; however, the employees active in Sweden do not speak or read that language. This already differentiates the German part and the Swedish part of the company, but it does not create unity. The software engineers also commented to not read the online communication via e-mail because it was sent in German, just as the training material. The company is making efforts to translate the training materials and it introduced a translation button on its email and digital communication, yet the software engineers still ignore it. This choice of language mistake backfired on the organizational identification as frequently during the interview the German part of the company was referred to as "they" and the Swedish part of the company as "we" this thus signifies a lack of organizational identification as well.

Organizational identification was defined as a process where members of the organization adopt beliefs, values and symbols of the organization and let this influence their behavior, the Identity mirrors an individual towards a group or organization (Cheney, et al, 1987). Norms and values seemed to be particularly important towards the software engineers we interviewed, they argued that the reason that they still work at company X, because of the flat organization, work life balance and feelings of trust, openness, and fun. These norms and values were told towards us as researchers to be the same for both companies; however, we as researchers doubt this to some extent. The laptop-fiasco that was described earlier on in the empirical findings section does not really resonate with openness and a flat organization. The software engineers did not need nor want the laptops, but they were simply forced upon them, when they let their managers know, this was communicated towards, but nothing was done. As a result, the software engineers do not use the laptops and dislike the fact that it happened this way. The post-acquisition setting negatively influenced software engineers' organizational identification towards the acquirer.

5.1.4. Endangered culture and decreased organizational identification

Within the empirical findings section, we concluded that the organizational culture could be in danger due to the changed circumstances that result from both the post-Covid setting as well as the post-acquisition setting. The culture is impacted negatively, resulting in a decrease in organizational identification. This is also reflected in our theoretical framework and in terms of organizational identification the priorly proposed theoretical framework seems to be applicable in real life. The self-view/identity of software engineers that work as consultants seems to deviate from mainstream literature though and we argue that software engineering is a craft on its own as software engineers that work as consultants do not really compare towards other kinds of consultants. In addition, working from home seemed to have a positive impact on software engineers' effectiveness as they could focus on their coding, but it had a rather negative influence on the social aspect of work and the organizational culture. Similarly, through looking at communication prevalent in this study we see that less people showing up to the office, together with the language barrier and laptop-fiasco of the acquisition, result in a negative impact on organizational culture and organizational identification. In the following section employee motivation is discussed in the light of our thesis.

5.2. Motivation - declining and increasing

Covid and the post-Covid settings have changed the way people relate to work through place, and this, in turn, has implications on how the software engineers are motivated. Just as with the post-Covid setting, the acquisition of company X by company Y resulted in a shift in business ownership that may impact their motivation at work. In the following parts, we will discuss how their motivation is influenced by these phenomena.

5.2.1. Fear of the unfamiliarity

There has been a decline in software engineers' motivation. In terms of the acquisition, it is recognized that the software engineers were afraid of the possible changes in management, as a change in management could influence values of organizational culture that they already value for a long period of time. Furthermore, the language barriers and lengthy process of the laptop-fiasco, which seem to imply a "*more hierarchical organization*" as commented by one software engineer, are believed to lower employee motivation for working. The reaction of the software employees towards the acquisition correlates with findings of Schweizer and Patzelt

(2012) that integration process post-acquisition could become the sources of uncertainties in regard to probable changes of existing workplace relationship and cultures. Moreover, the empirical findings re-emphasize the connection between employee motivation and the *hygiene factors*, referring to the environmental elements such as culture, leadership, working conditions, in Herzberg's two-factor theory in the Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) framework. Besides, the role of leadership, which constitutes organizational culture, and the culture itself has been mentioned substantially as one of the reasons for *"why I am working here"* during the interviews, which also aligns with Nohria, Groysberg, and Lee (2008)'s findings.

In addition to the acquisition, the more distant interactions with organization and colleagues resulting from remote working also hinder software engineers' motivation. While there are still contradictory views concerning co-workers as both the motivational factor and distracting factor for employees going to work in the office, it is widely acknowledged from the interviewees that their interaction and connectedness with the company and fellow workers were adversely impacted during the post-Covid setting. The declining interaction somehow reduces their motivation. one software engineer gave an estimation that now his company meets only 80 percent of a "*happy workplace*", rather than 100 percent as it did before the pandemic. This result is in accordance with the Alvesson and Kärreman (2018)'s study, in which the interrelation between individuals and the social groups and standards are highlighted in interactive motivation tradition. What is more, concerning employee identity as the motivational factor in interactive motivation, the reduction in software engineers' motivation is supported by Alvesson and Kärreman (2018) in the view that their motivation declines as a result of their lower organizational identification. Since the software engineers identify less with their company (as concluded in the above part), they are less motivated. Therefore, the empirical findings are in line with the theoretical framework which demonstrates the negative impacts of the post-Covid and post-acquisition on employee motivation through organizational culture, and the relation between identification and employee motivation (Alvesson, Etal. 2018).

5.2.2.   The nature of work as a moderating factor

From the empirical results we found that the nature of work appears to be a moderating factor in the relationship between employee motivation and the post-acquisition and post-Covid context. Specifically, the strong identification of software engineers towards their profession,

regardless of the environmental factors at which they work, increases their motivation for working.

The post-Covid setting has positive implications on software engineers' motivation in the sense that they experience comfort while working from home and can better concentrate on their coding work. Informality has been discovered in the empirical findings as the comfort zone of software engineers, which gives more convenience, flexibility, and perhaps more efficiency for their work. Working from home allows them to be in their comfort zone, they can perform their coding work without paying too much attention to the traditionally more formal nature of the office. Therefore, software engineers seem to be more motivated as they now can be in their most comfortable condition and completely devote themselves to their coding work. This result is probably explained by the interactive motivation tradition of Alvesson and Kärreman (2018), in which their identity with the software engineering profession, in addition to organizational identity, acts as the motivational factor to increase their level of motivation in the post-Covid setting.

In addition, during the interview with software engineers, it is expressed that the acquisition is not only associated with the drawbacks but also brings about growth opportunities in their expertise. (Almost) all the software engineers mentioned room for *"internal projects"* or expertise development, rather than monetary incentives like increased salary or promotion, as their expectation from the acquisition. The internal project is believed to be more feasible with the financial resources and personnel from the acquired company. They demonstrated a positive outlook when talking about the software engineering profession and their coding/ developing work. They are passionate and motivated about the future opportunities to have their own internal projects. Thus, software engineers' motivation is boosted from their work and the nature of work itself, which also correlates with the inner motivation tradition proposed by Alvesson and Kärreman (2018). Particularly, the nature of work relates to *motivational factors*, as drivers for employees' satisfaction and self-fulfillment in their work, according to Herzberg's two-factor theory. Furthermore, their desire for personal development to seek for peak experiences in software engineering profession also re-affirms the self-actualization needs in the Maslow's motivation theory (1943), which indicates the desire to realize one's full potential and self-fulfillment including creative activities (McLeod, 2018).

Provided that software engineering is knowledge intensive work which involves creativity in both using knowledge and creating new knowledge (Hislop, 2013, P71), the nature of work

appears as a highly motivational factors for software engineers, understanding creativity and its interrelation with intrinsic motivation is thus beneficial to the research's findings. According to Amabile (1983 cited in Amabile & Pillemer, 2012, p.7), intrinsic motivation is an important element determining one's creativity that "*the intrinsically motivated state is conducive to creativity, whereas the extrinsically motivated state is detrimental*". Accordingly, software engineer's motivation from their "coding" work itself could significantly improve their creativity in work, which is essential to grow and fulfill their profession. This strong intrinsic motivation is probably described as *harmonious passion*, which is defined by Liu, Chen, and Yao (2011 cited in Amabile & Pillemer, 2012, p.9) as "*the autonomous internalization of an activity, making it part of one's identity and thus creating a sense of personal enjoyment and free choice about pursuing the activity*". Harmonious passion is also considered as stable and stronger than simple intrinsic motivation since it is internalized as part of an individual's identity. Therefore, in this case, the interviewees identify themselves with the software engineering profession, making their harmonious passion, or intrinsic motivation for work become strong and stable, regardless of the reduction in organizational identification.

5.3.   Proposed theoretical framework 2.0

From the above discussion and analysis, we found that although the empirical findings are in accordance with literature on motivation, it brings about another perspective on our theoretical framework. The software engineers' motivation is not necessarily decreased or increased, in the post-Covid and post-acquisition setting although their organizational identification decreased. It is because of the strong identification of software engineers towards their profession and the motivation obtained through the nature of work that made the software engineers motivation remain stable. In some cases, the software engineers even turned out to be working more as a result of working from home, and in almost all the cases the software engineers worked more effectively. The nature of work appears as a moderating factor in this case. While software engineers identify less with their organization, their identification towards their profession remains. Furthermore, employee motivation is impacted both positively as well as negatively, but overall, the nature of work moderated these impacts and ensured a stable motivation despite the changing circumstances.

Theoretical framework 2.0
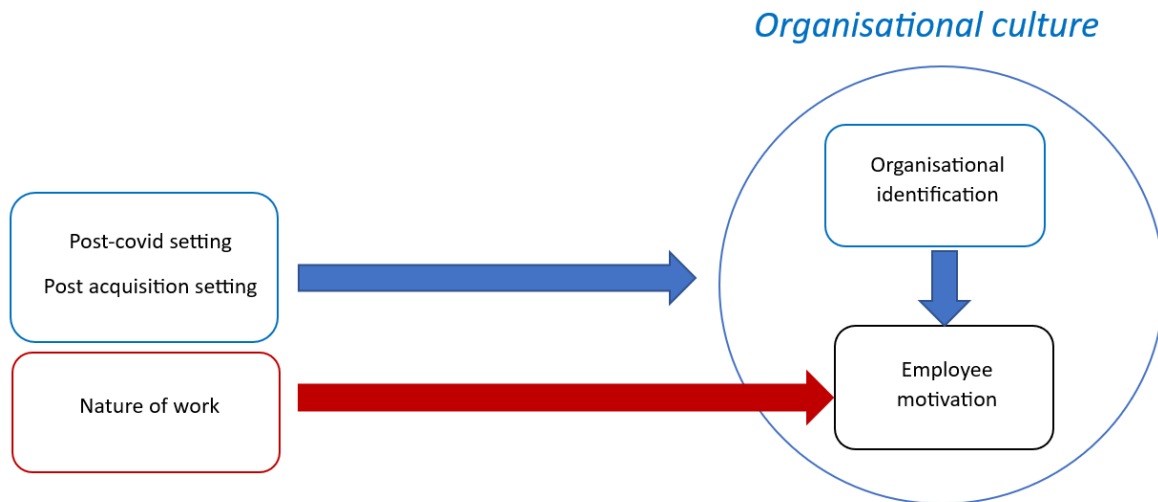
6. Conclusion

6.1. Empirical findings

Software engineering is a highly specific profession. The software engineers that we interviewed performed consultancy work, yet we cannot compare them to other types of consultants in terms of self-view and identity. Software engineers view themselves as kind of lazy in terms of their going towards the office attitude. In addition, their focus in terms of consulting is concerned with technical aspects, primarily "coding" rather than the social aspect of the client consultant relationship. Furthermore, software engineers have different norms, values, and identity, as they do not like hierarchies, value work-life balance, and are not necessarily interested in money, status or "making a career''. The software engineers we spoke to primarily want to do their coding work and do this within their comfort zone. This opposes for example towards research focusing on management consultants that emphasizes "elite status'' to be important, or the desire for professional service workers to become a partner (Stumpf, 2002; Gill, 2015).

The post-Covid setting has a negative impact on organizational culture and organizational identification. As a result of Covid, less software engineers come towards the office. At the same time all software engineers agree that Covid negatively impacted their organizational culture, and it similarly decreased their organizational identification. We experienced an organization that could be seen as a culture as their "daily performance creates the organization" (Czarniawska-Joerges, et al, 1991). An example would be the bar that was built

by employees for employees and constituted a daily spot for social interaction. However, this organizational culture is negatively impacted because the daily performance increasingly happens individually from home, rather than collectively in the office. The decrease in people working in the office also constituted the decrease in organizational identification according to the software engineers, thus proving the conceptual link between organizational culture, organizational identification, and the negative effect from the post-Covid setting.

Difficulty for post-acquisition identification: the work from home setting makes it more difficult for employees to adapt towards the acquiring organization's identity. This could be explained through the change in the identification process in which communication plays a crucial role in this process (Brown, 2017; Bartels, et al, 2010). However, because working from home increased so significantly, communication shifted from in-person communication towards digital communication which has a lower level of "social presence" and is less effective in creating interpersonal bonds (Tuan, 2010; Nguyen, et al, 2022). Besides, the organizational identification process could be explained through the question "*How do I come to know who I am in relation to you?*" (Whetten, et al, p.171). However, due to the post-Covid setting, the meeting moments are less frequent, and the software engineers spend a lot of time at home, which makes it difficult to mirror themselves against their new company/employer.

Nature of work is a moderating factor for software engineers' motivation, in relation to the post-Covid and post-acquisition setting. Due to the relationship organizational identification has towards employee motivation through organizational culture (Ravasi, et al, 2006; Nohria, et al, 2008), it was expected that when organizational identification and organizational culture was negatively impacted this should also negatively impact the motivation of the software engineers. Yet motivation seemed to remain unchanged as the software engineers appear to be motivated through the nature of work. Research emphasizes the connection between motivation and the nature of work (Amabile,et al, 2012), and for this thesis we argue that the nature of work thus functions as a moderating factor for the impact of the post-Covid setting as well as the post-acquisition setting. We do acknowledge the impact of these factors in terms of motivation towards some extent; however, motivation remained unchanged according to the interviews as software engineers argued they became; more effective, worked more in terms of time and enjoyed work because they "love coding". This makes us confident to argue that the nature of work thus functions as a moderating factor for software engineers' motivation.

The struggle for an ideal workspace: the post-Covid workspace is a struggle for both employees as for management. The software engineers experienced the comfort and convenience of their home offices, yet at the same time acknowledged the value in coming towards the office. People were seen as both a factor to come towards the office as well as a factor to go away from the office. Fellow colleagues are perceived as a social distraction that is both pleasant and unpleasant. What is more, when the office is empty the software engineers argued they might as well stay at home, yet when the office is busy this is far from an ideal workspace. Management experiences a similar struggle, the efficiency and cost saving of less people in the office is nice; however, the long-term implications on for example knowledge sharing, bonding and performance are uncertain. The office is an expensive part of the company operations and management doubts whether they should continue to have an expensive office, yet at the same time the office is seen as more than just a workspace, it is a meeting place according to management and when this is gone what will happen? The struggle is real for both employees and employers.

6.2. Theoretical Contribution

Theoretically we frame that software engineering consultants are a different kind of consultant in terms of self-view, motivation and identification compared to other consultants. Despite the fact that we acknowledge software engineers as both knowledge workers and consultants, software engineers are quite a unique profession that does not completely fit underneath the consultancy umbrella prevalent in organizational literature. Software engineers identify themselves differently. They do not have the drive for "an elite status" or career progression towards the partner or managers positions as other consultants or professional service firm workers do have (Stumpf, 2002; Gill, 2015). Nonetheless, both of these groups are knowledge workers as their work is *"non routine, creative and it requires both the application of knowledge as the creation of new knowledge"* (Hislop, 2013, p.71). Different types of knowledge workers thus have different self-views and identification even though these professions could fall under the same categories namely "consultancy" and "professional service work".

We found that software engineers' motivation can remain stable during times of disruptive changes because the nature of work is a moderating factor. Disruptive changes such as Covid or an acquisition that play a central role in this thesis have a negative effect on both organizational culture and organizational identification, which is also in line with research on

disruptive changes in organization studies (Ravasi, et al, 2006). However, for software engineers this does not seem to count for their motivation as they are motivated through the nature of work (Amabile, et al, 2012). Therefore, despite disruptive changes within their organization, the software engineer's motivation remains stable. In the research of Amabile and Pillemer (2012) from creativity literature, software-engineering is a creative profession since problem solving is a core competence within their work, and problem solving is acknowledged within creativity literature as well (Amabile, et al, 2012). We do acknowledge that motivation is somewhat impacted through the disruptive changes, yet overall motivation remains unchanged and thus stable. We adjusted this within the theoretical framework 2.0 that we proposed as a result of the discussion. What we contributed to the theory is that the nature of work could be a moderating factor towards changes of how we organize work. In this thesis, these changes towards how we organize work are the post-Covid setting where there is an increase in working from home (or even a change towards fully remote working), just as a change in organizing work due to the acquisition (there is a change in ownership).

Covid or better said, the post-Covid setting has a negative influence on organizational Identification. As less people go towards the office, communication is digital rather than physical and working from home appears to be more comfortable, making many employees decide to stay home. The decrease in working at the office negatively impacts the organizational culture as bonding becomes more difficult when physically distanced from one another (Tuan, 2010; Nguyen, et al, 2022). In addition, the process of organizational identification towards a new acquirer becomes difficult in a post-Covid setting as the employees mirror their own self view towards the (new) organization they work for (Whetten, et al, p.171), yet when being home, it is difficult to have an understanding about the norms, values and beliefs of each other as digital communication has a lower sense of social presence (Nguyen, et al, 2022).

The case which involves both the post-Covid and post-acquisitions is unique in its context. In terms of theory post-Covid, research is still relatively scarce, and the longer-term results of covid in the so called post-Covid setting will become clearer within the future. However, this thesis provides quite a unique case that can be seen as food for thought. Moreover, it is (as far as we are aware) one of the first cases where acquisitions in the post-Covid area are studied in relation towards organization studies. Specifically for organizational identification and motivation, it is a unique case to view these concepts within a very much changed landscape,

and it appears as if acquisitions were not positively affected by the post-Covid setting as organizational culture was negatively influenced, and the organizational culture plays an important factor within mergers and acquisitions (Van Dick, et al, 2006; Weber, & Tarba, 2012; Weber, Yedidia, Tarba, & Reichel, 2009).

6.3. Practical Implications

Providing the uniqueness in the context of the case, we believe our research will provide practical implications for businesses. Below the practical implications that we foresee are stated.

Software engineering specifically and computer science generally have expanded and developed significantly with continuous technology innovation. As the subject of this study is software engineers, the research will give businesses in the field insights for this group of knowledge workers. Specifically, this report will help businesses, especially management teams, to dig into how software engineers think typically in terms of acquisition, motivation, what their comfort zone is, what values that they appreciate just to name a few. All these perspectives are essential for businesses to understand, motivate, retain, and develop their personnel for long-term business and people management.

Employee motivation and identification are two main concepts discussed substantially in this thesis. Different groups of professions identify and are motivated through different ways. Provided that software engineering is quite a unique profession compared to other consulting professions, the research is believed to bring about insights for managers to take into consideration for effective strategies that not only meet business strategic goals (from the financial perspective) but also motivate and retain their talented employees (from the personnel perspective). Some of the insights from this study, such as software engineers' comfort zones, their profession and organization identification, their values towards work itself and remote working, is essential for future business decisions regarding management, engagement, motivation, and development. As shared by one manager in our case organization, one of their most talented software engineers left because he no longer felt motivated because the company did not meet his development expectations in the profession as before, we hope this research with given business context somehow provides food for thoughts for the question *"What is best for my software engineering employees?"*.

The research also provides readers with practical implications on merger and acquisition business settings, in which employees' identification, their explicit and implicit concerns, expectations and responses, are discussed with a specific case study. Accordingly, we believe the study's results could bring about useful take-aways for both employers and employees in terms of organization culture, communication, trust building, etc. to make the integration process more effective, just as for doing acquisitions in a post-Covid setting.

Hybrid working, working from home, and workspace has become commonly discussed after the pandemic. Though there is research into these topics, we believe that our study still provides practical implications from the complex contextual situation of the case around *hybrid working software engineers* in a *post-acquisition* setting. With the philosophy that remote working may remain in the future, the expectation as well as the struggle from both managers and employees regarding an "ideal" workspace will give insights for businesses to better manage employees working from home and effectively organize workspace.

6.4. Limitations

With the aim to bring about an objective viewpoint, below are some limitations of the study for readers' consideration. The first limitation to point out is perhaps that the software engineers in our interviews are all male. Although we tried to seek for the most possible diverse participants, including age, nationality, project types, tenure of work at the company, we could not have any female interviewees as all the software engineers in the company are male. This somewhat proposes an interesting insight in the gender tendency in the software engineering industry. Meanwhile, differences in gender may impact the studies' findings in terms of the workspace preference, motivation, and identification. Hence, gender differences should be considered when interpreting the research.

In addition to gender, the context of the case organization is another aspect that readers should pay attention to. The case is conducted in a Swedish software engineering business with the culture described as open, flat-hierarchical, trustworthy, and fun. This may influence characteristics and the types of software engineers who work here, leading to probable variance in their perceived values, preference, and tendency. Therefore, it is essential for readers to take the national, organizational cultural factors as well as other environmental elements into consideration for interpreting the thesis.

Another point for consideration when interpreting the study's result is the Hawthorne effect, which indicates the tendency that participants in research may change their behavior when being observed. According to McCambridge, Witton, Elbourne (2014), the social desirability considerations probably make participants change their behavior in accordance with these expectations. Hence, as the study is supported by managers at our case company, there is, still, possibility that the software engineering employees' responses are implicitly impacted by their managers' expectation, or the participants become more cautious, leading to potential variance in the research's findings.

6.5. Future Research

According to the results and limitations of this study, some future research possibilities will be presented to reinforce the understanding of the phenomena in our research. Firstly, effectiveness is mentioned by both the software engineers and managers when discussing workspace in the post-Covid setting. Considering the human resources perspective that the majority of interviewees enjoy and believe that they work more effectively, cost savings are an additional financial benefit as working from home reduces costs for office operations. Especially with the unpredictable future of the Covid pandemic on workspace and the preferences of employees, studies on various aspects of employee effectiveness in remote work could provide practical implications for many businesses.

Secondly, during the research we found that software engineering is a distinct knowledge-intensive profession with many insights that do not completely fit the consulting industry. With the limitations on cultural and gender differences as presented earlier, we believe that further in-depth research specializing on this group would be beneficial and bring about a more objective and general perspective on the norms, values, and characteristics of software engineers.

Thirdly, further research on doing an acquisition/ merger in a post covid setting is beneficial as the post-Covid setting might impact the success of mergers and acquisitions. As people work from home, identification and trust building processes may take longer and require different efforts from both employee and company to come towards a successful merger. We believe perhaps there are more factors that we have not noticed in our research that impact the integration process, which in turn influence the success of the acquisition/merger, as well as the motivation and identification of employees.

Finally, it is noted in our study that organizational culture plays a vital role in employees' identification and motivation. Accordingly, responses and assessment of the impact of the post-Covid setting on organizational culture could be further studied so that organizations are aware of and prepared for appropriate actions to keep the organization culture from being harmed or endangered during changing times.

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8. Appendix

8.1. Appendix 1 Organizational identification model during a merger and acquisition

Source: Van Dick, Ullrich and Tissington, 2006
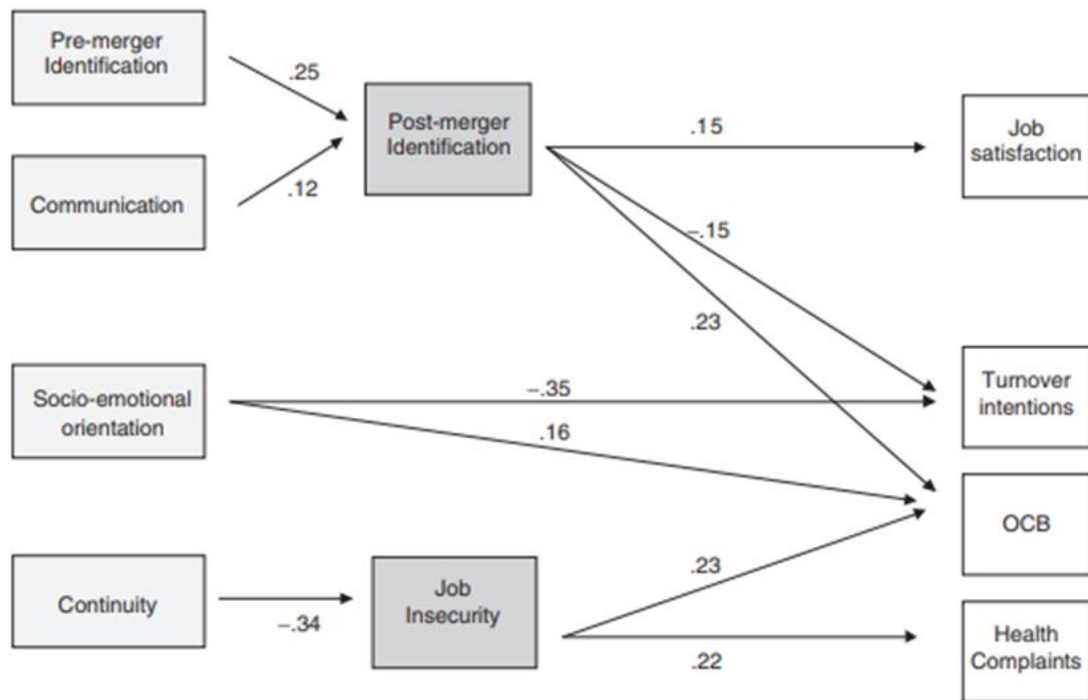
8.2. Appendix 2 List of interviewees

No.	Name (anonymized)	Occupation
1	Erik	Software Engineer
2	Karl	Software Engineer
3	Alexander	Software Engineer
4	Martin	Software Engineer
5	David	Software Engineer
6	William	Software Engineer
7	Simon	Software Engineer
8	Christian	Software Engineer
9	Jan	Software Engineer
10	Thomas	Software Engineer
11	Oskar	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
12	Maria	Chief Operating Officer (COO)
13	Emma	HR Manager

8.3. Appendix 3 Software engineer interview guide

A. **Introduce ourselves,** briefly mention anonymity and that we would like to record the interview and then ask for their permission.

> ● *We are writing our master's thesis at Lund University and we want to get a deeper insight of the topic. This will be completely anonymous so that no one will know what you said.*

> ● *This is an open dialogue, so it should be relaxed, you do not need to be nervous, you can tell what you think and feel - there is no right or wrong and no one will know who said what.*

B. **Introduce our research topic**: We are looking into the employees of company Y, or formerly known as company X since there is an interesting situation as X has been recently acquired by Y. At the same time the Covid pandemic happened and many of you are working from home so we would like to know more about this and ask some questions about how you feel about this

> ● *We have to ask if it is okay for us to record the interview and then be able to transcribe your answers. The audio file is only used by us as authors to simplify our work and ensure that your answers are interpreted correctly. No one but us will be able to access the recording.*

> *Do we have your permission to record?*

C. **Introductory questions:**
   1. Could you please introduce yourself and your career?
   2. How long have you worked here?

D. **Work environment**
   ❖ Working from home
   3. Are you working from home? Since when?
      - So you work 100% remote?
   4. Please describe your pre-pandemic workday
   5. How do you structure your working day currently?
      - How often do you take breaks? (more or less)
      - How do you know when to switch off from work?
      - Do you feel completely released after switching off from home?

- Do you feel/Would you say that you work more or less (productive) when working from home?

6. How has Covid changed your working and personal life?
   - Do you feel less connected with your company after Covid?
   - What may you think are the reasons?

7. What are positive and negative things that you associate with Covid in your working life?

8. How do you feel about working from home?

❖ **Space**

9. What do you like about your home office?
   - Could something be improved in your home office? (Distraction from personal stuff)
   - How did you get to the office? Was there a commute? How long?

10. What do you like about the company office in Malmo (or other location)?
    - Could something be improved at the company office?

11. In which working way do you feel more concentrated or more effective?

12. How often would you like to work from home or how often would you like to be at the company office?

❖ **Future orientation**

13. How do you see the future of your profession after Covid?

E. **Motivation:**

14. What motivates you in your work?

15. Are there any fun activities/ traditions (birthday, work anniversary, etc.) that make you feel engaged (while working from home)?
    a. How have these activities/ traditions changed by Covid?
    b. How do you perceive these kinds of activities?
    c. How do you feel about connecting with your colleagues (while working from home)?
    d. *(Do you sometimes feel/Would you say that lonely when working from home?)*
    e. *(Is there anybody else in your household? Are they working from home? Homeschooling? Etc.?)*

16. What do you think is the best thing about working here?

      a. Does it meet your expectation about a happy workplace? Any areas for improvement?

17. What do you think is the most boring thing about working here?

18. What characteristics of the company that keep you working here?

F. Identification after acquisition: briefly transition to the recent acquisition between company X and company Y

19. How have you been informed about the acquisition?
   - Do you feel that you are well informed about the acquisition or potential changes?

20. How do you feel about the acquisition as an employee?

21. Do you feel more like an employee of company X or company Y?
   - It could be neither company X, nor company Y, nor software engineer profession/specialization regardless of the employer

22. Could you share how you feel about the culture of company X (or company Y)?

23. Have you noticed any changes in your work after the acquisition?
   - Do you have an example? (The work environment, culture, leadership, teamwork/team structure)

24. How do these changes impact your (wellbeing at) work?

25. Would you see any potential impacts of the acquisition on your work? (Challenges, opportunities, team spirit, etc.)

26. What are positive and negative things that you associate with this acquisition in your working life?

G. Closing questions

27. Overall, what do you expect from the company that you think would be best for you?

That was all of our questions - do you have something to add or any comments?

Thank you so much for your participation!

8.4. Appendix 4 Manager interview guide

A. Introduce ourselves, briefly mention anonymity and that we would like to record the interview and then ask for their permission.

- *We are writing our master's thesis at Lund University and we want to get a deeper insight of the topic. This will be completely anonymous so that no one will know what you said.*

- *This is an open dialogue, so it should be relaxed, you do not need to be nervous, you can tell what you think and feel - there is no right or wrong and no one will know who said what.*

B. Introduce our research topic: We are looking into the employees of company Y, or formerly known as company X since there is an interesting situation as X has been recently acquired by Y. At the same time the Covid pandemic happened, so we would like to know more about this and ask some questions about how you feel about this

- *We have to ask if it is okay for us to record the interview and then be able to transcribe your answers. The audio file is only used by us as authors to simplify our work and ensure that your answers are interpreted correctly. No one but us will be able to access the recording.*

  Do we have your permission to record?

C. Introductory questions:

1. Could you please introduce yourself and your career?

D. Work environment

2. Are you working from home? Since when?
   - So you work 100% remote?

3. What is your standpoint on employees working from home post covid?

4. What do you think are challenges for employees while working from home?

5. What do you think about employee effectiveness while working from home?

6. How has Covid changed your employee management at the company?

7. What are positive and negative things that you associate with Covid as an employer?

8. What are the ideal working conditions that you think are best for the employees? (Group employees, days, frequency)

9. And what situation is best for business?

❖ **Future orientation**

10. How do you see the future of software engineers after Covid?

E. Motivation

11. How do you motivate and engage employees?
    - What activities/ traditions are in place? How have they been changed by Covid?
    - How do you perceive these kinds of activities?
    - To what extent does Germany company Y's activities/ traditions are introduced to company X in Sweden?

12. How do you feel about employee engagement at the moment?
    - Has this changed after covid or after the acquisition?

13. Do you see yourself more as a leader or a manager?

14. What characteristics are dominant in your leadership/managerial approach?

15. What do you think is the best thing about working here?
    - Any areas for improvement?

16. What characteristics of the company that keep employees working here?

F. Identification after acquisition: briefly transition to the recent acquisition between company X and company Y

17. How do you feel about the acquisition?

18. Do you feel the employees were well informed about the acquisition?

19. What responses did employees give related to the acquisition?
    - Do you think they have concerns related to the acquisition?
    - Have they shared any with you?
    - Share some of the concerns and uncertainties that we found in earlier interviews (unclear about future changes in terms of the scopes of work, team structure, opportunities for further integrated projects, fears of insecurity)
    - What is your analysis of the situation?

20. Could you explain into your own words the company culture here?

21. Is there culturally a match between company X and company Y?
    - Do you see any potential culture clash?

22. Do you feel that the X's employees in Sweden are well embedded in the company culture? Why?
    - What might be the reasons?
    - We found many employees still identify more with company X, rather than with company Y, what do you think about this?

- What are the challenges to boost company X's identity for the Swedish employees?
- What is your planned approach for the situation?

23. At the moment do you see yourself more as a company X or a company Y 's representative?

24. Are there any changes implied on company X in Sweden as a result of the acquisition? (Does it impact the culture, identification or leadership?)
    - Did procedures change?
    - What about office design? Could something be improved at the company office? Is there any standard for office design at company X in Sweden and should they do so?
    - What has changed in terms of reporting requirements? (control, team structure..)
    - Example of issues raised from the interviews: laptop problems (work equipment supplies), language barriers
    - What is your analysis of this situation?
    - What future changes are planned ahead for company X in Sweden?
    - What do these changes mean to you?

25. Would you see any potential impacts of the acquisition on employee's work? (Challenges, opportunities, team spirit, etc.)

26. What are positive and negative things that you associate with this acquisition?

G. Closing research questions

27. Overall, how do you think the identification and motivation of software engineers in Sweden are impacted in this situation?

That was all of our questions - do you have something to add or any comments? Thank you so much for your participation!

8.5. Appendix 5 HR interview guide

A. Introduce ourselves, mention anonymity and that we would like to record the interview. Ask for their permission.

- *We are writing our master's thesis at Lund University and we want to get a deeper insight of the topic. This will be completely anonymous so that no one will know what you said.*

- *This is an open dialogue, so it should be relaxed, you do not need to be nervous, you can tell what you think and feel - there is no right or wrong and no one will know who said what.*

B. Introduce our research topic: We are looking into the company Y, or formerly known as company X since there is an interesting situation as X has been recently acquired by Y. At the same time the Covid pandemic happened, so we would like to know more about this and ask some questions about how you feel about this

- *We have to ask if it is okay for us to record the interview and then be able to transcribe your answers. The audio file is only used by us as authors to simplify our work and ensure that your answers are interpreted correctly. No one but us will be able to access the recording.*

Do we have your permission to record?

C. Introductory questions:

1. Could you please introduce yourself and your career?

D. Work environment

2. What is the working condition at company Y in Germany now? (hybrid/ WFH/ office)
3. What is your standpoint on employees working from home post covid?
4. What do you think are challenges for employees while working from home?
5. What do you think about employee effectiveness while working from home?
6. How has Covid changed your employee management at the company?
7. What are positive and negative things that you associate with Covid as an employer?
8. What are the ideal working conditions that you think are best for the employees? (Group employees, days, frequency)
9. And what situation is best for business?

❖ **Future orientation**

10. How do you see the future of software engineers after Covid?

E. Motivation

11. What does the company do to motivate and engage employees?
    - What activities/ traditions are in place? How have they been changed by Covid?
    - To what extent these activities/ traditions are introduced to company X in Sweden?

12. How do you feel about employee engagement/connection between company X and company Y?

13. What characteristics are dominant in leadership/managerial work at company Y?

14. What do you think is the best thing about working here?
    - Any areas for improvement?

15. What characteristics of the company keep employees working here?

F. Identification after acquisition: briefly transition to the recent acquisition between company X and company Y

16. Do you feel the employees at company X were well informed about the acquisition?

17. What responses did company X's employees give related to the acquisition?
    - Do you think they have concerns related to the acquisition?
    - Have they shared any with you?
    - Share some of the concerns and uncertainties that we found in earlier interviews (unclear about future changes in terms of the scopes of work, team structure, opportunities for further integrated projects, fears of insecurity)
    - What is your analysis of the situation?

18. Could you explain into your own words the company culture here?

19. Is there culturally a match between company X and company Y?
    - Do you see any potential culture clash?

20. Do you feel that company X's employees are well embedded in the company culture? Why?
    - What might be the reasons?
    - We found many employees still identify more with company X, rather than with company Y, what do you think about this?
    - What is your planned approach for the situation?

21. Are there any changes implied on company X as a result of the acquisition? (does it impact the culture, identification or leadership?)
    - Did procedures change?
    - What about office design? Is there any standard for office design at company X in Sweden? Should company X adopt a similar office design?
    - What has changed in terms of reporting requirements? (Control, team structure...)
    - Example of issues raised from the interviews: laptop problems (work equipment supplies), language barriers
    - What is your analysis of this situation?
    - What future changes are planned ahead for company X?
22. Would you see any potential impacts of the acquisition on employees from company X?
23. What are the opportunities and challenges that you associate with this acquisition?

G. Closing research questions

24. Overall, how do you think the identification and motivation of software engineers in Sweden are impacted in this situation?

That was all of our questions - do you have something to add or any comments? Thank you so much for your participation!