

Organisational Identification in Hybrid Work

Effects of hybrid work on how we identify with our organisations

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Abstract

The shift towards hybrid work arrangements has garnered the interest of a wide array of academics (e.g. Surma et al., 2021; Martyna et al., 2021; Peters et al., 2022; Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021; Chafi et al., 2021; Becker et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the coronavirus appears to have accelerated “at least two pre-pandemic trends that were already eroding organisational identification” (Ashforth, 2020). The benefits of organisational identification for employees and their organisations are well-established and include, but are not limited to, intrinsic motivation (van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000), performance (van Knippenberg, 2000; van Dick, 2001), and information sharing and coordinated action (Cheney, 1983; Tyler, 1999). My research question therefore is “*how might hybrid work affect organisational identification?*”

My study relates to literature on hybrid work, work design, and organisational identification. Organisational identification has its roots in Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Ashforth and Mael (1989) were the ones to introduce SIT to organizational studies. Organisational identification has been studied in office-based and telework settings but how hybrid work might affect organizational identification has received little to no attention as of yet. Instead, a notable focus in hybrid work research has recently been placed on issues caused by Covid-19 such as loneliness (Bareket-Bojmel, 2023), employee engagement (Surma et al., 2021; Martyna et al., 2021), onboarding (Mazzei et al., 2023) and well-being (Peters et al., 2022; Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021; Chafi et al., 2022; Becker et al., 2022).

I applied a grounded theory approach to my study of organizational identification in hybrid work. I took inspiration from Charmaz’s (2006) constructivist grounded theory. I conducted 14 in-depth, qualitative interviews. I transcribed the interviews and through a series of coding, theoretical sampling, and memo-writing arrived at my findings and conclusions.

My primary findings concerned the freedom of choice allotted to hybrid workers regarding where they work and the effects this might have on organizational identification. The other prominent theme which emerged during the interviews was the role of face-to-face interaction in fostering organizational identification, and how hybrid work affects the ways in which this may or may not occur. Based on my literature review and interviews I conclude that it is likely hybrid work could play a part in reducing organizational identification. However, due to the complex nature of organisational identification this is difficult to discern for certain, and whether this matters to employees is unsure whereas for employers this may have more meaning at least in the long-run. Therefore, I encourage further explorations into the subject e.g. directly aimed at how to foster OI in hybrid work.

Keywords Organisational identification, hybrid work

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Tiivistelmä

Viimeaikainen siirtymä hybridityö asetelmiin on herättänyt lukuisten tutkijoiden mielenkiinnon (e.g. Surma et al., 2021; Martyna et al., 2021; Peters et al., 2022; Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021; Chafi et al., 2021; Becker et al., 2022). Samaan aikaan koronavirus on kiihdyttänyt monia pandemiaa edeltäneitä trendejä, jotka ovat heikentäneet työntekijöiden identifioitumista työorganisaatioidensa kanssa (Ashforth, 2020). Identifioitumisen moninaiset edut sekä työntekijöille että heidän työnantajilleen ovat laajalti tunnettu. Etuihin lukeutuvat muun muassa sisäsyntyinen motivaatio (van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000), tehokkuus (van Knippenberg, 2000; van Dick, 2001), ja tiedonjakaminen sekä koordinoitu toiminta (Cheney, 1983; Tyler, 1999). Täten tutkimuskysymykseni on ”*miten hybridityö saattaa vaikuttaa työorganisaatioidensa kanssa identifioitumiseen?*”

Tutkielmani liittyy hybridityön, työsuunnittelun, ja identifikaation tutkimukseen. Sosiaalisen identiteetin teoria (SIT) luo pohjan työorganisaatioiden kanssa identifioitumisen tarkastelulle. Ashforth ja Mael (1989) olivat ensimmäiset, jotka sovelsivat tätä teoriaa työorganisaatioiden kontekstissa. Identifikaatioita on tutkittu läsnä- ja etätyö asetelmissä, mutta se miten hybridityö asetelma saattaisi vaikuttaa identifioitumiseen ei ole vielä ollenkaan tai ainakaan laajalti tutkittu. Hybridityöhön liittyvät tutkimukset ovat viime aikoina keskittyneet koronaviruksen aiheuttamiin seurauksiin kuten yksinäisyyteen (Bareket-Bojmel, 2023), työntekijöiden sitoutumiseen (Surma et al., 2021; Martyna et al., 2021), työhön perehdyttämiseen (Mazzei et al., 2023) ja hyvinvointiin (Peters et al., 2022; Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021; Chafi et al., 2022; Becker et al., 2022).

Sovelsin tutkielmassani ankkuroidun tutkimuksen (ts. aineistopohjainen tutkimus) menetelmiä. Seurasin etenin Charmazin (2006) konstruktivistisen version metodiikkaa. Toteutin 14 kvalitatiivista haastattelua. Litteroin haastattelut ja sovelsin metodiikkaan kuuluvia käytänteitä kuten monivaiheista koodausta.

Hybridityön työntekijöille suoma lisääntynyt vapaus ja työntekijöiden tarve tavata kollegoitaan kasvotusten identifikaation tukemiseksi olivat keskeisiä keskustelun aiheita. Kirjallisuuskatsauksen ja haastattelujen perusteella päättelen, että hybridityö voi mahdollisesti heikentää työntekijöiden identifikaatiota organisaatioidensa kanssa. Identifikaation monimutkainen luonne kuitenkin hankaloittaa tämän vahvistamista. Epäselvää on myös kuinka suuri merkitys tällä mahdollisella muutoksella olisi työntekijöille, mutta työnantajille väitän tällä olevan suurempi merkitys ainakin pitkällä kaavalla. Täten kannustan tutkimukseen joka muun muassa tarkastelisi kuinka identifikaatiota voitaisiin tukea hybridityöasetelmissä.

Avainsanat hybridityö, identifikaatio

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1 Introduction

Do you define yourself by your interests, occupation, perhaps your accomplishments, or something else? Just like many of my peers I had to re-evaluate how I define myself in the beginning of 2020. I found myself questioning who I am and where I belong after losing connection with many pillars of my identity – dear hobbies were taken away, I would never return to a classroom for the remainder of my studies, and work became as remote as it could. Now in 2023 the world appears to be in large reverting to pre-covid times while some changes persist. With graduation in my sights, I once again find myself wondering who I want to be, where do I belong, and what I want to do in this new world of work. These contemplations raised the question of how the new ways of working, that is hybrid work, might affect how we identify with our organisations, and whether it matters.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Hybrid work and organisational identification

The shift towards hybrid work arrangements has garnered the interest of a wide array of academics (e.g. Surma et al., 2021; Peters et al., 2022; Juchnowicz and Kinowska, 2021; Chafi et al., 2022; Becker et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021; Bell et al., 2023). Academics generally agree that the subject of hybrid work is very topical (Benedic, 2022) and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future (Becker et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Ashforth (2020) noted that the coronavirus appeared to be “accelerating at least two pre-pandemic trends that were already eroding organisational identification”, these trends being a simultaneous growth of the gig economy and replacing of employees with artificial intelligence, and the increasing virtualisation of work. Ashforth (2020) suggests that “the loss of organisational trappings and spontaneous, face-to-face interaction with other organisational members makes it more difficult for employees’ connection to the organisation to remain salient”. Bodies of research have emerged to explicate the importance of organisational identification and how it occurs.

1.1.2 Benefits of organisational identification

The benefits of strong organisational identification for employees and their organisations are well-established. Benefits for the organisation include increased effort, decision making for the benefit of the organisation, cooperation and participation (Rousseau, 1998; Bartel, 2001;

Kramer, 2006; Simon, 1976; Tompkins and Cheney, 1987), intrinsic motivation (van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000), performance (van Knippenberg, 2000; van Dick, 2001), and information sharing and coordinated action (Cheney, 1983; Tyler, 1999). Meanwhile benefits for the individual include, but are not limited to, “experiencing growth toward becoming a truer exemplar of a valued identity” and “maintaining a sense of wholeness across time” (Ashforth, 2001; Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008).

Recent research suggests that employees are beginning to identify less and less with their organisations (e.g. Ashforth, 2020). Furthermore, an overall shift towards faster employee turnover has been noted by scholars. Employees are devoting themselves less to single organisations and instead looking to gain experience from a wide array of employers. Organisational identification has been found to reduce employee turnover (Mael and Ashforth, 1995; van Dick et al., 2004) and therefore could be of interest to employers looking to reduce it. These are just some of the benefits of organisational identification and understanding the benefits for both organisations and individuals is crucial.

1.1.3 Research problem, question, and objectives

My research problem is how hybrid work might affect employees identifying with their organisations. A particular emphasis is on how hybrid work might affect how organisational identification can occur. My research question is therefore the following.

“How might hybrid work affect organisational identification?”

My sub-questions are *“what concrete effects does hybrid work have on organisational identification?”* and *“how applicable to hybrid work settings is prior research on organisational identification?”* The first sub-question examines what actions may result from changes to how employees identify with their organisations. The latter sub-question examines to what extent extant research on organisational identification in other work settings could explain what is happening in hybrid work settings.

My *research objectives* are three-fold. First, I wish to familiarise myself more with organisational identification and hybrid work. I am very interested in social identity theory and related concepts. Furthermore, it appears likely that hybrid work will be the setting in which my career will unfold for the foreseeable future. Therefore, gaining a deeper

understanding of hybrid work settings could be beneficial to me. As I am functioning as a supervisor for approximately 40 employees during my studies and would prefer to continue in similar roles in the future, understanding how people identify with their organisations could also prove beneficial. My second research objective is to find out how organisational identification occurs in hybrid work settings and in what ways the experiences and opinions of employees differ and to what extent they are similar. My last research objective is to clarify what my findings might imply for employers and to suggest possible avenues for future research.

1.1.4 My own interest

My own interest in this subject grew when I was working two very different jobs in 2021-2022. I had worked one of the jobs for a couple of years prior to the coronavirus and it was such that it could not in large part be implemented in any other way than as onsite work. My team within the organisation was very close-knit and I felt strong belongingness. I took on the second job during the coronavirus and the work was implemented in a telework setting, which in time turned into a hybrid work setting as coronavirus-related restrictions were levied. I was welcomed with open arms into the second organisation, but the hybrid work setting felt as if it was hindering me identifying with the organisation, especially as a new hire. Multiple other factors might also have affected the differences in identification, but personally I experienced hybrid work as being the main culprit, especially since I truly liked each organisation.

1.2 Relevant literature and research gap

The subject of my thesis relates to research concerning hybrid work, work design and organisational identification. I looked at hybrid work research to identify gaps in the literature where I could position my thesis. Also, understanding the characteristics of hybrid work settings is crucial for finding possible solutions to challenges regarding organisational identification. I also conducted a quick dive into remote work -related research, since this could provide further insight into hybrid work due to their considerable overlap. Looking into work design literature supported my examination of hybrid work related research by elaborating work design related challenges.

Lastly, my thesis relates to research on organisational identification. This includes Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; 1986) and other related constructs. Various models of organisational identification have emerged such as the Process Model of Identification (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). Understanding what people need in order to identify with their organisations and why people identify with their organisations is central to examining how hybrid work settings could be beneficial or detrimental to organisational identification.

My thesis extends on organisational identification research by looking at hybrid work settings. Fortunately, my subject relates to well-established constructs. Social identity theory was introduced into organisational studies by Mael and Ashforth (1989) whereas Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994) built on this and introduced organisational identification to management studies. Research such as this provides my thesis with a much-needed theoretical base to refer to. Research on organisational identification in office-based and telework settings provide me with starting points to study organisational identification in hybrid work settings.

1.3 Definitions

A few definitions are critical to discuss before diving further into the thesis. Here I go over the definitions for *office-based work*, *telework*, *hybrid work*, and *organisational identification*. Other definitions of these concepts exist that are not presented or referenced here. The following definitions have been selected, because they best represent my understanding of these concepts after having gone through literature relevant to this thesis.

Office-based work is understood as work conducted physically on site at the office. Office-based work refers to working at the official worksite, which is not necessarily always an office even though here that is generally the case. Onsite work and office-based work are used interchangeably in this thesis. Meanwhile, Di Martino and Wirth (1990) define telework as “a flexible work arrangement whereby workers work in locations, remote from their central offices or production facilities, the worker has no personal contact with co-workers there, but is able to communicate with them using technology”. Some have attempted to specify the viable working locations in telework, but with today’s advancements in technology employees can work from nearly anywhere, and therefore I feel that this

specification would be unnecessary. I use offsite work, remote work, and telework interchangeably in this thesis.

Hybrid work is still a relatively new concept and definitions vary across the board. I believe it is best to first define the *hybrid workplace environment* within which work is conducted in a hybrid work setting. Surma et al. (2021) point out that “considering there is no common agreement among researchers on the definition of “workplace”, the projected hybrid workplace ... makes these considerations even more complex and challenging”. Surma et al. (2021) discuss various definitions for work environment, which depict it as either a physical or social environment. I adopt their definition of the physical hybrid workplace environment for use here: “a network of physical and virtual places where work occurs, including office, home, third places, and surrounding urban realm.” I understand hybrid work as a model in which work is conducted in this workplace environment and as one which provides varying degrees of freedom to choose where to work. Lastly, various online infrastructures and tools such as Microsoft Teams are used to enable work in cases where employees are working in different locations.

Ashforth & Mael (1989) define *identification* (OI) as “the perception of oneness and belongingness to some human aggregate”. Meanwhile Dutton et al. (1994) define *organisational identification* as the instance in which “a person’s self-concept contains the same attributes as those in the perceived organisational identity”. Furthermore, Pratt (1998) refers to *identification* as either “self-referential” or “self-defining”. Self-referential refers to deeming a collective or role as being similar to the self while self-defining alludes to becoming “more similar” with a collective or role.

2 Literature review

This literature review is split into three sections in which I examine what I consider to be the most relevant areas of research relating to my thesis. In constructing grounded theory Charmaz (2006) summarizes that “the literature review and theoretical frameworks are ideological sites in which you claim, locate, evaluate and defend your position”. The examination of current and previous publications concerning my thesis’s subject will especially help me in positioning my thesis among the existing literature. My goal here is to elaborate on what is known on subjects relating to my thesis and to position my thesis in the extant literature. The selected literature demonstrates key concepts to my thesis,

developments in relevant areas of research, current areas of focus in research, and avenues for future research.

This literature review goes relatively far in explaining certain concepts, especially organisational identification. Based on discussions I have had with numerous people throughout the master's thesis process, I felt a need to thoroughly clarify the subject of organisational identification. I believe that understanding how and why organisational identification helps the reader follow my thought process. Only through understanding the underlying mechanics and reasons behind organisational identification do I think you the reader can benefit from this thesis. Understanding these mechanics can also enable you to understand identification in your own life.

The first section of this review addresses *hybrid work*. In putting together this section I included publications on hybrid work and its connection to any number of themes outside of organisational identification. This section serves the purpose of highlighting what are the pressing issues academics are currently tackling relating to hybrid work and where my thesis lands within the existing literature. I also briefly reference research on remote work due to its close connection to hybrid work.

The second section addresses *work design and working habits* with a particular emphasis on the general development of work design throughout the years, what might be the future of work design, and current issues in work design such as health related issues. Alongside telework and hybrid work research, this section serves the purpose of showing the path that has led us from office-based work to telework and now to hybrid work.

The third section focuses on *the theoretical roots of organisational identification, and how it occurs*. This section is crucial for understanding how organisational identification occurs irrespective of the work setting. This general understanding then helps in understanding how organisational identification is affected by different work arrangements. Perhaps most importantly this section also includes an examination of the effects of organisational identification on employees and provides reasoning for the importance of organisational identification. Since organisational identification is the other major subject in my thesis alongside hybrid work, it is crucial here to clarify where my thesis lands among extant research on organisational identification.

2.1 Hybrid work

An interest in hybrid work grew at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Some research had been conducted on hybrid work prior to 2020 when the virus spread worldwide. However, the changes that the pandemic caused to working life noticeably increased the interest in hybrid work and the rate at which it was adopted as a work arrangement around the world. Benedic (2022) puts it well in stating that “the issue of hybrid work is not new, but it has never been so topical”. In fact, Covid-19 not only rapidly changed the world of work, but its impact seems to carry on as noted by Becker et al. (2022). The growing body of work surrounding hybrid work suggests an interest in the subject as a whole, and its growing presence in working life presents a need to develop capabilities for understanding it.

The body of research directly discussing hybrid work is rather young, since hybrid work itself is a relatively new form of work. Overall, while looking through databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, I was unable to find studies referring to “hybrid work” published in 2018 or prior. One of the earliest examples I came across comes from Xie et al. (2019) who conducted a study on hybrid work characteristics. This is not to say that arrangements comparable to hybrid work would not have been discussed before this time.

The reaction to hybrid work by academics was rather swift. Just as forced telework arrangements were being substituted with hybrid work arrangements, the first publications discussing hybrid work were being published. A commonly shared view is that the first case of Covid-19 was in December of 2019 as stated by Zoumpourlis et al. (2020), while a WHO report suggests that the virus could have gotten its start a few months before (WHO, 2021). Job flexibility, which is at the core of hybrid work arrangements, has on the other hand been discussed long before the coronavirus pandemic. For example, Hill et al. (2001) researched the effects of job flexibility on work and family life balance based on a data set from 1996.

Research on hybrid work has included, but not been limited to, subjects such as work design (Wang et al., 2021), leading and management (Bell et al., 2023; Barbosa da Silva et al., 2022; Agarwal, 2021) the future of work, (Verma et al., 2022), office-space use (Vihavainen, 2021), and strategising (Benedic, 2022). Rigolizzo (2022) published on learning in a hybrid world with the goal of evaluating “workplace learning through the lens of hybrid work”. A notable focus appears to have been placed on issues caused by Covid-19 such as loneliness (Bareket-Bojmel, 2023), employee engagement (Surma et al., 2021), onboarding (Mazzei et al., 2023)

and well-being (Peters et al., 2022; Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021; Chafi et al., 2022; Becker et al., 2022). Other such publications include, but are not limited to, explorations into work and non-work life during Covid-19 (Jayaraman & Mishra, 2022), remote communality (Uusiautti et al., 2021), post-pandemic office work (Chafi et al., 2022), recruitment and compensation (Ben-Gal et al., 2022), and working conditions (Vinueza-Cabezas et al., 2022). Common topics in hybrid work research are hard to discern as it seems to me that academics are simply exploring any and all subjects in order to find what might be interesting and relevant.

More recently, Naqshbandi et al. (2023) found more support for flexible work practices positively affecting work performance. Zheng et al. (2023) examined supervisor monitoring in telework and hybrid work contexts and found a link between monitoring, and reduced trust and well-being. Lastly, Spitzmuller et al. (2023) proposed ways to manage flexibility and autonomy in hybrid work from a team interdependence standpoint. These publications alongside many others strongly group hybrid work and telework together, and the results of these studies often are described as holding true for both hybrid work and telework settings. Such connections between hybrid work and office-based work appear to be less common. This could imply that hybrid work leans heavily towards telework and is not an even split between office-based work and telework, as is also suggested by my interview results. Hybrid work might lean towards telework in that hybrid work almost always retains a telework element as long as even one employee is working offsite at a given time, and hybrid work seldom manifests as solely office-based work.

Having browsed hybrid work -related research it seems to me as if well-being would have garnered more interest than other subjects on average. Into this category I include themes such as loneliness, and mental and physical well-being. Furthermore, the focus appears to have been placed on studying employees and in providing solutions for improving employees' conditions. The focus has not been put on subjects such as efficiency for the benefit of organisations. The tone in general is employee first. Authors discuss how for example increased well-being can help with employee retention or in increasing their efficiency.

Something that I would like to note is the changing nature of the coronavirus pandemic and its possible effect on hybrid work-related research. As an example, Uusiautti et al. (2021) studied remote communality within a university during Covid-19. During their research they

had to adjust their questionnaires to suit the changing nature of work during the pandemic. At first their questions were geared towards telework during the initial lockdown, but in time they were revised to take into consideration hybrid work. The relaxation of coronavirus-related regulations brought along the switch to hybrid work from forced telework. Further changes to the pandemic could for example affect the leniency employers are likely to treat their employees with regarding their flexible working plans. Hybrid work's tendency to conform to various situation, such as the pandemic, can require constant adaptation from researchers, since working arrangements are not guaranteed to stay consistent for long.

No scholar appears to stand above the rest in the field of hybrid work research. Furthermore, no one publication seems considerably more important than the rest. As we are only at the beginning of what may become a larger body of research on hybrid work, it is hard to discern which publications might eventually turn out to be the most important ones. Hybrid work research has implemented qualitative and quantitative methods. Most studies appear to have relied on surveys and questionnaires for data acquisition, but analysis methods have varied across studies. Uusiautti et al. (2021) opted to use open-ended questions. Other examples of straying from surveys included Jayaraman and Mishra (2022) who implemented in-depth qualitative interviews, and Chafi et al. (2022) who led workshops on their research subject.

One limitation that hybrid work related research has experienced is time. Since hybrid work is overall a relatively new form of work, not enough time has passed for longitudinal studies to be conducted. This is not to say that hybrid work literature would not benefit from longitudinal studies. In fact, many including Zheng et al. (2023), Naqshbandi et al. (2023) and Juchnowicz and Kinowska (2021) explicitly state the need for longitudinal studies in the future relating to hybrid work. Additionally, Zheng et al. (2023), Chafi et al. (2022), Juchnowicz and Kinowska (2021), and Uusiautti et al. (2021) collected data from specific contexts such as the UK, Sweden, Poland, and a single university respectively. The limited context serves as a common limitation in their studies, but also provides insight into each unique setting. Zheng et al. (2023) and Juchnowicz and Kinowska (2021) focused mostly on employees and noted a need to collect data from supervisors as well in the future. Overall, most scholars stated an overall need for more research into their respective hybrid work - related subjects. This appeared to be something that most researchers concluded with, perhaps out of habit, but regarding hybrid work this statement might hold more meaning as

most publications on hybrid work are relatively unique in that we are only at the supposed beginning of a seemingly growing body of research.

2.2 Remote work

Remote working preceded hybrid work in more ways than one, so I feel I need to quickly address remote work -related research as well. New technologies had to be developed for remote working to be possible, and now those technologies help in enabling hybrid work. Alongside new technologies new working and management practices had to evolve as well. A plethora of research exists concerning remote work. Here I choose to provide a very short look into the extant research as remote work is not at the core of this thesis. Nevertheless, due to the relationship between hybrid work and remote work I believe it would be inappropriate to completely forego discussing remote work -related research.

In their review of telework research, Bailey and Kurland (2002) attempted to uncover “who participates in telework, why they do, and what happens when they do?” In large part, these questions were left unanswered. However, the review revealed an interest in telework among scholars at that point in time. The authors also discussed themes which appear to remain prevalent in hybrid work research today. The authors for example discussed reasons for teleworking. At the time of writing the tentative reasoning for telework was still undecided, but today the same reasoning is accepted for why employees decide to hybrid work. Bailey and Kurland (2002) stated that teleworkers appeared to communicate with their peers and colleagues at the same frequency as their onsite counterparts, and that this finding is reassuring. Now approximately 20 years later researchers are discussing feelings of isolation experienced by hybrid workers, as it appears that the physical isolation from one’s colleagues has become an issue. Lastly, the authors state that “no study has considered the creeping impact of teleworking employees on others in the organisation”. The authors take into consideration also the ones who are not teleworking and cast doubt on the effectiveness of telework and express concerns regarding adverse long-term consequences of teleworking on the organisation as a whole. In hindsight, whether or not these concerns were correct, telework became a widespread form of working. Scholars are now casting similar doubts on hybrid work.

Allen, Golden and Shockley (2015) conducted another review of telework research. The authors examined definitional challenges, nature of telework, community and societal effects,

and perhaps most importantly relating to my thesis work-related outcomes such as organisational identification and commitment among other subjects. Martin and MacDonnell (2012) found a small positive relationship between working remotely and organisational commitment. Furthermore, Hunton and Norman (2010) found that those workers who had the option to telework exhibited higher levels of organisational commitment while those who only had the option to work either onsite or offsite exhibited similar levels of organisational commitment. Allen, Golden and Shockley (2015) dictate the “amount of stress from interruptions, coworker inclusionary and exclusionary behaviours, and quality of relationships with coworkers” as predictors of organisational identification for teleworkers. Even though the option to telework might increase organisational identification, Fonner and Roloff (2010) found that the more the communication media in use allows the user to feel a sense of “physical presence and involvement” during work interactions the stronger their identification highlighting the importance of physical presence in work for identification.

Wiesenfeld, Raghuram and Garud (2001) also researched organisational identification among virtual workers. The authors found that virtual workers’ need for affiliation and received work-based social support were key determining factors of the employees’ organisational identification. The authors state that “physical distance virtual employees experience may make their psychological connection to the organisation more central”. The authors further support this statement by referring to early theorisations of organisational identification by Ashforth and Mael (1989) in stating that organisational identification does not require direct contact between the organisation and the individual.

As of more recently, Biron, Casper and Raghuram (2022) proposed a “process model of need satisfaction to foster telework outcomes”. They discuss how employees adjust to meet their own needs for “competence, autonomy, and relatedness”. They also stress the need to “understand how to enhance work-nonwork balance and productivity among teleworkers”. This paper is from during the coronavirus and therefore also addresses possible directions for work after the world hopefully stabilizes once more.

Unsurprisingly, research has also surfaced discussing telework and the coronavirus. For example, Jeske (2022) examined electronic monitoring during Covid-19. Jeske’s findings suggest that employee monitoring can have detrimental effects such as reduced well-being while also serving as an important tool to promote well-being when used correctly. Jeske suggests providing employees more autonomy over how monitoring is implemented. Lastly,

some publications have examined both telework and hybrid work settings. As an example, Sewell and Taskin (2015) studied spatiotemporal scaling in telework. They concluded by considering how these strategies might be of use in hybrid work settings as well.

2.3 Work design

In this section I go over notable contributions to work design research. I look at the beginnings of work design research, how it developed through time, and at current themes in work design research. Looking at work design research is relevant to my thesis considering that how hybrid work is organised is a question of work. Parker (2014) defines work design as “the content and organisation of one’s work tasks, activities, relationships and responsibilities”. Work design affects how employees can generate with their organisations and colleagues. Morgeson and Humphrey (2008) provide another definition stating that work design is “the study, creation, and modification of the composition, content, structure, and environment within which jobs and roles are enacted”. In general, how work is organised is likely to affect identification. Parker and Zhang (2016) contend that work design has been proven to affect individuals’ “sense of meaning, health and well-being, creativity, development and more”. They also state that work design can affect the effective functioning of organisations and various goals including “safety, performance and innovation”.

Parker (Wall and Cordery, 2001; Zhang, 2016) recognise the beginning of the Industrial Revolution as the time when job simplification became “the mainstream of work design” aided by Smith’s (1776) concept of division of labour and Taylor’s (1911) “notion of scientific management”. Job simplification meant placing the bulk of the mental work on managers while others carried out manual labour. Job simplification was pushed by the likes of Henry Ford and Frederick Taylor (Parker, Wall and Cordery, 2001). Charles Babbage (1835) noted benefits of job simplification including the use of cheaper labour, which was made possible by the simpler work descriptions.

Due to issues with job simplification, such as increased employee turnover and reduced mental health, the model was reworked by multiple scholars. Hackman and Oldham (1976) eventually published the Job Characteristic Model (JCM), which became a prominent theory in motivational work design, and according to Parker, Morgeson and Johns (2017) “by far the most influential model of work design” even though the “specific model described by the JCM has received only limited support”. The JCM “proposes that work design should have

five core job characteristics (skill variety, autonomy, feedback, task significance and task identity)” (Parker and Zhang, 2016). These characteristics help employees experience meaning, responsibility for their outcomes and understanding the results of their efforts. Employees consequently experience increased motivation, job satisfaction, and performance. New formulations of the JCM have emerged, but they have been studied only infrequently (Parker, Morgeson and Johns, 2017).

In time the JCM has been further developed. Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) increased the 5 core characteristics to 21. Parker, Wall and Cordery (2001) have provided another formulation, the Extended Job Characteristics Model, in which they present a more extensive set of job characteristics including interdependence and various forms of autonomy. Grant and Parker (2009) add to the traditional motivational approach by including proactive and relational perspectives on work design. Tornau and Frese (2013) have discussed the importance of job control and social support regarding proactive work behaviours. Keeping hybrid work in mind, Grant and Parker (2009) discuss proactive individuals shaping their work designs and the work designs in turn shaping the individuals’ motivation to act proactively at work.

Parker, Morgeson and Johns (2017) looked to identify the most important journal articles in work design literature and sought for common themes in work design research throughout the years. They identified five categories of work design research, which they named socio-technical and autonomous work groups, job characteristics, job demands-control, job demands-resources, and role theory.

Work design scholars have also examined the increased digitalisation of work. They have noted changes in work design caused by changes in technology. Furthermore, scholars have identified challenges with the ways in which organisations have adapted to developments in technology. Kelliher and Anderson (2009) discuss work intensification resulting from flexible work arrangements made possible by new technologies. Parker (2014) suggests that work design can support learning and development in work and, maybe more importantly regarding my thesis, support competing goals such as control and flexibility. Freedom and control turned out to be prominent topics in my interviews.

Humphrey, Nahrgang and Morgeson (2007) reviewed work design literature and found 14 work characteristics, which explained “on average 43% of the variance in the 19 worker

attitudes and behaviours examined”. Perhaps most importantly regarding my thesis, motivational characteristics explained 24% of organisational commitment while social characteristics explained 40% of the variance in organisational commitment.

With work intensification and the possible health risks it may entail in mind, a focus on employee health has been a part of work design at least since the 1970’s when Karasek (1979) introduced the job demands-control model of strain. The model received advancements from Karasek (1990) who added a social support dimension to this model and Demerouti et al. (2001) who created the job demands-resources model. Furthermore, other extensions, variations and interpretations of the original model include but are not limited to Bakker and Demerouti (2007) and Crawford et al. (2010). Nahrgang, Morgeson and Hofmann (2011) among others have examined the link between job demands, job resources, burnout, engagement, and safety outcomes keeping an eye on the possible health risks of work intensification. A large share of extant hybrid work research also focuses on the well-being of employees.

Parker and Zhang (2016) noted a need for work design theories to specify “whether and how we should separate employees physically and temporally from their organisations. Research is then needed to investigate the effects these new work situations have on the employees and the performance of work”. The authors also note a need to study outcomes of work intensification. These are both themes that came up regularly during my interviews. Parker and Zhang (2016) also hope to see more work design research regarding balancing flexibility and control, as they feel little focus has been given to the subject at the time of their writing.

Bottom-up forms of work design, such as *job crafting*, have also garnered interest within the last decade. Bottom-up work designs allow employees to customise their jobs to some degree to meet their individual preferences and needs. Petrou et al. (2012) and Tims and Bakker (2010) found job crafting to be positively related to job attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. Parker and Zhang (2016) note that bottom-up job crafting does not have an abundance of literature behind it yet and further research is needed. Parker and Zhang (2016) also note a need to further study poor work design. Parker, Wall and Cordery (2001) caution that “the greater scope of change means that it is frequently difficult to isolate work-design change from the other co-occurring change”, and the scope of change has only continued to increase since the time of their writing.

In addition to discussing extant work design literature, Parker, Morgeson and Johns (2017) discuss the future of work design research. They urge for a more complete assessment of work characteristics and outcomes of work design. They suggest studying trade-offs in work design by also examining for example “motivation, strain, and health outcomes within a single study”. Trade-offs such as convenience versus meeting colleagues came up during the interviews. Parker, Morgeson and Johns (2017) propose to examine “what is the role of work design in achieving important outcomes” in the future. They suggest exploring “the role that work design might play in shaping, or protecting personal and occupational identity”. To conclude with, the authors “propose work design as a powerful vehicle for mitigating potential negative effects of technological and social change, as well as for enabling these changes to be more effective”.

Unlike the body of research on hybrid work, work design literature goes further back and includes longitudinal studies. However, Parker (Cordery and Wall, 2001; Zhang, 2016) and Kelliher and Anderson (2009) among others point out a persisting need for more longitudinal studies on work design.

2.4 Organisational identification

A good amount of research exists regarding organisational identification. Also, the building blocks of organisational identification are well known and worthy of a mention here.

Reviewing the roots of organisational identification helps in understanding how organisational identification works and how the construct has evolved throughout the years.

Discussions likened to organisational identification can be traced back to at least Taylor (1911), in which Taylor stressed the importance of aligning the interests of organisations and employees. Also, Barnard (1938) discussed how employees could be willing to put in more effort depending on their connection to their organisation. Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) point out Simon (1947) as the first to provide the construct “some theoretical teeth” and Simon and March (1958) as the first ones to have “formalised the construct”. Albert and Whetten (1985), Ashforth and Mael (1989) and Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994) can be credited with bringing organisational identification to the mainstream.

Meanwhile, Foote (1951) articulated that people are likely to identify with “fellows in groups”, categorise the social world around them to “regularise their doings”, and that “these

categorisations of experience motivate behaviour through necessary commitment of individuals in all situations”. This was significant in that Foote (1951) provided reasons for the importance of identification in a work context and also an opinion on what identification consists of in an organisational context. Followingly, Brown (1969) continued investigating identification in organisations.

In 2005 enough research on organisational identification had emerged that Edwards (2005) could compile a review of significant publications on organisational identification, which includes works that I believe are worth mentioning here. The following references are Edwards’s descriptions. Ashforth and Mael (1989) “introduced social identity theory into the area of organisational studies and OI”. Dutton et al. (1994) further developed “the discussion of social identity theory and embedded OI within the field of management”. Pratt (1998) provided a “broad overview of a number of central questions associated with OI” such as “conceptual issues and a discussion of antecedents and outcomes”. Van Dick (2001) “showed how social identity theory could be used to extend and further understand the concept of organisational commitment”. Van Dick (2004) “discussed issues of OI and organisational change and mergers, linkages with commitment, dimensions and foci of identification and links with performance”. Riketta (2005) conducted a “meta-analysis of research into organisational identification and attitudinal organisational commitment”. Lastly, Riketta and van Dick (2005) conducted a “meta-analysis of research investigating different foci of organisational identification”.

Edwards (2005) also provides a thorough overview of organisational identification related research, in which he discusses various conceptualisations of organisational identification. He notes “a lack of consensus surrounding the notion of OI across different reviews”.

Accordingly, Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) state that “the relatively narrow formulations [of OI] tend to follow [social identity theory/self-categorisation theory]” while “the relatively broad formulations are more eclectic in origin”. Edwards (2005) cautions that “there remains a risk of confusion when researchers investigate identification, as it is not always clear what psychological state is encapsulated by this very important construct”. Even though these differing views exist, at its core it appears that organisational identification as a construct has a relatively clear and solid base at the time of writing of Edwards (2005) and Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008), and that it remains largely the same to this day.

Further research has been and is being conducted to this day on organisational identification, but no significant alterations to the theory have surfaced.

Ashforth, Corley and Harrison (2008) provide another excellent review of organisational identification research. The authors separate their examination into “four fundamental questions”, and I draw heavily on these four questions in structuring the remaining review of organisational identification literature. The questions are “what is identification”, “why does identification matter”, “how does identification occur”, and “one or many [identifications]”.

2.4.1 Identity

To understand identification, we must understand identity. According to Ashforth, Corley & Harrison (2008) identity answers the question “who am I?” or “who are we?”. Ashforth, Corley and Harrison (2008) note three conceptualisations of identity that have been of exceptional importance in organisational and occupational studies. They are identity theory, Social Identity Theory (SIT) (and its “sister approach”, self-categorisation theory), and the identity of the organisation. The authors conclude that “an individual’s identities inside an organisation [emerge] from the central, distinctive, and more or less enduring aspect, in short the essences, of the collectives and roles in which he or she is a member”. Furthermore, “identities are usually an amalgam of the perceived characteristics of the collective or role and the perceived prototypical characteristics of its members” – an explanation they derived from Postmes et al. (2006). Next, I provide a brief overview of each of these three conceptualisations.

2.4.2 Three conceptualisations of identity

Here I highlight some of the notable contributions to identity theory. In identity theory identity is regarded as the “parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies” (Stryker and Burke, 2000). The authors also clarify that identity theory is generally split into two parts: “one emphasises the social structural sources of identity and the relations among identities, and the other focuses on internal, cognitive identity processes”.

Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) distinguish between how identities are regarded in social identity theory and identity theory. In SIT, identities are regarded as inherent to

“collectives such as organisations” whereas in identity theory identities “inhere in roles” such as occupations and relational networks. Stryker and Burke (2000) provide an excellent review of past, present, and future identity theory research. They specify that “identity theory traces its roots to the writings of George Herbert Mead (especially 1934)” and that “identity theory was first presented [in] 1966”. A few years later, Stryker (1968) further developed the ideas of McCall and Simmons (1978). What Stryker (1968) added to the thoughts of Mead (1934) was reformulating Mead’s “social behaviour” into “role choice behaviour”. Identity theory has a vast body of research behind it, but for the purpose of my thesis a further dive into it would be excessive. I suggest looking into Stryker and Burke (2000) for anyone interested in identity theory research. To me it appears that the focus has shifted more towards social identity theory research in recent years, of which identity theory research is a precursor.

Tajfel H. and Turner J. C. are widely credited with the conceptualisation of social identity theory. Tajfel and Turner (1979) is the publication in which SIT is originally formulated. Unfortunately, Tajfel passed away in 1982 and was thus unable to contribute further to the theory. Tajfel and Turner (1986) is an “updated and slightly revised” version of their original publication. Tajfel (1978) already provides a description of social identity: “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”. Another early publication on social identity theory is Tajfel (1982), in which he discusses the social psychology of intergroup relations. Additionally, Turner et al. (1994) and Brewer and Gardner (1996) clarify the differences between social and personal identities. They contend that personal identities are particular to an individual and differentiate them from others while social identities are shared among people and differentiate groups from one another.

Van Dick (2001) noted that the social identity approach has certain advantages over “traditional research on commitment from the perspective of organisational psychology”. This approach takes into consideration the notable influence of situational and contextual change on identification and provides “a strong theoretical basis for predicting, measuring, and analysing different dimensions of identification”. Within organisational contexts, Hogg and Terry (2000) have applied the social identity approach to studying mergers and acquisitions. Haslam (2001) applied social identity theory in research concerning group decision-making, and intergroup negotiation and conflict management. Social identity theory

has also been applied to research on leadership (see e.g. Haslam et al., 2001). Other noteworthy applications of SIT in organisational settings include Ouwerkerk et al. (1999) and van Knippenberg (2000; van Schie, 2000).

The third conceptualisation of identity per Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) focuses on the identity of the organisation. Albert and Whetten (1985) and Whetten (2006) define identity as the “central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics of an organisation: It is how the collective answers the question who are we as an organisation?” Corley et al. (2006) contend that research into organisational identity has proven strong links “with organisational images, strategic decision making, and many key organisational variables at the individual level”.

2.4.3 Identification

Ashforth and Mael (1989) define identification as “the perception of oneness and belongingness to some human aggregate”. Meanwhile Dutton et al. (1994) define organisational identification as the instance in which “a person’s self-concept contains the same attributes as those in the perceived organisational identity”. Furthermore, Pratt (1998) suggests that identification is either “self-referential” or “self-defining”. Self-referential refers to deeming a collective or role as being similar to the self while self-defining alludes to becoming “more similar” with a collective or role.

While Pratt (1998) defines identification as primarily cognitive, Tajfel (1978) argued that a social identity also includes “the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”. Individuals must value the identity in question. Harquail (1998) agrees with Tajfel’s notion by contending that identification “engages more than our cognitive self-categorisation and our brains, it engages our hearts”. Other works which support including affect in the formulation of identification include Ashforth (2001) and Kessler and Hollbach (2005) among others. Ashforth (2001) also found that one can act their way into identifying underscoring the role of behaviour for the construction of identification. However, when looking at what identification may mean for behaviour Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) propose that behaviour is only a “probabilistic outcome of identification, not a necessary component”.

Tajfel (1982) recognises two distinct and necessary elements of identification: a cognitive element which refers to an awareness of membership, and an evaluative element which pertains to implied value in the membership. He also notes a third element, which is often associated with identification, and that is “an emotional investment in the awareness and evaluations”.

2.4.4 Organisational identification and related constructs

Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) point out that organisational identification overlaps with “the constructs of organisational commitment, organisational loyalty, person-organisation fit, psychological ownership, and job embeddedness”. Perhaps the closest of these constructs to organisational identification is organisational commitment. To prevent confusion, “organisational commitment is often associated with how happy or satisfied am I with my organisation ... Organisational identification, by contrast, is concerned with the question, how do I perceive myself in relation to my organisation?” (Pratt, 1998). Other relevant distinctions between the two constructs include those of Riketta and Herrbach. Riketta (2005) found that organisational identification correlates more strongly with extra-role performance, that is behaviours outside formal job requirements, than attitudinal organisational commitment, and Herrbach (2006) notes that organisational identification also relates to negative emotional experiences whereas organisational commitment does not. For more clarification on organisational commitment, please refer to for example to Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) who discuss measuring organisational commitment.

2.4.5 Significance

Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) discuss the significance of identification from four viewpoints: how identification relates to identity, how identification relates to other organisational behaviour topics, individual outcomes of identification, and organisational outcomes of identification. I consider the latter two as the most relevant viewpoints regarding my thesis and thus choose to focus on them.

People have an innate desire to expand their “self-concept to include connections with others and to feel a sense of belonging with a larger group” (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). This is important in that work organisations can serve as one of the larger groups to fill this desire. Pratt (1998) points out that basic human needs such as safety, affiliation and

uncertainty reduction also serve as motives for identification. Organisations should care about the individual outcomes of identification in addition to the organisational outcomes, especially since the former often enables the latter.

Another notable motive for identification is self-enhancement, which serves the purpose of “experiencing an identity in a positive manner and experiencing growth toward becoming a truer exemplar of a valued identity” (Ashforth, 2001; Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). According to Ashforth, five other self-related motives for identification exist: “self-knowledge (locating the self within a context so as to define the self), self-expression (enacting valued identities), self-coherence (maintaining a sense of wholeness across a set of identities), self-continuity (maintaining a sense of wholeness across time), and self-distinctiveness (valuing a sense of uniqueness)”. Swann (1990), Shamir (1990) and Steele (1988) among others have found that self-verification, that is the desire to see oneself as being consistent over time, is at least as strong as the desire for self-enhancement.

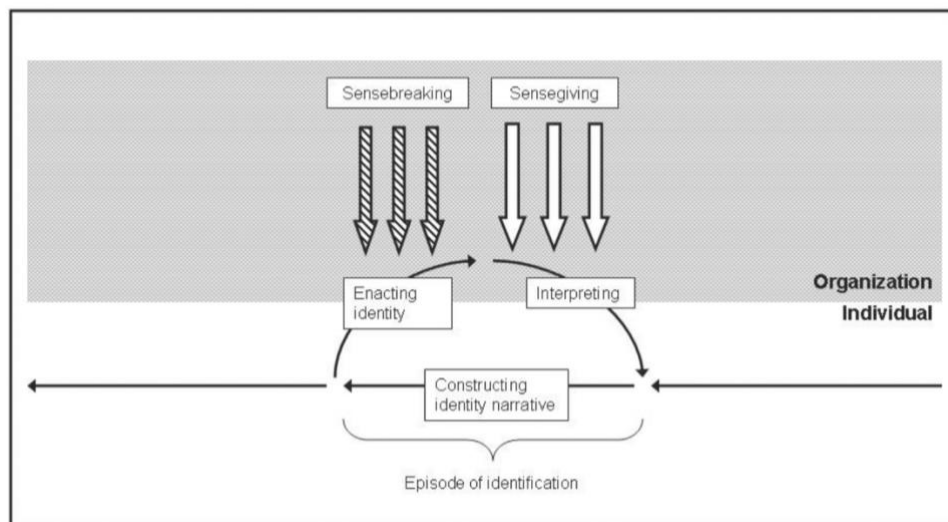
Organisational outcomes of identification include but are not limited to increased effort, decision making for the benefit of the organisation, cooperation and participation (Rousseau, 1998; Bartel, 2001; Kramer, 2006; Simon, 1976; Tompkins and Cheney, 1987), intrinsic motivation (van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000), performance (van Knippenberg, 2000; van Dick, 2001), and information sharing and coordinated action (Cheney, 1983; Tyler, 1999). More outcomes include reduced employee turnover (Mael and Ashforth, 1995; van Dick et al., 2004), organisational citizenship behaviours (van Dick et al., 2006), improved functioning of virtual teams (Sivunen, 2006), positive evaluations of the organisation (Cheney, 1983; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994), competitive behaviour against out-group member (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994), better control by the organisation (Haslam and Ellemers, 2005), internalising and adhering to group values (Ashforth and Mael, 1989), and defense of the organisation (Edwards, 2005; Tyler, 1999). Also, Cheney (1983; Tompkins, 1987) found organisational identification serving as an instrument of persuasion. Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) warn that many studies do not recognise the unique properties of identification and therefore lead to the outcomes being relatively loosely related to identification.

In addition to knowing the benefits of identification it is also important to acknowledge its potential drawbacks. Relatively little research exists on the negative outcomes of organisational identification, but several calls for such research have been made for example

by Galvin et al. (2015), Ashforth (2016) and Conroy et al. (2017). Some drawbacks include persistent commitment to failing projects (Haslam et al., 2006), psychological entitlement (Naseer et al., 2019) and resisting organisational change (Bouchiki and Kimberly, 2003). Dukerich, Kramer and McLean Parks (1998) note problems resulting from overidentification such as automatically trusting members of the organisation, not-intervening in questionable behaviour and in general a loss of objectivity. More recently, Galvin, Lange and Ashforth (2015) explored narcissistic organisational identification and how it could be detrimental to organisations. Irshad and Bashir (2020) provide suggestions for mitigating the adverse effects of organisational identification.

2.4.6 How does organisational identification occur

Understanding how to promote identification requires a grasp of how identification occurs. Pratt (1998) and later Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006) noted a lack of research on this subject compared to other questions of organisational identification. Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) state that identification is often regarded as a top-down or bottom-up process. The authors go on to provide a “process model of identification”, which takes into consideration both processes.



*Fig. 1 – Process model of identification
Redacted from: Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008), p. 341*

Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) describe their model followingly:

“The process of identification [is] an interplay between individuals and organisations. Individuals begin to incorporate elements of the collective into their sense of self by enacting identities and then interpreting responses to these enactments. Organisations encourage enactment and provide feedback through sensebreaking and sensegiving. These individual and organisational processes work together as a cycle ... Individuals construct an identity narrative as a way of linking these moments over time, generating a story that integrates “who I am now” with “who I have been,” while suggesting “who I might become”.”

To clarify, Pratt (2000) describes sensebreaking as involving “a fundamental questioning of who one is when one’s sense of self is challenged ... [creating] a meaning void that must be filled”. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) describe sensegiving as attempts to guide the “meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organisational reality”. Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) describe the relationship between sensegiving and sensebreaking so that “sensegiving serves as a response to sensebreaking, providing the organisationally sanctioned answers to the questions associated with identity deficits”. Similarly, Weick (1995) states that “people learn their identities by projecting them into an environment and observing the consequences”. Observable indicators of identity enactment have been split into three categories: identity markers (mainly physical features of the environment such as clothes and interior), performance outcomes, and behaviour (Ashforth, 2001). One can also identify via affinity without observable indicators (Pratt, 1998). Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) use the term enactment to refer to behaviour, cognition and affect. Lastly, Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) note that each episode of identification depicted in figure 1 can require more than one repetition. If one “recognises congruence with the organisation’s identity”, identification is likely smooth and requires only one repetition of the cycle whereas more repetitions might be needed if one is changing to become congruent with the organisation’s identity.

2.4.7 Foci of identification

Organisations have an abundance of foci for identification. People may be members of “an occupation, department, task force, lunch group, and so on, each of which has its own, more or less distinct identity” (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). Albert and Whetten (1985) described people as sharing common identities across subunits and as having sub-unit specific identities. These have later been described respectively as cross-cutting identities, which are shared and span across different groups, and nested identities, which are “embedded ... within others in a means-end chain” for example a task force within a specific division of an organisation (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001; Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008; Ashforth, Rogers and Corley, 2011). Sluss and Ashforth (2007) add to the conversation by introducing relational identification. They argue that “relational identity integrates person- and role-based identities and thereby the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels of self”. The three levels of self are derived from Brewer and Gardner (1996). The connection between relational and organisational identification has been further discussed by Sluss (Ashforth, 2008; Ployhart, Cobb and Ashforth, 2012).

Individuals can identify with multiple foci simultaneously, and research has shown that they value the distinctions between various levels of self and loci of identification (van Dick et al, 2004; Millward, Haslam and Postmes, 2007; van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000; Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). Riketta and Nienaber (2007) state that “identification with a particular focus correlates more strongly with those potential outcomes ... that are directed at the same focus rather than at a different focus”. Another important finding is that people tend to identify more strongly with further nested identities such as one’s work-group as opposed to the organisation as a whole (e.g. Van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000; Riketta & van Dick, 2005). Some explanations for this include lower order identities being more exclusive and proximate, lower order identities accounting for most interaction, individuals likely having more of an impact on loci related to lower order identities, occupational empowerment alongside a decrease in top-down control, and individuals primarily operating at their lower order level as opposed higher levels.

Identities may conflict with each other and lead to detrimental effects (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003), but there also exists a lot of support for different identities supporting each other through convergence (e.g. Riketta, 2005; van Dick et al., 2004; Ullrich et al., 2007; van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000). The line between various identities can

be blurry (see e.g. Russo, 1998) and attempts have been made to try and clarify how and when people combine their identification (Roccas and Brewer, 2002).

2.4.8 Recent research

Looking at more recent research on organisational identification reveals themes that currently require attention and directions for future research. Most recently, Ashforth et al. (2023) tackled role-based identities and built a theory on “how and why antithetical expectations and their implied identity foils arise in organisations”. Caprar, Walker and Ashforth (2022) discuss detrimental effects of strong identification in organisations. Schinoff, Ashforth and Corley (2020) studied how the way employees interact with each other has fundamentally changed due to technological advancements. Bajaba, Bajaba and Alsabban (2023) studied exploitative leadership and the mediating role of organisational identification, and Ashforth (Galvin and Lange, 2015; Fuller and Galvin, 2018) examined narcissism and organisational identification.

Interestingly, Ashforth (2020) focuses on how the coronavirus could be affecting employees’ identification with their organisations and its effect on future research. Ashforth (2020) suggests multiple directions for future research. He suggests studying “the potential for major events and actors’ responses to strongly affect identification with organisations and relevant occupations”. Furthermore, research should also focus on the possible acceleration of the shift away from an “organisational we to other foci of identification”. Ashforth, Schinoff and Rogers (2016) point out a need to research the interplay between various “magnitudes” of identification. Meanwhile, Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) suggest exploring how identity construction can go wrong, as they suspect that it is not simply a reverse of effective identity construction. Lastly, Ashforth et al. (2023) proposed studying how the effects of contradicting identities could be moderated.

2.5 Research gap

I was able to identify a research gap within the bodies of organisational identification and hybrid work research. The body of hybrid work related research is relatively young due to the novelty of the subject overall. Numerous different subjects have been studied regarding hybrid work in recent years, and subjects comparable to hybrid work such as job flexibility

have been studied even further back. However, I was unable to unearth publications discussing in what ways might hybrid work be affecting organisational identification.

Organisational identification has fortunately been studied in office-based and remote work settings from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, organisational identification has clear roots in widely accepted and studied constructs such as identity theory and social identity theory (e.g. Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994). The lack of publications discussing the effects implementing hybrid work might have on organisational identification presents an interesting research gap. How organisational identification occurs in general is well-known (e.g. Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008), which leaves the question of how hybrid work might affect the way it occurs.

Since hybrid work includes elements of office-based work and telework, prior research on organisational identification in these work settings could provide insight into how organisational identification might occur in a hybrid work setting. The connection between hybrid work and other work settings presents a much-needed starting point for my examination. Even though hybrid work is a relatively new way of arranging work I do not have to start completely from scratch in trying to unpack how it might affect the way people identify with their organisations. Hybrid work differs from office-based work and telework in that employees have more freedom of choice regarding where they work, and this propose new challenges regarding organisational identification.

2.6 Theoretical framework

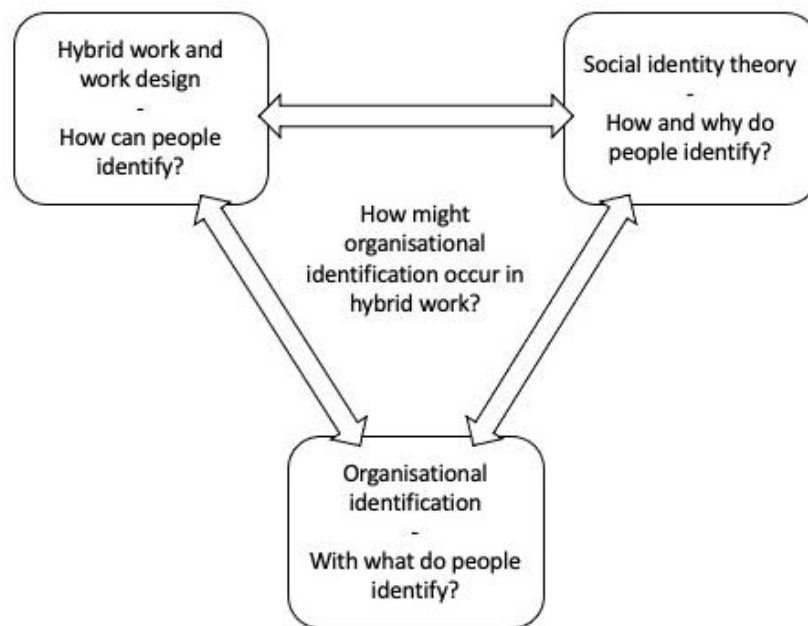


Fig. 2 – My theoretical framework

Source: own formulation

The theoretical framework of my thesis is depicted in figure 2. Hybrid work and work design literature serves providing the setting in which organisational identification may or may not occur. How work is arranged directly affects what possible avenues for identifying exist. Social identity theory clarifies in what different ways people can identify in social contexts and the possible reasons for seeking to identify. Organisational identification explicates what people identify with in organisational contexts. The interplay of these three serves in answering my research question “how might organisational identification occur in hybrid work?”

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Unit of Analysis

The focus of my thesis is on organisational identification. I focus on how organisational identification occurs in hybrid work settings. Academics often describe organisational identification as being either strong, weak, or so forth, and they discuss what may strengthen or weaken organisational identification. The relative strength or weakness of organisational identification amongst people and through time is also what I will focus on instead of trying

to arrive at numerical values for identification. I focus especially on what in hybrid work settings either strengthens or weakens organisational identification. Of course, if someone were able to for example determine an optimal level of organisational identification in a specific setting, then the absolute value for identification would become more interesting. Until then however more interest has been shown in strengthening organisational identification for its known benefits and minimising the risks of weakening it.

3.2 Research questions

My research question is “*how might hybrid work affect organisational identification?*” This entails examinations of the ways in which identification occurs in hybrid work settings and what in hybrid work may cause organisational identification to strengthen or weaken and why. With *occurs* I am referring to the process model of identification (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley, 2008), which I discuss in the literature review.

My sub-questions are “*what concrete effects does hybrid work have on organisational identification?*” and “*how applicable to hybrid work settings is prior research on organisational identification?*” While my focus is on the changes to the strength of organisational identification, my first sub-question helps me to also examine what might happen when identification either increases or decreases. Just because an employee feels a certain way does not ensure they will act accordingly (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). I assume that especially from an employing organisation’s point of view understanding likely, concrete consequences of increasing and decreasing identification in a particular setting would prove useful.

The second and last sub-question highlights the relationship between hybrid work, telework and office-based work settings. It is meant to serve as a reminder for myself throughout the thesis writing process so that I will pay attention to what prior research in other work settings may reveal regarding hybrid work settings. As little to no research exists directly regarding the thesis’s subject, extant findings from similar settings are essential.

3.3 On grounded theory

My study is qualitative, and I implemented a grounded theory approach in my thesis. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) “the grounded theory approach is developed

for theorising from the data through, and with the help of, a highly formalised and descriptive methodology”. They go on to state that a few different versions of grounded theory exist, and that grounded theory has “wide use and applicability, and it has established its position within business studies”. Glaser and Strauss (1967) are credited with providing the original ideas for grounded theory, which were later taken in different directions by for example Glaser (1992, 2002), Corbin and Strauss (1990), Strauss and Corbin (1998), and Charmaz (2006, 2014).

I discussed my thesis subject with Assistant Professor Niina Nurmi, and she introduced me to Charmaz’s (2006) grounded theory while also helping me by discussing the subject matter of my thesis with me. I deviated from Charmaz’s approach to some extent, and I will address those deviations where relevant. The deviations were such that I would describe myself as following the grounded theory approach of Charmaz (2006, 2014), but I cannot state in good faith that I would have conducted a complete grounded theory study.

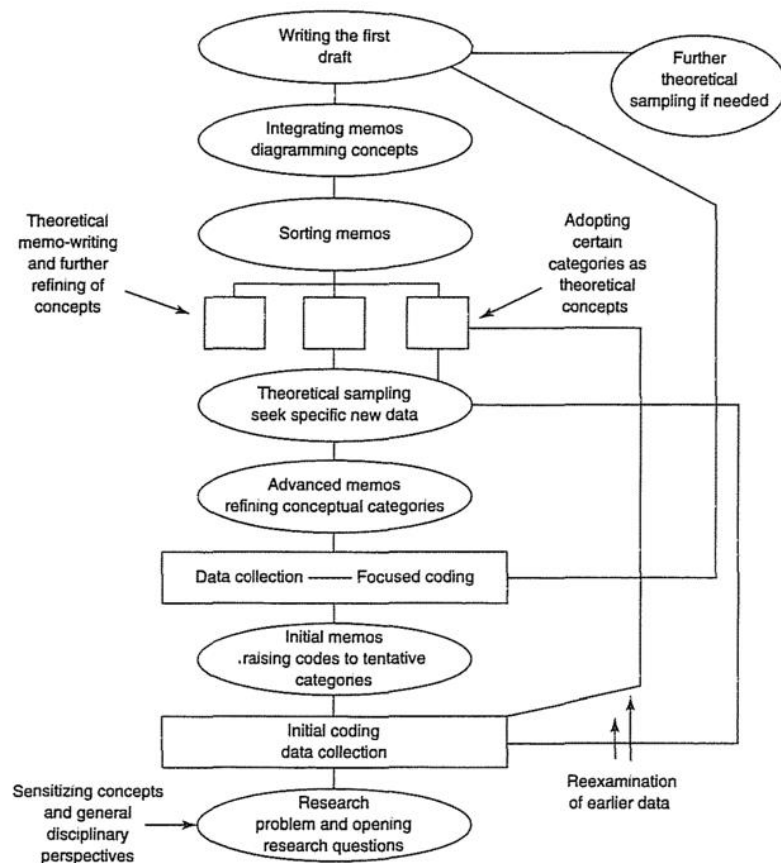


Fig. 3 – The grounded theory process
 Redacted from: Charmaz (2006), p. 11

Originally, Glaser and Strauss (1967) criticised the logico-deductive theorising of their time for placing too much emphasis on theory-testing and leaving out inductive reasoning in theory formulation. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) note that Glaser and Strauss did not hold “a naïve inductivist position” but wanted the researcher to approach new problems with a clean slate instead of trying to force extant theories on their data, which is also what I tried to accomplish in this Master’s thesis. Charmaz (2006) recounts that Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) original “statement of the logic of grounded theory ... resonated with wide audiences that included diverse researchers of both social constructionist and objectivist allegiances”. Charmaz goes on to state that Glaser’s (1978) further elaboration expanded “basic grounded theory strategies ... but spoke to fewer scholars”. Meanwhile Strauss’s (1987) and Strauss and Corbin’s (1990,1998) formulations were immensely successful and widely adopted, but they made grounded theory “more technical and procedural” (Charmaz, 2006).

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) note that grounded theory has successfully been applied to organisation, leadership, and strategic studies. Grounded theory has also been used to study organisational changes. Locke (2001) also notes that grounded theory is well suited for capturing the complexity of contexts and linking with organisational actions. Especially this notion by Locke suggests to me that grounded theory could suit the study of organisational identification. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) describe grounded theory as producing theory of social phenomena due to the “constant overlap and interplay between the data collection and analysis phases”, which are given “specific and rather formal form”. The approach relies on induction and deduction while verification is also an important factor. However, the role of verification has been questioned by Glaser (1992), who emphasises the idea of theory discovery in grounded theory over verification.

In practice, the grounded theory approach requires transcribed interviews, written observations of actions or events, or similar data that can be “compared with each other in the analysis process, with the aim of searching for similarities and differences between them” (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016). The aim of this process of constant comparison is to unearth similarities across the data for example between interview answers. Several phases of coding are used to look for similarities across the data in which the codes represent for example reasons behind actions stated in the interviews. These codes are then grouped and possibly reformulated. The collected data is gone over multiple times to check whether later codes might explain earlier actions. This process requires constant note-making (Strauss and

Corbin, 1998). The process also includes theoretical sampling, meaning that the researcher gathers and examines further data along the lines of what is emerging from the current data. The goal is to “reach a core category that adequately explains the phenomenon under investigation”. In the case of this thesis, the phenomena under investigation are the possible effects hybrid work might have on organisational identification. Coding, theoretical sampling, and memo-writing are further discussed later in this chapter.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) state that the grounded theory approach has been critiqued for its highly formalised methodology, especially regarding the formalised coding process and the rules for how to proceed with data analysis. However, the applicability of the grounded theory approach naturally depends on the research question and setting, as is the case with any other approach. It is therefore the researcher’s responsibility to evaluate the compatibility of any given approach with their research problem. For me, a master’s student, a formalised methodology that I can follow and which has proven to fit similar subjects sounds befitting.

Another criticism towards grounded theory has been directed at the formulation of codes without explaining how the codes relate to each other (Goulding, 2000). Bryman and Burgess (1995) remark that it is likely more scholars claim using grounded theory than who use it correctly. Perhaps the question is how much can you deviate from one of the formulations of grounded theory and still claim to have conducted a grounded theory study. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) note that methods that resemble but cannot be classified as grounded theory typically use parts of grounded theory “for classification and organisation of data but theory generation is left out”. For this reason also I cannot state that I conducted a full grounded theory study, as I do not arrive at a clear theory. Notably, Glaser (1992) himself has criticised the technical direction grounded theory has taken in newer formulations, and Glaser (2002) has rejected the constructivist direction of Charmaz (2000, 2014). Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) note that grounded theory is more of a “family of methods, as different forms exist and are used today under the umbrella title of grounded theory”.

3.4 Ontology and epistemology

“Ontology concerns the ideas about the existence of and relationship between people, society and the world in general” (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016). Marschan-Piekkari and Welch (2004) reference Babbie (1992) in stating that “the fundamental ontological question facing

management researchers is whether reality is of an objective nature and external to the individual ... or the product of individual cognition and mind". They note that most management researchers "have little to contribute to this philosophical debate" but that they prefer to make their ontological and epistemological stances known. In short, ontology concerns questions of what there is in the world. Eriksson and Kovalainen state that quantitative research often has objectivist assumptions in that a social world exists "independently of people and their actions and activities".

Qualitative research on the other often holds subjectivist (constructionist) assumptions, as do I in this thesis. The constructionist view assumes that a reality does not exist outside individuals but instead depends on the individuals' interpretations. Regarding my research problem, socially constructed identities are at the core of organisational identification and therefore I take a constructivist stance on ontology. The individuals can change their "understandings of social reality through interaction" as per Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016). Furthermore, the perceptions of those identities are often different for each individual. Creswell (2009) notes that the goal of constructivist research is to "rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied", as I do in analysing the interviews while also referring to extant literature.

Epistemology concerns ideas of what is knowledge and what are the sources and limits of knowledge (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016). Objectivist and subjectivist (constructionist) views exist also in epistemology as in ontology. The objectivist view holds that "there exists a world that is external and theory neutral while the subjectivist view holds that "no access to the external world beyond our own observations and interpretations is possible". Marschan-Piekkari and Welch (2004) state that the lines between epistemological paradigms are becoming increasingly blurred especially in international business research and encourage researchers to clarify their epistemological stances since others may not be familiar with the distinctions between paradigms. I take a constructionist (subjectivist) stance on epistemology in my thesis, as the subjectivist assumption is that "knowledge is available only through social actors" (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016) as is the case in Social Identity Theory.

The early formulations of grounded theory were rooted in objectivism. However, Charmaz (2006, 2014) deviated from this tradition by following constructivist assumptions. Furthermore, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) note that the original authors Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin end up differing in their epistemological standpoints as well. Eriksson and

Kovalainen go on to state that “the epistemic discussion of knowledge and knowledge production is at the core of some of the shifts and changes in the ways grounded theory approach is being adopted and used”.

Charmaz (2006) describes constructivist inquiry as starting with an experience and then asking how members construct it. “To the best of their ability, constructivists enter the phenomenon, gain multiple views of it, and locate it in its web of connections and constraints. Constructivists acknowledge that their interpretation of the studied phenomenon is itself a construction”. Charmaz elaborates on her constructivist epistemological stance by summarising the properties of her grounded theory approach. She defines the research process as “fluid, interactive, and open-ended” and the researchers as a “part of what they study, not separate from it”. Perhaps most importantly for me she states that “successive levels of abstraction through comparative analysis constitute the core of grounded theory analysis” (for a full summary see Charmaz, 2006).

3.5 Data Collection

Primary data I collected is comprised of qualitative interviews. I conducted 14 qualitative interviews, which were on average 51 minutes long. Interviewees either had to work or have worked in a hybrid work setting. The interviewees had all worked in a hybrid work setting and only one of them was working otherwise at the time of their interview. Secondly, I aimed to interview individuals who would likely be able to conduct the interview proficiently in English to limit issues caused by language barriers. Proficiency in English would help in providing good quality answers and also in creating fruitful conversations. The title and sector of each interviewee were not selection criteria as such. I tried to gather interviewees with varying backgrounds and roles from different sectors. I was interested in seeing whether or not there would be common ground among people with varying backgrounds. I interviewed 7 men and 7 women between the ages of approximately 25 and 55. A heterogenous group felt more likely to unearth varied findings whereas a more homogenous group might have been more hit-or-miss possibly forgoing the groups that would have provided good insight.

I knew most of the interviewees beforehand, and they then connected me with the remaining interviewees. All interviewees were approached either via email, WhatsApp or LinkedIn. All interviews were conducted over Zoom or MS Teams except for one, which was carried out

onsite at the interviewee's office. All interviews were recorded either onto a mobile phone or laptop. The recordings were of good quality and only a few words were inaudible due to problems with sound. I manually transcribed the interviews verbatim in Microsoft Word producing approximately 140 pages for analysis (font Times New Roman, size 12, spacing 1,5). I then created duplicate files of the transcriptions and reformatted them for coding. In addition to the transcriptions, I wrote notes on the interview templates by hand during the interviews and these templates are stored in a single folder. All recordings, transcriptions and related files are kept in a dedicated folder on a laptop's internal memory and duplicates are stored on an external databank.

Secondary data in my thesis consists of research on hybrid work, work design, and organisational identification and related concepts such as social identity theory. Most of the literature was gathered from databases such as Web of Science and SCOPUS. The literature is either highly cited and important in its own field serving to elaborate an important concept such as Social Identity Theory, the research is used to demonstrate how the field of research has developed throughout time, or it is nonetheless closely related to the thesis's subject. I relied on citation indexes and the opinions of established academics in identifying seminal works in their respective fields. All of the articles I was able to retrieve are stored on my laptop and an external databank. According to the grounded theory approach, "literature reading should not direct the empirical material gathering or analysis, but inform and enlighten the reader" (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016). Furthermore, "a grounded theory-based research project usually evolves with a tentative literature base to begin with", and this is how I approached my study.

3.6 Data analysis

3.6.1 Coding

The coding process is "the essential element for grounded theory methodology". Coding is important in that it provides a systematic way of interpreting data, and a systematic approach can easily explain what was done and how the conclusions were arrived at (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016). I conducted initial line-by-line coding for the transcriptions as per the grounded theory methodology. The goal with initial coding is to "separate data into categories and to see processes" (Charmaz, 2006). In practice, initial coding is often carried out by writing codes (words or phrases) next to the relevant words, lines or incidents in the

margins of interview transcriptions. Traditionally, initial coding includes going back to earlier respondents to see if important processes you identified explain “events and experiences in their lives” (Charmaz, 2006).

The next step is focused coding. Charmaz (2006) states that focused coding “requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorise [the] data incisively and completely”. I created a matrix in Microsoft Excel which contains all interview questions and answers, and a summary of all answers per each question. The summaries helped in identifying focused codes. I felt that the matrix helped me compare responses across the data set. Based on the views of Glaser, Strauss, Corbin, and Charmaz I understand coding as a continuous process of analysing, comparing, and collecting data in various phases, which each add their own level of depth to the final product by guiding the researcher to treat their data in a particular fashion in each phase ensuring a thorough handling of the data.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) presented a third form of coding, axial coding, which was intended to bring the fragmented data back together after initial, open coding. Axial coding serves to answer questions such as “when, why, who, how, and with what consequences” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). I took these questions into consideration during previous coding phases, but I did not conduct axial coding according to the formal procedure. Lastly, Glaser (1978) presented theoretical coding. It serves to conceptualise “how the substantive codes [from focused coding] may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory”. I looked through Glaser’s theoretical coding families for reference, and as with axial coding forewent theoretical coding in practice as a separate phase.

3.6.2 Problems with coding

Charmaz (2006) warned against forcing your data into “preconceived codes and categories [such as] extant theories”. She goes on to state that “every researcher holds preconceptions that influence, but may not determine, what we attend to and how we make sense of it”. Initial coding may help in avoiding pushing your own preconceptions on the data, since it “[induces] you to wrestle with your participants’ interpretive frames of reference, which may not be your own”. Charmaz (2006) argues that preconceived theoretical concepts could serve as starting points for examining your data, but they should not be used to create automatic codes for the data. As suggested by Charmaz, I sought out to define what was happening in

my data before thoroughly examining extant literature. I researched my subject enough to formulate my research and interview questions but saved further reading for after the interviews and initial coding. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) support this in stating that “a grounded theory-based research project usually evolves with a tentative literature base to begin with”.

Other problems Charmaz (2006) notes regarding coding include “coding at too general of a level, identifying topics instead of actions and processes, overlooking how people construct actions and processes, attending to disciplinary or personal concerns rather than participants’ concerns, coding out of context, [and] using codes to summarise but not to analyse”. She also notes that coding from notes instead of transcribed interviews can be problematic, since this assumes that the interviewer has been able to select “the most telling material” to record at the time of the interview. Hence, I transcribed all interviews verbatim and used those transcriptions in coding. Coding from full transcriptions can “preserve details for ... ideas to ignite later”. Charmaz states that interviewers should record what they hear and also what they see. Notes about what the interviewer saw also serve as data to be coded. I did not record what I saw via Zoom, Teams, or physically face-to-face, because I felt that the added task might distract me from the ongoing discussion.

3.6.3 Memo-writing, theoretical sampling and saturation

During and after coding in grounded theory the researcher engages in memo-writing. Charmaz (2006) describes memo-writing as crucial in that it “prompts you to analyse your data and codes early in the research process”. Furthermore, “memo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers”. Memo-writing is meant to help the researcher to “increase the level of abstraction” of their ideas. Some codes that are selected for memo-writing stand out and become theoretical categories. The memos in themselves are analytic notes of varying length that help explicate and fill out categories. They provide the researcher with a place to store and develop their ideas and fine-tune future data-gathering. Within the memos you can make comparisons between data, codes, categories, concepts, and so forth. You can explore your data further in memo-writing while at the same time documenting your ideas and producing possible text for the final product.

Charmaz (2006) discusses two levels of memo-writing: early memos and advanced memos. Early memos are used to “explore and fill out qualitative codes”, and they can focus and

direct future data collection. Advanced memos “describe how your category emerges and changes” and “identify the beliefs and assumptions that support it”. They also serve in looking for fit and important differences between categories and subcategories.

I have a habit of saving nearly endless versions of any given project I am working on. Once I had conducted all interviews, I began coding and comparing the interview transcriptions. At the same time, I began writing the findings section of this thesis based on the codes and subsequent analysis. I decided that the numerous versions of my findings would suffice for memo-writing. As per Charmaz (2006), especially the more refined memos are often integrated into the final publication. With this in mind, I treated the various versions of my findings as memos and went back and forth between them for fine-tuning. Charmaz (2006) stresses that “the methods of memo-writing are few; do what works for you. Memos may be free and flowing; they may be short and stilted-especially as you enter new analytical terrain. What's important is to get things down on paper and stored in your computer files. Keep writing memos however you write and in whatever way advances your thinking”. For me, applying my own habits to memo-writing served me best.

When the researcher notices that their categories in memo-writing are lacking, they can employ theoretical sampling to fill out the category and develop the emerging theory. “Theoretical sampling involves starting with data, constructing tentative ideas about the data, and then examining these ideas through further empirical inquiry”. Conducting theoretical sampling too early may result in “premature closure of analytic categories”. Theoretical sampling is used for example to “check for hunches, saturate the properties of a category, distinguish between categories [and] clarify relationships between emerging categories”. Theoretical sampling can increase the quality of research by “increasing the precision of your categories, grounding your conjectures in data [and] explicating the analytic links between and among categories”. When categories are full “they reflect qualities of your respondents' experiences and provide a useful analytic handle for understanding them”. (Charmaz, 2006)

Charmaz notes that theoretical sampling is more of a strategy than an explicit procedure. Accordingly, even though theoretical sampling is often carried out by conducting additional interviews with old or new interviewees, theoretical sampling also may include “studying documents, conducting observations, or participating in new social worlds”. I conducted theoretical sampling by looking through additional documents, which I selected based on emerging categories in my findings. I feel that my thesis would have benefitted from

additional interviewing, but I decided to forego further interviewing due to timeframe related challenges.

Theoretical saturation has been reached when “gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories” (Charmaz, 2006). Differences exist between how grounded theorists assess when saturation has been reached and regarding the importance of reaching it. Researchers also place varying emphasis on sample size and theoretical saturation. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) argue that “when qualitative research is concerned with meanings and not with making hypothesis statements ... the term saturation is not useful”. Dey (1999) argues that in some circumstances it is even inappropriate. Strauss and Corbin (1990) emphasise the meaning of time spent analysing and familiarising yourself with your data and argue that saturation is a matter of degree. I continued theoretical sampling to the degree that I felt I had gained a thorough understanding of what is happening in the emerging categories. The categories would have benefitted from further interviewing, because then I could have precisely those precise subjects that I wanted to whereas with extant documents I was limited by what was published.

3.7 Reflection and ethical considerations

I feel that I was successful in collecting relevant data for analysis. I believe that my literature review is robust enough to serve as a good basis for my thesis. I also feel that the literature I have gathered fits my research problem well and that it supports the importance of my thesis's subject. To my understanding the amount of interviewing I did was adequate for a Master's thesis. My thesis advisor Professor Hannu Seristö stated that 10 qualitative interviews would be sufficient for a master's thesis, which is why I scheduled 16 interviews of which 14 materialised. The interview recordings were successful and only a few individual words were inaudible. I would have preferred to conduct more interviews, but due to time constraints I had to settle for less. More interviews might have unearthed something interesting, but I am unsure whether I would have had the time to analyse them in a way that the thesis would have been better for it overall. I am unsure if having interviewees with either more or less varied backgrounds would have been beneficial. The goal of qualitative research is not always to produce generalisable findings (Charmaz, 2006), so I feel good in looking at fewer cases in more depth. In any case, my understanding is that my sample size would still anyways be insufficient for making hefty generalisations. I must note that I conducted a few

interviews while sick and dealing with very high fever due to the coronavirus. This likely affected the quality of those interview sessions to at least some extent.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) state that “research ethics in qualitative business research is most often only related to ethnographic data-collection processes and interview processes in ethnography or case study”. They go on to mention that “one of the key elements in all ethical guidelines is the protection of participants in research”. Ghauri and Gronhaug (2010) also reference the use of deception and the use of coercion as ethical concerns. All interviewees took part voluntarily and were promised anonymity. The interviewees were informed of the purpose of the study and basic procedures prior to engaging in the interviews. All interviewees agreed to have their names mentioned in the thesis as long as they would not be connected to their answers. I believe confidentiality was essential especially since we discussed matters such as why the interviewees either feel they do or do not belong to their organisations. The interviews also contained criticisms and comments that might have more likely been withheld if not for anonymity.

I do not find ethical concerns with the subject of the thesis. The subject in itself is not unethical. I do not believe that the findings of my thesis could in practice be used in a manipulative fashion by managers to the detriment of their employees. Downsides of organisational identification are briefly discussed in the thesis for the sake of transparency.

Secondary data was collected from trustworthy and reputable sources. I have avoided plagiarism to the best of my abilities by citing all the works that I have used in the making of this thesis. I also familiarised myself with Aalto University’s Code of Academic Integrity, which goes into depth for example regarding inadequacies in citing and referencing.

This thesis was not sponsored by any party, nor was it tasked by any organisation. Therefore, sponsorship related ethical concerns are not present in this thesis. I acknowledge that my own experience with the research problem may cause me to exhibit biases that may affected for example the directions I took the interviews in and also how I analysed them. I tried to mitigate issues with bias by formulating interview questions that would not contain preconceptions but allow the interviewees to fully represent their own views.

3.8 Evaluating the study

3.8.1 Criteria for grounded theory

As I followed Charmaz's (2006) formulation of grounded theory, I will also use her criteria for evaluating grounded theory studies. For comparison, Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1978) originally assessed grounded theory according to fit, workability, relevance, and modifiability (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016) while Charmaz evaluates grounded theory according to credibility, originality, resonance, usefulness.

Regarding credibility, Charmaz (2006) asks for example has the researcher "achieved intimate familiarity with the setting or topic", "are the data sufficient to merit your claims", and "are there strong logical links between the gathered data and your argument and analysis". I cannot say that I would be able to evaluate whether the links between my gathered data and my arguments are strong, but at least while discussing my analysis with my peers they have been able to follow my trail of thought. I do believe that I have achieved familiarity with my subject. Whether or not this is reflected in the thesis itself, I leave that up to you the reader. The amount of time I spent interviewing, analysing the interviews, and collecting and analysing articles suggests that I have achieved familiarity with the subject. Lastly, credibility relies also on systematic analysis, and following the grounded theory approach supported me in conducting such an analysis.

With originality Charmaz refers to whether the formulated categories provide new insights. She asks "what is the social and theoretical significance of [the] work" and "how does [the] grounded theory challenge, extend, or refine current ideas, concepts, and practices". I feel that the social significance of my subject is relatively high based on the benefits of organisational identification discussed in the thesis, especially since organisational identification has not been thoroughly studied in hybrid work settings. My study lands in a clear gap in extant research and may serve in exposing possible paths for future research.

Resonance refers to how well the formulated categories "portray the fullness of the studied experience" and whether they make sense to the participants of the study. A weakness of my study is that I did not share my interpretations with the participants, and consequently am unaware whether my analysis makes sense to them. Also, as I have stated my study could

have benefitted from another round of interviews with the same people. On a positive note, I feel I successfully arrived at relevant categories that I examined further.

Lastly, usefulness relates to if the analysis offers “interpretations that people can use in their every-day worlds”, do the categories “suggest any generic processes”, and does the analysis reveal directions for future research. I believe and hope that my study may raise further questions for future studies. Furthermore, I feel my conclusions are reasonable and such that they could have significance in every-day worlds.

3.8.2 Reliability and validity

Reliability relates to consistency in research and how likely another researcher is to arrive at the same findings if they were to replicate the study (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016).

Creswell (2009) references Gibbs (2007) in stating that reliability “indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects”. Gibbs (2007) suggests for example checking transcriptions to check for mistakes and to constantly compare codes to keep to codes’ definitions consistent. I took particular care in transcribing the interviews to avoid mistakes, and the grounded theory approach supported me in constantly comparing and revising codes.

According to Flick (2006), “the discussion about reliability in qualitative research comes down to the need for explication in two respects”. The data must be explicated in a way that allows others to identify the statement of the subject and where the interpretation begins. Second, procedures need to be specified to enable comparable conduct. Flick also mentions the need for detailed documentation of the process. I believe that my subject is clear, and my procedures are transparent and specified. However, my coding process lacks documentation in the thesis. I could not attach the coded transcriptions to the thesis due to anonymity concerns, but I could have discussed my codes more instead of only presenting the final categories in findings.

Validity on the other hand refers to how well the conclusions of a study reflect what actually has happened. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen researchers are split on to what extent reliability and validity are suitable criterion in evaluating qualitative research. As an example, Corbin in Corbin and Strauss (2008) states that she does not feel comfortable using the terms validity and reliability in relation to qualitative research, because they carry with them “too

many quantitative implications”. She also notes that validity for her is not synonymous with quality. In addition to fulfilling the criteria of validity, quality findings “have an innovative, thoughtful, and creative component”.

Creswell (2009) notes that valid quantitative data oftentimes requires random sampling “so that each individual has an equal probability of being selected, and the sample can be generalised to the larger population”. However, qualitative research requires purposeful sampling to select individuals who have “experienced the central phenomenon”. Accordingly, to increase the validity of my study I was careful to select interviewees who had worked in hybrid work settings.

To increase validity, Creswell (2009) suggests the researcher to establish themes by converging several sources of data or perspectives. Creswell also suggests using “rich, thick description to convey the findings”. Providing multiple perspectives can also increase validity. The researcher should also clarify their own biases relating to the study to create “an open and honest narrative”, which is why I shared my negative experience concerning organisational identification in hybrid work. He also suggests negative case analysis. I did not conduct negative case analysis, but I did try to analyse the interviews from multiple perspectives to provide multiple explanations for single outcomes.

Creswell (2009) states that validity is a strength of qualitative research, which may explain why “validity receives more attention than reliability” in qualitative research (Flick, 2006). Flick (2006) dictates three common mistakes regarding validity: seeing principles, relations, or so forth that are not there, rejecting them when they are indeed present, and asking the wrong questions. I tried to avoid these mistakes by going back and forth with my data with the hope of uncovering such mistakes thanks to new perspectives.

3.8.3 Limitations

The study included certain limitations which I discuss here. The interviews were restricted in demographics. All but one interviewee worked in Finland at the time of the interviews. The answers might have been affected by a more diverse sample of working cultures. The study was also limited in that most interviewees had Finnish as their mother tongue. Proficiency in English was a selection criterion for the interviewees to mitigate the effects of poor English

skills on the interview answers. The possibility of language proficiency affecting how interviewees expressed themselves must however be noted.

Approximately half of the interviewees worked in academia at the time of the interviews, which was not a selection criterion for the interviews but does serve as a limitation. This means that the answers and overall analysis might have leaned towards representing the views and experiences of academics over other possible groups.

The differences between hybrid work settings also serve as a limiting factor. Even though the interviewees all worked or had worked in hybrid work settings, the settings to my understanding had clear differences between them, which likely played a part in the varying experiences and opinions on hybrid work and organisational identification. Also, the interview answers are representative of only one point in time. A longitudinal study of how the interviewees identification might change during hybrid work would have provided a more comprehensive picture of how hybrid work might affect organisational identification.

The final limitation I will mention is the coronavirus. Distinguishing between the factors which have in fact affected organisational identification during the coronavirus was troublesome. I recognise that the coronavirus could likely have affected the decision-making of the interviewees regarding for example where they choose to work. The possible changes to decision-making could consequently have affected the employees' identification. Therefore, hybrid work might not have been the root cause for many of the perceived effects on organisational identification.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Here I present and discuss my findings. Each section addresses a prominent theme from the interviews, except for the last which contains miscellaneous findings, which I did not wish to waste but share whether they are relevant to the thesis or not. I identified important codes during the coding phase, which I explored further and formed into larger categories. Through memo-writing and theoretical sampling these categories developed into the findings of my thesis.

4.1 Freedom – what employees truly value

Throughout the interviews it became very clear to me that the freedom allotted to employees in hybrid work would be central to my findings. Freedom (to choose where one works) in hybrid work settings is one of, if not the, separating factor between hybrid work and other work settings. Telework settings do not necessarily restrict employees to their homes, but employees do not have a similar option for going onsite as they would in hybrid work settings. Meanwhile, office-based work settings tie employees to the office. The interviewees agreed that freedom to choose where they work is mostly a good thing and something they would not like to relinquish. I feel that the increased freedom has exposed how employees weigh different aspects of their lives, in this case for example work-life balance, convenience, efficiency, and related subjects. Various manifestations and consequences of increased freedom are discussed here.

Most interviewees stated that the freedom hybrid work affords them allows them to better balance work with everything else in their lives. Some interviewees noted that they are happier at work, because their lives are overall more balanced. A better work-life balance could result in better performance at work. Furthermore, if employees' overall well-being were higher thanks to better work-life balance, employees might be able to better handle adversity at work. Their average experience of work might become more positive compared to for example when they would be extremely tired and burnt out. The better experience of work might translate to stronger identification with the organisations, because of the affective component in identification described by Harquail (1998). It is easier to identify with something that you enjoy and have positive feelings towards.

Most interviewees appeared to favour other matters over going onsite to the office. Even though many interviewees mentioned wanting to go onsite to meet colleagues, they also stated a need for more reasons for going onsite, implying that meeting colleagues is not always enticing enough. Some interviewees noted that they would not go onsite if they were not likely to meet colleagues at the office. Many interviewees insinuated that organisations should provide their employees with reasons for going onsite other than work, since work can be done elsewhere. Certain work-related tasks might only be accomplishable at the office for some such as printing, but overall the interviewees experienced a lack of work-related reasons for going onsite. What these reasons might be however was not further explored in the interviews.

The subject of employees working remotely in hybrid work settings is in my mind relevant to organisational identification for at least the following reason. I understand that someone might wonder why this is relevant to examine especially since organisational identification has been studied in telework settings. I believe it is important to understand what enables and causes employees to remain offsite in hybrid work settings, even when they have the option to go onsite, because the positive influence physical presence, face-to-face contact, and spontaneous interactions and organisational trappings at the office have on organisational identification has been proven in research. This is not to say that in theory employees could not identify with their organisations as strongly, if not more strongly, than others do in office-based work settings, but physical presence has been proven to be beneficial for organisational identification. Understanding why employees choose to work remotely is essential if the goal were to increase time spent onsite at the office. Where someone works does not necessarily relate to how well they identify with their organisation, but it does relate to how identification could occur. As I discuss later, whether a work setting supports an employees identification depends largely on why they wish to identify.

Simply having a choice regarding whether to work onsite or offsite can organisational identification (Hunton and Norman, 2010). This received support in the interviews as many interviewees experienced increased freedom as a sign of trust which they felt as strengthening their identification. I was surprised to find how many interviewees equated freedom with trust. Some interviewees noted that providing freedom involves trusting the ones who it is given to while others experienced increased freedom explicitly as a sign of trust from their employers. Personally, as an outsider looking in it seems as if organisations had little to no choice in providing employees with more freedom in order to keep their organisations functioning while adhering to Covid-19 regulations.

Even though I can see where the interviewees were coming from, I personally could not regard increased flexibility as a sign trust but as a choice made out of necessity in this particular case. To me this displays the possibility of thinking and feeling your way into identifying (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). It is possible that employers do fully trust their employees to work well wherever they are. Even if they did not, I suspect that remote work, and later hybrid work, would have been implemented nonetheless due to the coronavirus.

Since some interviewees expressed that they would leave their jobs if they were forced to work more or fully onsite, can the flexibility be viewed as a sign of trust. A cynical view would be that employers became aware that employees experienced flexibility as a sign of trust and went along with it as a way to gain favour among them. Employers could be hesitant to try and force employees into coming onsite, as they are aware of the risk of losing those employees who prefer to work remotely. I recognise that there are many benefits to hybrid work also from the organisations' point of view, so the fear of losing employees is by no means the only reason for sustained hybrid work. Nevertheless, many interviewees, both managers and non-managers, agreed that taking away the freedom from employees is basically no longer an option. If more onsite time were the goal with organisational identification in mind, this reluctance to relinquish newfound freedoms might prove to be a major hindrance.

Freedom and flexibility appeared to be the most appreciated perks of hybrid work amongst the interviewees. Many of the interviewees have learned to expect and demand flexibility since the wide adoption of hybrid work arrangements. They have seen what possibilities lie in receiving more freedom for example as I already stated regarding work-life balance. Implementing telework and now hybrid work arrangements has enabled companies to continue functioning for the past couple of years to the best of their abilities. Based on some answers, flexibility and freedom are now regarded almost as fundamental to work, or even as a right, rather than a perk or one of many possible ways of arranging work.

However, the flexibility appears to for the most part go only one way and not the other. Employees want flexibility but are displeased to be flexible themselves. One interviewee, who works in a supervising position, wished employees stressed that organisations require a group effort and that sometimes you need to forgo your own comfort and work for the benefit of the group referring for example by coming onsite for the benefit of other employees. Bailey and Kurland (2002) called for research on the impact of teleworking employees on others in the organisation. Bailey and Kurland studied telework, not hybrid work, in their 2002 paper, and the impact they referred to was not anything specific such as organisational identification. Without specifically looking for such research, I did not come across a study which would have answered their call.

It is possible that people have somewhat forgotten what it is like to work together after working remotely and being separated from their colleagues for long periods of time. Also, it is possible

that hardships brought along by the coronavirus could have instilled a sense of everyone for themselves, which would now be showing as reduced willingness to compromise. In their study of university alumni, Mael and Ashforth (1992) noted that previous research (Braham, 1987; DeMeuse, 1987) supports turbulent environments such as mergers and acquisitions causing employee wariness, disillusionment, and perhaps most importantly self-centredness. It is understandable that once you become accustomed to something you consider better, reverting to what was no longer seems an option. Hybrid work and telework have enabled people to work for a wider range of companies for example such that they would have been unable to work for before due to too long commutes. In such cases, it is completely understandable to me that employees would choose to or have to quit, if onsite work were required once again.

Nevertheless, 8 out of 14 interviewees felt that days on which employees would be required to be onsite could be beneficial for organisational identification. The question was presented in a way that did not specify how many days, but I simply inquired whether this would be beneficial for their identification. Furthermore, all interviewees stated that fully offsite work was the most detrimental arrangement for organisational identification. This suggests that the interviewees have their own understandings of what increases and what decreases their identification with their organisations. Whether or not they value their identification with their organisation enough over other matters such as saving time by not commuting to the office is a different matter.

A possibility may lie in providing employees with longer weekends through hybrid work arrangements, at least to begin with. A four-day work week is being discussed in media nonetheless (see e.g. BBC, 2023; CNBC, 2023). As an example, Mondays or Fridays could be substituted with hybrid days during which employees could decide where they want to work. They would be regarded as workdays without mandatory meetings or the like. This would enable employees to take extended weekends. Such arrangements might already be in use, and at least four-day work weeks have been embraced by some organisation. Of course, such arrangements might be a far cry from what someone who currently experiences complete freedom would accept. However, adding more solutions to organisations' playbooks for organising work without upsetting those who enjoy their hybrid work freedom the most would in my mind be critical for meeting different circumstances in the future.

Technological advancements that have enabled telework and now hybrid work have made it easier for employees and employers to connect. Fonner and Roloff (2010) note that the more

communication media allows users to feel physically present the stronger their identification likely becomes. Also, organisational identification does not necessarily require direct contact between the employee and the organisation (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). However, research supports the importance of physical presence in reinforcing organisational identification and keeping the employee's connection with the organisation salient (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). To my understanding the distance between the organisation and the employee can inhibit identification by for example blocking or distorting cues that would be necessary for sensebreaking and sensegiving as depicted in the process model of identification (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008).

People need a place where to project their identities to observe the resultant consequences, learn their identity, and see how they fit in with the organisation (see e.g., Weick, 1995). Hybrid work also affects the physical environment by making it less predictable. Depending on the individual this could be for better or for worse. I argue that the physical environment provides a better place to enact one's identity than an online workspace in that the physical environment provides more feedback for sensebreaking and -making. Unfortunately, based on personal experience, it feels as if hybrid work changes the physical office environment for the worse, or at least does not make it better with identification in mind. Perhaps the most disappointing part of hybrid work for myself was going onsite only to enter an online Teams meeting when others remained offsite. Multiple interviewees also felt hybrid meetings as being troublesome. In such cases, the potential for fostering organisational identification onsite is not used to its fullest. Sitting next to colleagues while we stare at our respective screens seems like a waste regarding organisational identification. Also, involving both those who are onsite and offsite is very challenging with one of the sides often getting left out. In contrast, Pratt (1998) argues that it also possible to identify through affinity in which case the question of the environment has less meaning.

In my mind, the environments' unpredictability is in large part a result of the employees' unpredictability. One interviewee stated that their managers "have no control over how ... teams work" in their hybrid work setting. The lack of control is not an issue that is particular to hybrid work settings, but the comment does raise concerns. If the goal were to provide as much freedom to employees as possible in a hybrid work setting, the predictability of those employees would likely decline especially regarding where they work. Of course, an organisation could implement ways to monitor where employees work for example by

requiring them to report where they will be working for the upcoming weeks. This however imposes on the employees' freedom and restricts decision making in the future. Employee monitoring has been linked to reduced trust and well-being (Zheng et al., 2023), which is why Jeske (2022) suggests providing employees more autonomy over how they are monitored.

Regarding new hires, organisations would be unable to promise them contact with their future colleagues, if the colleagues have freedom over where they work. Employees could be required to be onsite for a set time-period with new hires, but at worst this could result in distain towards newcomers in general. One interviewee noted that, especially as a new hire, it was difficult to gain a sense of belongingness when other employees were seldom seen onsite at the office. Mazzei et al. (2023) note onboarding as a "process particularly challenged by the remote working component of hybrid work. Some of its drawbacks, such as ... the reduction in colleagues' support and informal communication, actually represent relevant challenges for newcomer onboarding".

It became very clear during the interviews that the primary reason for going onsite among the interviewees was to gain face-to-face time with colleagues, which is problematic since meeting colleagues onsite is not guaranteed in hybrid work settings. Immediately this raised questions such as how many would be content with meeting just one colleague onsite, and how many would need more to be convinced into going onsite. People may also be very particular about who they want to meet onsite in which case the number of colleagues onsite may not have as much relevance. A few interviewees expressed a need to go onsite to concentrate and work away from distractions at home. Interviewees also mentioned that brainstorming, creative work, asking for help and working on new subjects worked best onsite face-to-face. In such cases the reason for going onsite was in fact related to working. In time, it is possible that hybrid workers working primarily from home would want to leave their homes at some point to enjoy a change of scenery. However, this does not necessarily result in people going to work at their designated offices, since nowadays there are many more places suitable for working remotely. One interviewee suspected that people will in the long-run want to return to the office, while still having remote days in some form.

So what does this mean regarding organisational identification? Identification does not necessarily manifest as behaviour (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008), and therefore the choices employees make regarding where they work cannot be regarded as representing their level of identification with full certainty. Working with colleagues face-to-face has been proven

to increase organisational identification for example through “spontaneous, face-to-face interaction” and other organisational trappings (Ashforth, 2020). The interviews supported this in that many interviewees expressed a need to have face-to-face time with their colleagues to strengthen their identification with the organisation.

Even though most interviewees would like to meet their colleagues onsite every now and then, they appeared hesitant about going onsite to be the one for their colleagues to meet. The primary issues here seemed to stem from uncertainty regarding whether or not the interviewee would end-up meeting anyone or someone in particular onsite. Most of the interviewees appeared to be against going onsite unless they were likely to meet someone with whom they could for example have informal discussions. Other times it felt as if there existed an underlying assumption that some colleagues would be onsite, almost as if by default, even though they are afforded the same freedom of choice to remain offsite. To me this simply sounds like a remnant from the times of fully onsite work when you knew you would meet your colleagues at the office if not for special circumstances. The picture of people at the office appears somewhat hard to shake. Note, this is only my perception based on the interview answers, and no interviewee directly stated that they assume their colleagues are onsite by default. In fact, as I stated many interviewees explicitly feared not-meeting colleagues onsite. Unless we are discussing coordinated action, there is little to no guarantee of meeting colleagues onsite in hybrid work settings.

In practice however it has appeared unlikely that the entire office would be empty and there is usually someone at the office, but who they are and whether they are available for discussion is uncertain. In my experience those onsite are usually the same people, which means that no matter how many times you were to go onsite to meet your colleagues, you might end up running only to a select few who also choose to be onsite. The one time someone who usually is not onsite decides to appear at the office it is likely little work will get done as others will likely want to catch up with them, unless the onsite employees have formed their own group in which case the outsider will likely either wish to belong and come onsite more often, or they become discouraged and become less motivated to return onsite. Ashforth and Mael (1989) note that “identification can persist tenaciously even when group affiliation is personally painful”. Furthermore, Wiesenfeld, Raghuram and Garud (2001), state that individuals who desire organisational identification are “more likely to proactively reach out”, and in cases of where there is a lot of physical distance to the organisation the psychological connection to the

organisation may become more central. In short, if there is a will there is a way, and difficult circumstances do not necessarily result in weak organisational identification.

In the end, the effect freedom ends up having on employees' organisational identification depends to a large extent on what they are looking to get out of identifying with their organisations and what they require in order to identify with their organisations. Pratt (1998) states the need for uncertainty reduction as a motive for organisational identification. Also, self-verification, the desire to see oneself as consistent over time, is a proven motive for organisational identification (Steele, 1998; Swann, 1990; Shamir, 1990). For such employees, freedom and increased control in hybrid work could serve in reducing uncertainty. On the other hand, the freedom that their colleagues likewise receive could end up increasing uncertainty especially in organisations with cultures lacking in communication. I suspect allotting more freedom to employees over their working conditions reduces the employees' predictability, especially if they have little to no motive or reason to communicate their plans. Setting times when to meet each other onsite could reduce uncertainty. It is however possible that increased identification could result in better information sharing and coordinated action as found by Cheney (1983) and Tyler (1999) mitigating this issue.

Some people seek to identify with their organisations to feel a sense of belonging to a larger group (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). Most interviewees admitted identifying with their organisations. However, most of them identified more with smaller teams while fewer identified with the larger organisation. Some interviewees noted that it has been difficult to feel at one with their respective organisations due to fragmentation caused by the hybrid work setting. This supports Ashforth's (2020) argument of a shift towards defining ourselves "less in terms of an organisational we and more as other forms of we along with a personalised me". Furthermore, Van Knippenberg and van Schie (2000) and Riketta and van Dick (2005) found that people tend to identify more strongly with more nested identities, in this case the smaller teams are nested at least within the organisation and likely in varying departments. Nested identities serve in achieving self-distinctiveness, which is a self-related motive for identification. Nevertheless, Ashforth and Mael (1995) found that some people are simply more inclined to identify with larger groups out of preference, so the preceding discussion may not always hold true.

The freedom employees have in hybrid work settings over for example where they want to work at a given time might appear to be a solution for some of telework's shortcomings

regarding identification. If not-having face-to-face time in telework settings is seen as something hindering organisational identification, providing employees with the option to go onsite to gain face-to-face time with their colleagues in hybrid work settings could be a possible solution. As already discussed, multiple interviewees expressed meeting colleagues face-to-face as enhancing their identification with the organisation, and hybrid work presents employees with the possibility to do so. Employers might hope that affording their employees the possibility to go onsite would support their identification. However, even if employees would want to go onsite, they might not do so for multiple reasons.

Employers should avoid assuming that simply affording their employees with freedom and options would in itself support identification, especially since identification does not necessarily result in behaviour (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008), and people have very varied reasons for identifying, some of which may not require face-to-face contact. In telework and office-based work arrangements it was far more clearcut where employees would be working, so managing where people work with organisational identification in mind was not up for debate. Hybrid work therefore introduces a new aspect that needs likely requires attention. Office-based work has many benefits over telework regarding organisational identification, and the risk is that employers will choose to or inadvertently assume, especially under duress from the coronavirus and the like, that the possibility of onsite work in hybrid work arrangements suffice. In other words, employers might be inclined to assume that hybrid work will bring with it the best of both office-based work and telework. This is more of a warning than a finding, but this worry is based on the understanding that some interviewees were left to fend for themselves when the coronavirus pandemic began. The changes that were implemented were so large and fast that some organisations did not perhaps fully comprehend how much guidance employees would need, or they did not have the resources to provide them with that guidance.

4.2 Disproportionate strain and lack of transparency

An issue which came up in the interviews regarding hybrid work was that certain employees are being disproportionately strained by their colleagues. Interviewees felt that it is easier vary who they ask for help onsite, since multiple people are present and available close to them. During telework and now hybrid work interviewees noted that they have a few key colleagues who they ask for help repeatedly. Those are usually the ones who they have established for

example WhatsApp chats or email chains with. This ends up straining said colleagues disproportionately as they end up being one of the few, or the sole, source of help the other employee relies on. Interviewees felt it was hard to contact a new person for help when you already have an open line of communication with another colleague. Even though disproportionate strain may not be optimal for well-being, it is possible that being the one others seek help from could increase organisational identification. Ashforth (2020) notes that a sense of social validation would likely “[foster] greater identification with [the] occupation” and appreciative parties. Tajfel (1978) stresses that individuals must value the identity in question, and taking up more responsibility often increases the value of a particular identity. Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) note enacting valued identities as a motive for identification.

The freedom to choose where you work in a hybrid work arrangement can also lead to the organisation placing unequal levels of strain on employees. For example, the employees that choose to be onsite might receive more attention from their managers assuming that the managers are also onsite. Since an employee is available onsite, their manager might feel it is easier to assign them tasks that should have been given to someone else who happens to be working remotely. This raises a concern regarding fairness and equal treatment. Tasks should be allocated the same way regardless of the work setting. However, if an employee were to experience that they have more contact with for example their manager than their colleagues, this relationship becomes distinctive and could increase identification with the organisation. Furthermore, since people look to attain a positive self-image Tajfel (1978), they tend to identify more with higher status groups (Ellemers, 1993). In this case the manager might represent a higher status group. On the other hand, if the employee sees the manager as too dissimilar this may not become the case because similarity, or the assessment of being similar, is central to identification (Turner et al., 1987).

Unfortunately, those employees who are onsite are perhaps more in the line of fire than their offsite counterparts when their managers feel a need to provide criticisms. Once again however the effect of criticism on identification might be complex. I suspect the feeling of getting criticised disproportionately to others would not make someone want to belong to the respective group. However, if the person in question were to frame themselves as a sacrificial lamb who will endure the strain for the rest of the group, they might experience stronger identification as they would be enacting a possibly meaningful role. Furthermore,

constructive criticism could contribute to the construction of the identity narrative by mimicking sensebreaking and -giving. Constructive criticism challenges the sense of self and organisationally accepted answers to the identity deficits caused by the previous challenges are presented. All in all, being onsite can either knowingly or unknowingly lead to the onsite employee becoming burdened more than ones offsite. Depending on the individual in question this could either discourage or even encourage them.

One interviewee stated an issue with transparency. They knew very little about what their colleagues were doing at any given time and how they were being treated. Not knowing raised a concern in them regarding whether they were being treated fairly or not. Of course, the interviewee has their own experience of fairness even without knowing how their colleagues are being treated. However, in this case they cannot discern are they being treated fairly compared to their colleagues. This was of course already an issue in telework, but it persists in hybrid work as well. In my own experience, when you show up more opportunities are presented your way, whether it is just or not, in my mind validating this concern.

4.3 Recent changes in work – out with the old and in with the new?

For those that have entered work life during the coronavirus, hybrid work might be the only experience of work they have ever had. They might not fully comprehend how recent of a change hybrid work is. The past few years have been exceptional times and have therefore called for exceptional measures. This is not to say that the trend would not have been towards hybrid work arrangements prior to the coronavirus. Hybrid work was already being implemented before the coronavirus, but the pandemic very much accelerated the speed and scope at which it has taken hold. Regardless, those that have only experienced work during this recent years may not recognise how exceptional the times have been. For them hybrid work is simply the norm, not even the new norm as some people regard it. They have learned to expect it, and also demand it, especially since they have little to know experience of anything else. Employers must now balance between meeting the needs of employees who have only known hybrid work and regard it as the norm, and those employees who have worked primarily onsite for the entirety of their careers up until recent years. Thankfully experience in telework softens the blow for some.

Regarding the contact the interviewees had with their organisations, the interviewees primarily noted that they have less informal discussion and approximately the same amount

of formal discussion as before. This led to a feeling of an overall more formal work environment since the ratio of formal discussion increased in relation to informal discussion. Some interviewees also felt that interrupting is more difficult in hybrid meetings, asking questions and joining new conversations is harder, and they felt that it was easy to end up staying quiet and lurking in the background even if they had something to say. The formality that the offsite element adds to hybrid work could explain why multiple interviewees go onsite primarily to seek informal interaction with their colleagues. The overall formal atmosphere might be detrimental to organisational identification. Informal organisational practices support open and trustful interactions (Baer and Frese, 2003).

At least five interviewees joined their respective organisations so that they started by working in hybrid work settings. Four of these interviewees appeared to identify less with their organisations than the rest of the other interviewees on average. However, one of these interviewees appeared to identify as strongly if not stronger than the average. This is not a comment on the absolute strength of their identification but a comparison of who's identification appeared stronger based on the interview answers. This could suggest difficulties with onboarding in hybrid work settings and support the findings of Mazzei et al. (2023).

Work was changing already before the pandemic. Younger generations were getting used to the new gig-economy (Ashforth, 2020) and switching employers more often to gain experience from various companies and to build their CVs. In comparison, older generations were used to working for the same company for longer periods of time. Hybrid work, and telework, appear to have put distance between the employee and their organisation making switching employers easier than before since the connection to the company may not be as salient as before. This was also reflected in the interviews as an increased willingness to switch employers. On average, the interviews displayed lesser feelings of indebtedness than what might have been customary earlier, but this is only my own speculation. Ashforth (2020) suspects that “merely transactional relationships with a workforce are not sufficient for any organisation's long-term welfare”.

4.4 Who wins and what happens to organisational identification?

Based on the interview answers, to me there are certain winners and losers when it comes to hybrid work with organisational identification in mind. For the purpose of this discussion, I

separate hybrid workers into various groups based on attributes I elaborate next. One categorisation is based on where hybrid workers choose to work without considering their motives. This categorisation includes those who choose to work primarily or fully onsite, those who choose to work primarily or fully offsite, those who enact a fifty-fifty split, and those whose choices appear random. In this case we are unable to determine clear winners or losers. Per the definition of hybrid work, all aforementioned groups more or less get what they want. We therefore have to examine the reasons behind why employees either go onsite or remain offsite to determine how organisational identification is affected.

According to the interviews the choice to work offsite was mostly based on scheduling benefits, convenience, and practicality. Meanwhile, the choice to go work onsite primarily resulted from a desire to meet other colleagues while a few referred to escaping distractions elsewhere. Accordingly, I form categories based on whether employees wanted to meet others onsite or not (I am yet to consider why they want to meet their colleagues). When a portion of employees chooses to work offsite, those that would have wanted to go onsite to meet colleagues become generally more inclined to stay offsite like their counterparts as it becomes less likely they would meet anyone onsite. This is disregarding cases in which employees know undoubtedly that they will meet who they want to meet onsite for example via scheduling.

Note, this works only one way. Those who come onsite without wanting to meet colleagues might motivate those who do want to meet colleagues into coming onsite as well. The group who is not coming onsite to meet colleagues requires something else to motivate them, or they are indifferent and randomness reflects their decision-making. This categorisation already reveals one losing group, which is those who want to meet colleagues onsite. I make this assumption, because them getting what they want is reliant on having like-minded colleagues and on a group which is more inclined to work offsite. Research has shown the prevalence of loneliness (Bareket-Bojmel, 2023) and well-being (Peters et al., 2022; Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021; Chafi et al., 2022; Becker et al., 2022) related issues in hybrid work during the coronavirus. These are factors which could in time cause employees to want more face-to-face time with their colleagues making the situation better for those who would like to meet their colleagues anyways. However, this does not reveal much regarding identification, and we therefore have to examine why employees want to meet their colleagues onsite.

Categorising employees based on how much they want to identify with their organisations would not lead to fruitful discussion here, because an abundance of reasons and ways for

identifying exist. If I were to separate employees accordingly, I would be left with groups that each place varying levels of emphasis on identification and simultaneously have different foci of identification. That is why I choose to categorise employees based on whether their identification is heavily reliant on their face-to-face contact with their colleagues or not. From this categorisation we can identify a group, those who are reliant on face-to-face contact for identification, that is at risk of suffering from hybrid work. Among the interviewees there were also those who felt that physical togetherness is a major part in how they identify with their organisations but still decided to work offsite, because they valued matters such as convenience even more. This may either be a result or cause of the ongoing overall erosion of organisational identification (Ashforth, 2020).

The issue is that those who are reliant on meeting colleagues for identification are reliant on something that might be taken away from them, whereas those who are not reliant on face-to-face contact have less to lose in this respect. The interviewees appeared to value other matters than meeting colleagues, whether or not they needed it for identification, to such an extent that I find it likely most of them would more often than not choose to work remotely. Most of the interviewees wanted a hybrid work arrangement leaning towards working remotely, while only one strongly preferred onsite work. Those who went onsite, not for their colleagues, were there primarily for efficiency related reasons. Based on the inclination towards working remotely in hybrid work amongst the interviewees, I suspect that in time it is more likely that those who go onsite to meet colleagues will also remain offsite more often, as opposed to those who prefer working offsite returning to the office. This however depends on the job description as some jobs benefit from onsite time whereas others can be performed as, if not more, efficiently remotely. Hybrid work has in my mind exposed what people truly value in their lives, and people are now in the process of reorganising their lives.

Hybrid work has to my understanding only reduced, or kept same, the motivation of employees for going onsite. Even though I referred to for example loneliness as a motivator for people returning to the office in the future, based on the interview answers other matters supporting staying offsite appear far more motivating. Furthermore, research supports the idea that people are beginning to change how they construct their identities. Wiesenfeld, Raghuram and Garud (2001) propose that the psychological connection to the organisation may become more salient when the physical distance becomes large enough, which may lead to people accepting the physical distance more easily. Also, Ashforth et al. (2020) and Briscoe et al. (2012) propose

that in turbulent times people tend to follow personal identities more, such as personal brands and self-conceptions of adaptability, in which case the organisation's meaning for one's identity might reduce. At best, how people identify can confirm to the hand they have been dealt and at worst people will struggle to hold on to something fleeting. Since experiencing face-to-face contact with the organisation could be supplemented with other sources of identification, I suspect that everyone except the ones who are very reliant on physical presence are likely to let go and find other foci of identification in the organisation or elsewhere to fill the void if they deem the void as something they need to fill.

So is hybrid work not better than telework regarding organisational identification, since employees do have the opportunity to go onsite? Unfortunately, the interviews suggest that it may not be, or at least not to the extent that I would have hoped. Hybrid work does have a chance to foster organisational identification more than telework. In fact, already the afforded choice of both remote and onsite working might increase organisational identification (Hunton and Norman, 2010). Theoretically hybrid work is better than telework for organisational identification due to the added option of onsite work in that it enables employees to identify in more varied ways (more of a chance to fulfil the needs of employees regarding identification). Furthermore, you could argue that theoretically hybrid work is also better for identification than fully onsite work thanks to the afforded choice of where to work. However, in practice this does not appear to be the case, and the interviewees mostly agreed that onsite work is overall best for identification, then hybrid work, and lastly telework.

The answers were varied regarding what will happen to organisational identification if employees are always free to choose where they work, but an overarching theme was that employees would become isolated and that organisational identification would likely decrease. Three interviewees stated that little would happen regarding organisational identification, and one suggested that organisational identification could only increase in hybrid work settings. Overall based on the interviews, my answer would be that most will choose to stay offsite either because they want to or because they have no reason to go onsite regardless of their motivations. The identification of those who would like to meet colleagues might weaken more in comparison to the identification of those who do not have this preference.

The ones who would prefer to meet colleagues onsite are left with few choices. My view is that these types of employees will in varying frequency risk going onsite and being disappointed since the other option is to remain offsite and not meet colleagues at all. The problem here is

the possibility for continued disappointment, especially in cases in which the employee has no other reason for being onsite, other than wanting to meet colleagues.

Whether or not the colleague that someone would go see onsite is content with being onsite themselves is also important to address. I feel it is important to note that the state of mind of the colleagues onsite might affect whether the ones that would like to meet them onsite actually end up benefitting from the interaction or not. Someone being sour for being forced or otherwise having to be onsite against their will might have a detrimental effect on others' organisational identification. The question then becomes, is it more beneficial or detrimental for organisational identification to force employees into coming onsite, so that face-to-face interaction could be guaranteed for those who want it.

Based on extant theory, I cannot definitively deduce that lacking face-to-face contact in hybrid work would decrease organisational identification considering the ways in which employees could change the way they identify with the organisation. This was however something that some interviewees assumed. One interviewee held the opinion that those who identify more strongly will go onsite and those who identify less will not. They also stated that those who work onsite integrate better into the organisation and form their own group. They stated that people who identify strongly enough will be onsite, and those that are offsite do not identify with the organisation as strongly. This statement receives some support in the interviews and partial support from extant literature.

When asked what will happen to organisational identification if hybrid work becomes the norm (regardless of how it is arranged), four interviewees stated that it depends, and three were optimistic that it could be managed well to support identification. Based on all answers overall, the average level of organisational identification is likely to decrease or stay the same, but not increase.

4.5 Miscellaneous findings

In the beginning of each interview, I warmed myself and the interviewee up with various introductory questions that were essentially unrelated to organisational identification. To reduce the pile on the cutting room floor, here are some miscellaneous findings that might be interesting.

All but one interviewee was working in a hybrid work setting at the time of their interview with that one interviewee having an office-based arrangement. Most of the interviewees working in a hybrid arrangement were primarily working offsite. One of the interviewees stood out by seldom exercising their right to be offsite and instead worked primarily onsite while other interviewees worked mostly offsite. All respondents enjoyed high levels of freedom to choose where they work, and very seldom did their employers impose on this freedom by having onsite days or meetings.

Meetings, in which some of the participants were onsite and others offsite, were mostly condemned by the interviewees. The primary benefit of such hybrid meetings was to stay in the loop while for example being sick and unable to attend meetings in person. Otherwise, the interviewees saw such hybrid meetings as too difficult and awkward to arrange and run. The people onsite would likely be staring at their screens even though they would be in the same room as their colleagues, taking away from them being onsite together. Those who were joining the meeting from elsewhere often felt disregarded in the background and involving them in discussions was seen as too difficult or awkward for the rest of the group.

9 out of 14 interviewees believed that their organisations switched to hybrid work due to Covid-19. Attitudes towards hybrid work were largely positive among the interviewees and also within their organisations based on their own perceptions. Only one of the interviewees experienced their company going back to onsite work, and even at their company this was an office-specific choice, not company-wide. All but one interviewee expected there to always be a hybrid element in their work arrangements for the foreseeable future. Many interviewees noted that hybrid work has increased their working hours, since they feel it is harder to switch off since they have been left to manage themselves to a large extent. Also, the interviewees felt that they lacked natural breaks at home and simply worked through what would have been breaks onsite.

All interviewees felt that organisational identification is important, and only one interviewee felt that organisational identification was not actively fostered in their organisation. However, in all but one case, I was unable to ascertain how the fact that their organisations fostered organisational identification showed in practice leaving me to question to what extent organisational identification is considered. Seeing an organisation as promoting identification could be a byproduct of the employee themselves identifying with the organisation and seeing the actions of the company as purposefully aimed at supporting their identification when in fact

this might not be the case. Case in point equating provided freedom with trust and not with lack of choice. Regardless, based on the interviews as a whole it feels that whether or not organisational identification is seen as important by employees, employees currently value other things more and rarely allow what would be best for identification to dictate their actions.

Most interviewees stated that they identify well/very well with their organisation while four stated that they identify half or less (if there was a scale). Based on answers to other questions it felt as if deep belongingness would be mostly gone for whatever reason, even though most interviewees said that they identify rather strongly. The actions, choices, and traits that existing research on organisational identification suggests strongly identifying individuals as exhibiting were mostly absent. However, I cannot draw conclusions solely based on the actions of the interviewees as behaviour is only a probabilistic outcome of identification (Ashforth, 2020). Furthermore, most interviewees proved to value other matters over what would support their identification best, so these choices may blur their level of identification. Five interviewees would like to identify more with their organisation and eight felt that they were content as they were. Ten respondents believed that it could be possible to identify too much with their organisations, the primary risk being losing yourself to your work and having the organisation-related identity taking over.

When asked what makes them identify with their organisations, the interviewees gave varied answers. The most prominent themes were having informal conversations within the organisation, being physically together, and being provided freedom. I would have expected company values to be a prominent theme, but only a few respondents directly referenced their organisations' values. I suspect that the freedom allotted to employees works more like a perk that is enjoyed and motivates employees to stay in the organisation, and not as something that directly and considerably increases identification. Even though interviewees felt that the freedom might or does increase their identification through a show of trust, I am left wondering how strong the actual effect of this freedom is on organisational identification.

If only organisational identification is considered, it would likely be more beneficial to have less freedom, because the interviewees stated a need for face-to-face interaction to enhance organisational identification. I do not know if the supposed increase to identification due to feeling trust fully counteracts the weakening of organisational identification due to the reduction in face-to-face interaction in hybrid work arrangements, and this is only one imaginable trade-off out of many others. When asked about the benefits and downsides of

hybrid work regarding identification relative to other work settings, increased freedom was the biggest benefit referred to while isolation was the prominent downside. Most interviewees appeared to appreciate their freedom more than they hated isolation based on their decision-making.

Regarding who affects their organisational identification the most, most of the interviewees responded with colleagues and then whoever they are most in contact with. Few interviewees noted their managers as affecting their identification. However when asked directly, only two interviewees felt that their managers do not affect the way they identify with their organisation. According to the interviewees, their managers affected organisational identification by facilitating, enabling and supporting their work, knowing the employees and their needs, by creating the work environment, and by upholding the company values. Four interviewees noted that the role of managers regarding organisational identification was integral while two felt the role to be small.

Many interviewees felt that they identify more with their colleagues and teams than the organisation as a whole. The organisation's actions do however still affect employees identify with it. One interviewee noted that their identification is affected by how the organisation is perceived by the public. The employees themselves might identify more with their smaller teams, but when it comes to interacting with people from outside their organisation, to the outsiders the employees tend to represent the company and not the smaller teams. Outsiders to the organisation are likely not familiar with the small teams employees might identify with but instead project what the organisation represents on the individual employee.

Consequently, how the organisation is viewed by outsiders might affect how employees identify with it, since people likely want to connect themselves to a valued identity (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008).

One interviewee remarked that good management is good management and bad management is bad management. In hybrid work lies the opportunity to gain the best of both worlds and the worst of both worlds. Even though I have focused heavily on issues caused by hybrid work regarding organisational identification, I feel it is also important to note that working fully onsite does not make up for poor belongingness and automatically equal strong organisational identification. Poor office-based work arrangements can of course be worse for organisational identification than some hybrid work arrangements. My goal was not to put down hybrid work

or telework as ways of implementing work nor was it to promote office-based work arrangements with organisational identification in mind.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Summary

The importance of organisation identification for individual employees and their employing organisations was stated in this thesis. Organisational outcomes of identification include increased effort, decision making for the benefit of the organisation, cooperation and participation (Rousseau, 1998; Bartel, 2001; Kramer, 2006; Simon, 1976; Tompkins and Cheney, 1987), intrinsic motivation (van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000), performance (van Knippenberg, 2000; van Dick, 2001), reduced employee turnover (Mael and Ashforth, 1995; van Dick et al., 2004), improved functioning of virtual teams (Sivunen, 2006), positive evaluations of the organisation (Cheney, 1983; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994), competitive behaviour against out-group member (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994), and better control by the organisation (Haslam and Ellemers, 2005). Individual outcomes include “self-knowledge (locating the self within a context so as to define the self), self-expression (enacting valued identities), self-coherence (maintaining a sense of wholeness across a set of identities), self-continuity (maintaining a sense of wholeness across time), and self-distinctiveness (valuing a sense of uniqueness)” (Ashforth, 2001).

I identified a research gap amongst literature related to hybrid work and organisational identification. Organisational identification has been studied in office-based and remote work settings from multiple perspectives, and the same hold true for research on hybrid work, even though the body of research on hybrid work is relatively young. I was unable to unearth publications discussing in what ways might hybrid work be affecting organisational identification, and in there lies the gap I intended on contributing to. Accordingly, my research problem was how hybrid work might affect the ways in which employees identify with their organisations, and my research question was “*how might hybrid work affect organisational identification?*” My research objectives were to gain familiarity with organisational identification and hybrid work, to find out how organisational identification occurs in hybrid work settings and in what ways the experiences and opinions of employees

differ and to what extent they are similar, and to clarify what my findings might imply for employers and to suggest possible avenues for future research.

To summarise my findings, I found that my interviewees were on average relatively reliant on face-to-face contact, and informal interaction, for identifying with their respective organisations. Furthermore, I found that the freedom hybrid work affords employees is one of if not the most appreciated aspects of hybrid work. However, my study suggests that the freedom to choose where one works might have a detrimental effect on organisational identification. I discussed in what ways hybrid work might increase and decrease organisational identification. Overall, I cannot conclude with certainty that hybrid work is either bad or good for identification. The possible effects of hybrid work on organisational are so varied that examining all of the avenues emerging from the interviews would not have been possible. Therefore, I chose to focus on the effects of increased freedom on organisational identification and the need for face-to-face contact in fostering identification. My answer to my research question is that hybrid work is not likely to increase and is likely to decrease overall organisational identification.

The effect of hybrid work on organisational identification is heavily reliant on why and how each individual employee identifies with their organisation. People can change foci of identification to fill voids caused by changing circumstances. It is for example possible that the increased distance to the organisation may result in the psychological connection becoming more central (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram and Garud, 2001). However, I question to what extent employees nowadays value organisational identification. Research supports the notion that organisational identification is weakening overall, and employees might instead base their social identities on other matters such as their projects and gigs or networks (Ashforth et al., 2018; Ashforth et al., 2020). Furthermore, personal identities relating to personal brands and adaptability may be increasing in meaning (Ashforth et al., 2020, Briscoe et al., 2012). Also, the interviewees often valued the benefits of working offsite to those of going onsite possibly leading to reduced identification with the organisation.

5.2 Managerial implications

Based on my findings, I believe understanding why employees choose to work offsite would be crucial for employers to understand, especially due to the positive organisational outcomes of strong organisational identification. Also, the possibility of purely transactional

relationships being insufficient for the long-term welfare of an organisation (Ashforth, 2020) underscore the importance of fostering identification. Unfortunately for employers, employees appear to be placing lesser emphasis on their identification with their organisations. In this case one side is has disproportionately more at stake, and employers have more to lose than employees. Furthermore, an important avenue into identifying with organisations, face-to-face contact, is not strongly supported by hybrid work settings. Employers have to try and find other ways of fostering organisational identification. Employers may have to rely more on what is beneficial for organisational identification in telework settings. My findings imply that employers cannot assume that the onsite aspect of hybrid work would serve in fostering organisational identification.

My study implies more work for employers. Fully onsite and fully offsite work did not require managing where employees work in the same sense that hybrid work does. Hybrid work proposes a chance to foster organisational identification with its onsite dimension. Managing the different wants and expectations of employees in hybrid work settings is a challenge to be solved. Based on the interviews, the core challenge for employers regarding organisational identification appears to be how to foster identification in people who would require face-to-face interaction without imposing on newly afforded freedoms to such a degree that employees decide to leave. Identifying what people value in their lives and how this affects their decision-making regarding work would most likely be the first step in solving this issue.

The future role of organisational identification in my opinion ultimately comes down to whether people will still value identifying with their organisations and whether they find ways of supporting that identification. Luckily, employers have an opportunity to try and foster identification in more ways than just face-to-face contact. Unfortunately, most of my interviewees viewed that in particular as being central to how they identify with the organisation alongside informal interaction, and as I have discussed hybrid work does serve in supporting face-to-face interaction.

My study also implies that organisations may have to at some point begin enforcing onsite work as a part of hybrid work, if fostering organisational identification were the goal. Organisations appear to be familiar with the possible implications of imposing on their employees' freedoms. It will be interesting to see whether employers will have to start reducing their employees' freedoms, when this might be, and what will happen.

5.3 Future research

During my study I identified numerous avenues of importance for future research. The question why employees decide to remain offsite even when they have the option to work onsite would in my mind require further attention. This would entail examining what people value in their lives and what their identifications may be supplementing organisational identification, if any, and how this affects their decision-making regarding work, especially now that they have a better opportunity to act in accordance with their wants. This examination would serve the purpose of finding ways in which employers could better support the way employees are choosing to balance their lives and possibly finding ways in which supporting employees' work-life balance might serve in supporting organisational identification. Research on work in general could benefit from an updated understanding of where employees' and organisations' needs and wants coincide.

I would encourage further explorations into why organisational identification might be decreasing overall, and do employees care if it is. The overall weakening of organisational identification already has recent research behind it, but whether employees care about this could have implications for whether their organisations could and should try to foster organisational identification, and to what extent. If we were to find that employees are letting go of their organisations as part of their identities, it might imply that employees would require from other incentives for staying with their employers. Further examinations into what is causing organisational identification to diminish could also be fruitful. The growing gig economy, recent turbulent times, and increased virtualisation of work (Ashforth, 2020) are a few for starters. I cautiously add the implementation of hybrid work to the list. However, it is unclear to what extent each of these might affect organisational identification, and the turbulent times are perhaps passing, so it will be interesting to see how the situation develops.

Another question is could the face-to-face interaction employees would like to experience be supplemented with face-to-face interaction elsewhere. Furthermore, when people do go onsite how would the time be spent best, and does the lesser time onsite put additional pressure on the time that is spent there. One approach would be to expect lesser work-related results from onsite time and emphasize socialising. However, I suspect justifying this to employers would be nearly impossible, because I cannot justify it even to myself.

I also want to mention a few issues that are not related to organisational identification. In my mind the freedom in hybrid work necessitates the examination of how many and which employees are required onsite for the organisation to function properly. If full freedom in the hybrid work arrangement were to be the goal, then the answer would have to be zero to account for the possibility that all employees would decide to be offsite simultaneously. If this was the case and the organisation would function completely with all employees offsite, what becomes of the office. Keeping offices only for mingling purposes would likely be very hard to justify even with organisational identification in mind. Organisations are beginning to deliberate what to do with their offices, since employees are not using them to the same extent as before. Furthermore, if companies keep their offices, should they continue providing food? If the offices are empty, can the space be exploited in other ways? In the time of hybrid work, what can employers be expected to provide their employees at the office? Is it realistic to still expect the same of office spaces that people had become accustomed to prior to hybrid work? These are just a few questions that came to mind.

I also encourage others to further examine my research problem. I invite contradicting views and hope that in time we may have a better understanding of how organisational identification could be fostered in hybrid work settings, especially since hybrid work is expected to stay as a form working for the foreseeable future (Becker et al., 2022).

Lastly, to simplify my analysis I assumed employees as having full freedom of choice regarding where they work while discussing possible outcomes of said freedom on organisational identification. Future studies could look at the effect varying degrees of freedom might have on organisational identification. For example, I discussed having set onsite days every week with the interviewees, and they mostly agreed that this could be beneficial in supporting organisational identification. However, this matter was not examined further.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview rubric

1. How did you work before hybrid work?
2. Do you still work in other modes than hybrid work?
3. How much of your work is hybrid work (and something else)?
4. How would you prefer to work?
5. How free are you to choose your work setting in hybrid work?
6. What have been the biggest changes that hybrid work has brought for you?
7. How many people are you working with at once on average?
8. Why do you think your organisation switched to hybrid work?
9. How has hybrid work been met at your organisation (by employees / by management)?
10. Will your organisation revert to previous work settings? Why?
11. How would you describe your role in your organisation?
12. How would you describe your role's importance in your organisation?
13. How would you describe your relationship with your organisation?
14. What role does organisational identification play in your organisation?
15. How important is organisational identification (in your organisation)? How does it show?
16. How well do you identify with your organisation? How does it show?
17. What do you do that suggests that you identify / do not identify with your organisation?
18. How (well) do you think other employees identify with your organisation? How does it show?
19. What causes you to / why do you identify with your organisation?
20. Would you like to identify more (or less) with your organisation? What would help with that? How would it help? Why?
21. Do you think identifying more with your organisation would benefit you/the organisation?
22. Can someone identify too much with their organisation? Why?
23. Is organisational identification worth pursuing purposefully? Why?
24. What do you think are the pros / cons of pursuing organisational identification?
25. What work setting fosters organisational identification the best / worst? Why?
26. How does the freedom to choose your workspace affect you identifying with your organisation?

27. Who are the people that affect / What affects you identifying with your organisation the most? How?
28. How have managers affected you identifying with your organisation?
29. How does organisational identification affect your work / the work of others?
30. What do employees need in order to identify with their organisation? What about in a hybrid work setting?
31. What do you require in order to identify with your organisation? What about in a hybrid work setting?
32. Have you ever felt pressure to identify with your organisation? How? Did this affect how you identify with your organisation?
33. How guided has the process of identifying with your organisation felt?
34. Do you believe that predetermined workspaces in hybrid work would help foster organisational identification? Why?
35. How would you describe the main differences regarding organisational identification in office-based work, telework, and hybrid work?
36. Compared to telework and office-based work, what are the benefits / downsides of hybrid work regarding organisational identification?
37. What has caused organisational identification to increase / decrease in a hybrid work setting?
38. Does the idea of organisational identification affect your preferred work setting? How?
39. Does your preferred work setting affect how you identify with your organisation?
40. Does your ability to choose your workspace affect how you identify with your organisation?
41. Has hybrid work affected your working hours (time of day and total amount spent working)?
42. Has hybrid work affected how much you are in contact with your organisation? How?
43. What is a manager's role in promoting the organisational identification of their employees? In x setting?
44. How could (your) managers (further) promote the organisational identification of their employees in a (hybrid work setting)?
45. Do you believe that your average employee / manager cares about identification? Why? How does it show?
46. What have your managers done to concretely try and affect organisational identification in their organisation?

47. What has your organisation done to concretely try and affect organisational identification? In *x* setting?
48. In what ways are managers able / unable to affect the organisational identification of their employees?
49. What factors limit your managers' / organisation's ability to promote organisational identification in *x* work setting? Why?
50. What happens to organisational identification if employees are always free to choose where they work?
51. What will happen to organisational identification in a future where hybrid work is the norm?