

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

Employee Engagement in Hybrid Teams - An Empirical Study in the German Software Industry

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science (MSc)

Wien, 2023 / Vienna 2023

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UA 066 914

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Internationale Betriebswirtschaft

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Bernhard Kittel

Abstract

This thesis investigates the impact of location on employee engagement of workers in hybrid teams. The study employs qualitative interviews with eight participants, including both remote and on-site employees from two Germany-based software firms. The examinations focus specifically on cognitive and emotional engagement, to validate whether remote employees do indeed exhibit lower engagement rates than their on-site colleagues in hybrid work models.

Findings indicate that achieving equal levels of cognitive engagement within a hybrid team is feasibly. The implementation of suitable tools and processes mitigate potential negative effects on cognitive engagement, contradicting the expectation 1 of lower cognitive engagement for remote employees. In contrast, the two studied employee groups display notably different levels of emotional engagement. Remote employees exhibit weaker social ties and lower affective organizational commitment (AOC). Limited physical interactions and feelings of exclusion contribute to these disparities, supporting the expectation 2 of challenges in fostering emotional engagement for remote employees in hybrid teams.

In summary, while reaching even levels of cognitive engagement is feasible, fostering equally high levels of emotional engagement of remote workers remains a significant challenge for hybrid organizations. Recognizing the importance of employee engagement in talent retention, firms operating in a hybrid setting must be aware of the pitfalls and mitigation strategies. The findings of this paper offer valuable insights to organizations navigating the evolving landscape of employee engagement in a dynamic work environment and provide a solid foundation for future research in the field.

Abstract

Diese Arbeit untersucht die Auswirkungen des Arbeitsortes auf das Engagement von Arbeitnehmern in hybriden Teams. Die Studie verwendet qualitative Interviews mit acht Teilnehmern, darunter sowohl remote als auch vor Ort arbeitende Mitarbeiter von zwei in Deutschland ansässigen Softwareunternehmen. Die Untersuchungen konzentrieren sich speziell auf kognitives und emotionales Engagement, um zu validieren, ob remote Mitarbeiter tatsächlich geringere Engagement Level als ihre vor Ort arbeitenden Kollegen in hybriden Arbeitsmodellen aufweisen.

Die Forschungsergebnisse zeigen, dass es möglich ist, innerhalb eines hybriden Teams vergleichbare Level von kognitivem Engagement zu erreichen. Die Implementierung geeigneter Tools und Prozesse federn potenzielle negative Auswirkungen auf remote Kollegen ab, und widerspricht somit der ersten Annahme des geringeren kognitiven Engagement bei remote Mitarbeitern. Im Gegensatz dazu zeigen die beiden untersuchten Mitarbeitergruppen deutlich unterschiedliche Niveaus des emotionalen Engagements. Remote-Mitarbeiter weisen schwächere soziale Bindungen und eine geringere affektive organisatorische Bindung auf. Begrenzte physische Interaktionen und ein Gefühl der Ausgrenzung tragen zu diesen Unterschieden bei und unterstützen die zweite Annahme, dass die Bildung von emotionalem Engagement bei remote Mitarbeiter in hybriden Teams herausfordernder ist.

Zusammenfassend zeigt diese Arbeit, dass es zwar möglich ist gleichwertige Levels des kognitiven Engagements zu erreichen, die Förderung von ebenso hohem emotionalen Engagement von remote Mitarbeitern für Organisationen im hybriden Umfeld eine bedeutende Herausforderung darstellt. Hybrid agierende Unternehmen müssen sich der Risiken bewusst sein und mit entsprechenden Maßnahmen entgegenwirken, um ein hohes Engagement über die gesamte Mitarbeiterschaft hinweg zu gewährleisten. Die Forschungsergebnisse dieser Arbeit bieten wertvolle Erkenntnisse für Organisationen, die in einem immer volatiler werdenden Arbeitsumfeld ihre Mitarbeiter*Innenbindung gewährleisten wollen, und legen eine solide Grundlage für zukünftige Forschung auf diesem Gebiet.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Increase in Remote and Hybrid Working Models

Throughout the past years, companies have evolved more and more toward remote working models. These span from including individual remote employees into hybrid organizational forms, to building whole teams that collaborate entirely remotely. The COVID-19 pandemic, throughout which organizations were forced to adapt and test remote working models during lockdowns, has fuelled this development.

Having, often successfully, tested the “home office” model, herds of employees now insist on maintaining this privilege¹ (Alexander et al., 2021, p. 8). Consequently, organizations are starting to grant their workers more flexibility to choose where to work from² (Pattnaik and Jena, 2020, p. 874). Tech analyst Gartner predicts that post-pandemic 48% of employees will work remotely at least sometimes (Gartner, 2022). The Future of Work Survey predicts that 74% of teams will be working with remote team members by 2028 (UpWork, 2021). Firms such as Google, Facebook or Apple actively promote employees working remotely and plan to continuously expand their remote workforce. As remote and hybrid forms of collaboration persist, it becomes an increasingly relevant research field. The implications of these new forms of collaboration have not yet received large scholarly attention within this context. Managing the paradigm shift toward remote and hybrid engagement successfully is essential for companies to stay competitive and retain their best talent.

1.2 Importance of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has been a prominent topic in recent years. Benefits of employee engagement include reduced turnover, more innovative and productive employees, as well as increased well-being in teams (Robertson and Cooper, 2010, p. 1; Szyszko, 2021, p. 8). Its importance and value are widely recognized in academia and the concept has made its way into

¹ Various statistics from a range of companies and organizations exhibit this longing for remote working options. According to Buffer, 97% of remote workers would like to be able to work remotely at least some of the time for the rest of their career (Buffer, 2022).

² 75% of surveyed companies are allowing long-term remote work while only 9% are not (Buffer, 2022)

the business world. Ever more organizations are dedicating heaps of resources to measuring, monitoring, and improving employee engagement to stay on the winning side of the war for talent. Next to fuelling digitization across industries, studies also exhibited that the COVID-19 pandemic had an array of negative effects on employee morale and well-being and boosted depression rates (OECD, 2021; Adisa et al., 2021). Businesses have had to adapt to the changing environments rapidly, often neglecting or underestimating the needs of employees. Whilst a slew of other factors, such as job insecurity, uncertainty, and general anxiety over the pandemic, also played into poor engagement scores in these times, the change in collaboration style and work environment whilst in the home office, are also contributing forces.

This paper will not focus on employee engagement throughout forced lockdowns in a global pandemic. Instead, this brief introduction serves to portray the acceleration in remote work that has taken place in the past two years, and the far-reaching implications for employers and employees alike. One year into the pandemic, LinkedIn polls on whether or not companies would keep remote work practices in place, and which kinds of working models employees preferred, could be seen daily. By now it has become blatantly clear that our working world, at least in digitized industries, will never be able to go back to pre-pandemic office working models³ (Buffer, 2020; Conway et al., 2016). Remote and hybrid work has come to stay (Alexander et al., 2021, p. 2; Buffer, 2020; McKinsey, 2020; Yang et al., 2022, p. 43; Cisco Global Hybrid Work Study 2022).

1.3 Relevance of the Software Industry

Within the software industry, implementing remote work tends to pose less challenges than in many other industries. Most tech companies already work with digital tools daily and are familiar with products that help bridge physical gaps. Many companies had already begun including remote employees pre-pandemic or had built up entirely remote organizations (i.e. Buffer, Zapier, Atlassian, and many more). Because implementing hybrid collaboration can be less challenging on the operational side for software companies, the topic of employee engagement can be

³ In 2020, only 3% of remote workers would promote an “office first, remote allowed” approach, while 86% support a “fully remote” or “remote first” approach (Buffer, 2020).

overlooked quickly. The effects this shift has on employees must be understood and addressed, nonetheless. Therefore, the software industry is a particularly interesting niche to study.

Academics thus far have studied employee engagement in physical teams and remote work, extensively. However, examinations of employee engagement in hybrid teams are scarce. This paper will address this research gap by exploring employee engagement in hybrid teams. It will dissect how our present understanding and interpretations of employee engagement, which have been based largely on the physical workspace, need to adapt considering more hybrid collaboration. Differences between engaging remote and on-site employees need to be addressed. With the recent boost in remote and hybrid work, it has become clear that “both employee engagement metrics and workplace tools are still far from considering this emerging workplace ecosystem” (Surma et al., 2021, p. 16).

This paper follows the call of multiple researchers for more qualitative research in hybrid settings (Yang et al., 2022, Surma et al., 2021; Szyszko, 2021, p. 16). Deduced from qualitative interviews with employees within hybrid teams, differences between remote and on-site employee engagement in hybrid teams are analyzed. Chapter two provides a literature overview of employee engagement research as well as initial empirical results regarding remote and hybrid engagement. Chapter three outlines the methodology used in this qualitative study. In the fourth chapter, study results are analyzed, followed by an interpretation in chapter five. The final chapter will provide a conclusion and implications for future research around hybrid employee engagement.

2. Theory

2.1 Types of Engagement in an Organizational Context

Engagement is a relatively young field of study situated in organizational psychology and sociology. It emerged with William Kahn in the 1990s and has witnessed impressive attention from the business world and academic researchers ever since. Kahn was the first to explore the psychological reasons why people engage or disengage in their work. He focused on **psychological** engagement, defining it as the “harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (1990, p. 694). In his pioneering research, Kahn identified three

psychological conditions for engagement: meaningfulness, safety, and availability (p. 703). If a job was meaningful to an employee, the job could be done in psychological and physical safety, and the necessary physical, emotional, and psychological resources were available to conduct the job, then Kahn identified higher engagement rates.

Various types of engagement within an organizational context have since been discussed. As elaborated above, Kahn began by dissecting psychological engagement. **Job engagement**, on the other hand, is defined as a “multi-dimensional motivational concept reflecting the simultaneous investment of an individual’s physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in active, full work performance” (Rich et al., 2010, p.619). This aspect focuses on engagement with a job or a role. While very similar to Kahn’s definition, it excludes the more personal expression of employee’s selves in their organization. In other words, job engagement refers to the engagement with the task at hand, and not on a broader organizational commitment.

One of the most well-cited researchers in the field are Schaufeli et al. (2002). They define employee engagement as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.” (2002, p. 74). Albeit capturing much of the essence of *employee* engagement, Schuck (2019) argues that the definition is too similar to concepts such as job satisfaction⁴ or job involvement, focusing solely on the interaction with a task at hand, and that **work engagement** would be a more fitting term for the above definition. In past research, terms such as employee engagement, work, or job engagement were often used interchangeably. More current research has begun to disentangle the individual constructs and specify what employee engagement entails. Thus, it is important to differentiate between the different types of engagement in the organizational context, to sharpen research in the field going forward.

2.1.1 Controversial Engagement Perspectives

Ambiguous definitions, and discussions over what engagement encompasses, persist in research. This section will outline some ongoing debates in the overall engagement field before diving deeper into *employee* engagement.

⁴ Job satisfaction is a much older construct than employee engagement dating back to the 1970s (Locke, 1976). and is defined as a “global, general work-related perception focused toward a state of satiation” (Shuck, 2019, p.46). The concept does not reflect whether employees are motivated and is static instead of forward moving. Employee engagement extends much further than satisfaction.

Engagement and Well-being

Scholars continue to study the link between well-being and engagement. Robertson and Cooper (2010) propose the term “full engagement” to include well-being metrics. They argue that psychological well-being correlates closely with employee engagement and should be included under “full engagement”. Other researchers also accredit a positive correlation between engagement and well-being (Alfes et al, 2010, p.3; Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot, 2017, p. 544) and many of the newer academic frameworks and industry tools naturally include well-being metrics to measure employee engagement (honestly.com; officevibe.com; peakon.com; Shuck, 2019). Simultaneously, more recent studies are beginning to question the positive correlation between engagement and well-being. In 2020, Gallup made an interesting observation which they coined the “Wellbeing-Engagement Paradox” (Gallup, 2021). While historically both rates correlated closely, well-being rates plummeted throughout the first year of the pandemic, while engagement rates stayed consistent or even improved. Although I will not discuss the results further, they do question the correlation between the two concepts and suggest that employee engagement may be more resilient than assumed. The link between well-being and engagement will be an interesting field for future research. As this perspective is still relatively new and still evolving, in this paper employee engagement coincides with Robertson and Cooper’s understanding of “full engagement” to include well-being metrics.

Engagement and Burnout

Researchers have routinely juxtaposed engagement with burnout (Alfes et al, 2010, p.2; Cole et al., 2012; Maslach et al., 2001; Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Burnout is “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals that do people work” (Maslach and Jackson, 1981, p.1). Many academics postulate that burnout is the antidote to engagement: “The practical significance of this burnout–engagement continuum is that engagement represents a desired goal for any burnout interventions⁵” (Maslach and Leiter, 2008, p. 499). Indeed, several studies have confirmed the negative correlation between engagement and burnout (comp. Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 86).

⁵ In their burnout – engagement continuum Maslach and Leiter juxtapose their three burnout dimension with the engagement dimensions: exhaustion– energy, cynicism - involvement, and inefficacy– efficacy (Maslach and Leiter, 2008, p. 504)

While acknowledging a negative correlation between engagement and burnout, other scholars believe that employee engagement should not be merely understood as the opposite of burnout, but as a distinct concept (Conway et al., 2016; Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Schaufeli et al. 2002; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006; Shuck, 2019). This paper will examine engagement separately from burnout.

Trait vs. State Engagement

A further controversial aspect in literature is the categorization of engagement as a state or a trait. Some researchers argue for the trait engagement perspective (Macey and Schneider, 2008⁶; Dalal et al., 2012) meaning engagement is largely impacted by predisposition and personality traits such as neuroticism (Wildermuth, 2010) extraversion, conscientiousness, or proactiveness (Young et al., 2018; Christian et al., 2011). Studies have indeed exhibited a connection between personality traits and engagement. Young et al., for example, found empirical evidence for a strong correlation between positive affectivity⁷ and engagement, supporting the trait engagement perspective (2018, p. 1340).

However, regarding engagement exclusively as a trait would imply that engagement cannot (or only slightly) be influenced by external forces. Most researchers view engagement as an active psychological state that can be influenced by the environment and is in constant flux (Cole et al., 2012, p. 1552; Conway et al., 2016; Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004; Schaufeli et al, 2002; Schaufeli et al, 2006; Shuck, 1029, p. 14). “Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior.” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Likely an interplay of trait and state engagement is at work. While acknowledging that certain personality traits can influence engagement, this paper follows the perspective that engagement is (also) a state that can be addressed and directed by external factors.

⁶ Macey and Schneider don't entirely reject engagement as a state but differentiate between trait and state engagement.

⁷ “Positive affect refers to a dimension in which high levels are characterized by “high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement, whereas low positive affect is characterized by sadness and lethargy” (Watson et al., 1988)” (Khan et al., 2022, p. 2)

The persisting academic controversies over what engagement means precisely and what aspects should be included in its analysis demonstrate the complexity and relative novelty of the research field. As theories and models are still evolving, matching future findings to the new hybrid working arrangements becomes increasingly important. The next section outlines the current research on employee engagement – the theoretical cornerstone of this study.

2.2 Defining Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is distinct from the other types of engagement forms discussed above. It extends beyond the mere scope of task fulfillment to encompass the entire professional, emotional, and social work experience (Shuck, 2019, p. 25). Alfes et al. define employee engagement as “being positively present during the performance of work by willingly contributing intellectual effort, experiencing positive emotions and meaningful connections to others.” (2010, p. 5). In contrast to other types of engagement, interpersonal and social factors are given much greater importance, making it an interesting concept to assess in times of increasingly virtual interactions. Employee engagement includes fostering positive work- and nonwork-related experiences (Adisa et al., 2021, p. 3).

Schaufeli et al. name vigor, dedication, and absorption as essential elements of employee engagement. Vigor includes high energy levels, mental resilience, and persistence when performing a job. **Dedication** encompasses a feeling of enthusiasm, pride, and commitment coinciding with a sense of belonging to, and identification with, an organization. Lastly, absorption refers to a deeply engrossed and focused way of working during which time passes quickly (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74-75). While vigor and absorption strongly resemble job or work engagement, dedication is particularly unique to employee engagement. How dedicated employees are, influences turnover rates, productivity, and innovativeness of employees. Vigor, dedication, and absorption can be translated to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement respectively, the three dimensions of employee engagement which will be discussed in the next chapter.

High energy levels, which Schaufeli et al. include under **vigor**, are essential to understanding employee engagement. Scholars agree that the concept is linked to high levels of energy experienced within an organizational context (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Shuck et al, 2017; Young et al., 2018). Energy can be described as a “scarce resource that individuals seek to acquire,

retain, and protect.” (Young et al., 2018, p. 1332). Translated to employee engagement, this implies the “maintenance, intensity, and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural energy”⁸ (Shuck et al., 2017, p. 959). Thus, employee engagement is a desirable state that is directed toward a common organizational purpose and is characterized by commitment, passion, enthusiasm, and focused energy (Macey and Schneider, 2008, p.4).

It is important to note that employee engagement can indeed be steered. Building on the view that employee engagement is a state, Brad Shuck postulates that the concept is (a) active, stable, and steady, (b) can vary based on subjective interpretations of individuals, and (c) has a directionality, meaning it is targeted toward something or someone (2019, p. 15). This implies that employee engagement can be actively influenced by organizations and is something that needs continuous attention from management.

In summary, employee engagement is not merely the state of being involved and committed to a task at hand. It also entails high levels of **dedication** toward, and **identification** with an organization as well as **proactiveness**, **enthusiasm**, and **motivation**. Engaged employees experience high levels of **energy** within their work context and have meaningful connections to co-workers and the organization itself. As the concept of employee engagement is complex, researchers have routinely proposed its division into subcategories, to better dissect and understand it. The following section will introduce the categorization into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement.

2.2.1 Cognitive, Emotional and Behavioral Employee Engagement

Throughout the past decades, researchers have proposed various ways of conceptualizing employee engagement. A prominent example of a quantitative approach to the topic is the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli et al. in 2002. The UWES measures engagement through a 17-item questionnaire covering the three dimensions discussed earlier: vigor, absorption and dedication. Alfes et al. suggest a division into affective/emotional, cognitive/intellectual, and social engagement which are measured by extent and frequency. These are just two examples of proposed approaches that are commonly used in engagement research. The approaches in this field are all very similar and there are sometimes only nuances that

⁸ These three types of energy will be discussed in the following section

differentiate one from the other. However, as the two above approaches lay a slightly greater focus on *work* engagement, than on *employee* engagement, this paper will follow a more recent categorization of Brad Shuck, who puts a slightly greater focus on emotional engagement.

Prof. Brad Shuck, a university professor and employee engagement researcher, breaks down employee engagement into (a) cognitive, (b) emotional, and (c) behavioral engagement (2019). These are closely linked to the three initial factors Kahn defined to measure psychological engagement (physical, emotional, and cognitive) and very similar to categorizations proposed by other researchers (comp. Alfes et al., 2010⁹, Adisa et al., 2021¹⁰, Schaufeli et al., 2002). The three dimensions are not clear-cut, and some aspects of engagement may overlap into multiple areas. Still, this separation can be useful to better understand and analyze different components of employee engagement. The dimensions build up on one another and all three are crucial to attain high levels of employee engagement.

Cognitive Engagement

In early engagement research, cognitive engagement was limited to “the investment of personal energies into cognitive labors” (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). This aspect of employee engagement is very similar to Schaufeli et al.’s definition of work engagement. Two decisive factors of cognitive engagement include the **absorption** and **attention** with a task or job at hand (Rich, 2006, p.27, Kahn, 1990), in other words how long and focused an employee can conduct their work.

Over the years the term has extended to encompass not only the commitment to a single task, but to the general organizational contributions of an employee. Shuck takes up this broader interpretation of cognitive engagement: it is “the degree and intensity of mental energy that an employee **contributes toward positive organizational outcomes**” (Shuck, 2019, p.27). The availability of resources (availability appraisal), the security of one’s job (safety appraisal), and

⁹ Alfes et al., categorize engagement into “**emotional** or affective engagement; intellectual or **cognitive** engagement; and **social** engagement, each measured in terms of extent and frequency.” (2010, p. 2)

¹⁰ „In fact, a disengaged employee is less dedicated, withdrawn from his/her role and more reluctant to **physically**, **emotionally** and **cognitively** execute workrelated tasks more effectively.” (Adisa et al., 2021, p. 2)

how meaningful the work conducted feels (meaningfulness appraisal), impact the level of an employee's cognitive engagement (Kahn, 1990, p. 705; Shuck, 2019).

The **availability appraisal** is the foundation of engagement. If employees do not possess the personal, social, and job resources necessary to conduct their work, higher levels of engagement cannot be achieved (Kahn, 1990; Shuck, 2019). Tangible resources include hard- and software tools, as well as sufficient budget and staffing. Intangible resources encompass **personal resources** (e.g. self-efficacy and optimism), **social resources** (e.g. coworker support, joint decision-making and friendship), as well as **job resources** (e.g. autonomy, supervisory coaching, and opportunities for professional development) (Adisa et al., 2021, p.3; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, p. 127).

The **safety appraisal** picks up on Kahn's psychological safety concept. When employees can bring their full selves to work, take on new challenges, bring in new ideas, and interact and discuss with colleagues "without fear or negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" (Kahn, 1990, p. 708) they are likely more engaged. Trust is an important cornerstone for the safety appraisal: "Safety revolves primarily around each employee's need to **trust** their working environment cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally" (Shuck, 2019, p. 28). A clear job description, realistic goal setting and qualitative feedback from supervisors can also increase an employee's feeling of safety and trust within a team, increasing the overall engagement (Shuck, 2019, p. 29).

Lastly, the **meaningfulness appraisal** refers to an individual's sense of purpose and belonging in their specific role. Kahn describes psychological meaningfulness as the "sense of return on investments of self in role performance" (1990, p. 703). Feeling value and significance within a professional context is essential to feel true engagement in a job, but also constitutes a natural desire in other aspects of life. "This need for meaning is absolutely central to the role of personal involvement and personal investment that human beings are drawn towards throughout fulfillment of their overall life roles" (Shuck, 2019). Thus, organizations must provide employees with a sense of belonging and purpose, as well as convey appreciation and recognition.

In summary, cognitive engagement includes being equipped with all the necessary resources to cognitively engage with one's role in an organization, while feeling safe and appreciated. Cognitive engagement is the aspect of employee engagement that practitioners are often most

interested in, as it is easier to measure and act on than other more abstract dimensions. It is also the foundation for all other engagement levels¹¹. Only when the necessary resources, safety and meaningfulness are in place, can emotional and behavioral engagement grow.

Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement, also referred to as affective engagement in literature, entails employees investing large amounts of their emotional resources into the organization and “feeling positively about doing a good job” (Alfes et al., 2010, p.5). This is the case when employees have already developed feelings of trust and pride in the context of cognitive engagement and develop a deeper **valuation appraisal** toward their employer. “In the research literature, *pride*, *belief*, and *accomplishment* are identified as currencies of contextual value that drive emotional engagement (Shuck and Rose, 2013, p. ...).”.

In emotionally engaged teams, workers choose to invest resources such as “time, knowledge, pride, belief, and attention as an artifact of valuation “within the organizational environment (Shuck, 2019, p. 31). These, in turn, impact employee loyalty, identification, advocacy and positive reciprocity (Alfes et al., 2010, p. 5). Emotionally engaged employees are less likely to switch jobs and more likely to invest in their current employer. There are various contributing factors to this dimension such as management style, perceived organizational support (POS) ¹², employee voice¹³, and affective organizational commitment (AOC) (Conway et al., 2016, p. 911; Adisa et al., 2021; Dalal et al., 2012; Mowday et al. 1982).

AOC portrays a vital concept to retaining talent and fostering identification with, and commitment toward, an organization. According to Mowday et al., high AOC is characterized by “(a) a strong belief in and acceptance of an organization’s goals, (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization“

¹¹ This does not necessarily imply that cognitive engagement is higher than other engagement dimensions. Alfes et al. found affective engagement to be much higher than cognitive engagement in their study (2010, p.6).

¹² Perceived organizational support is “an indication that the employer is concerned about employee well-being, values their efforts and treats them both fairly and respectfully“ (Adisa et al., 2021, p. 4). Dalal et al. found that POS is significantly negatively correlated with negative affect (2012, p.311).

¹³ Employee voice is defined as „employees’ actual behaviour in ‘speaking up’ with constructive ideas that aim to improve or change the status quo.“ (Rees et al., 2013, p. 2783). It can provide employees with “a sense of direction and control over demands in their work” and improve the perception of fairness about the process and outcome of decision (Conway et al., 2016, p. 906).

(1982). High affective organizational commitment has been linked to high perceived organization support (POS), an element of cognitive engagement, highlighting the intertwined nature of the engagement levels (Szyszko, 2021). Cognitive and emotional engagement are distinct from one another, but simultaneously bi-directional and codependent (Shuck, 2019, p.32).

Behavioral Engagement

Lastly, behavioral engagement refers to the level of effort an employee is ready to put into their work and how motivated they are. It is defined as “the psychological state of intention to behave in a manner that positively impacts performance“ (Shuck, 2019, p. 33). Behavioral engagement has often been described as putting in the ‘extra effort’, however, Macey and Schneider argue that *effort* is a very vague term that does not suffice to truly grasp engagement in its entirety (2008, p.15). Instead, they argue that being behaviorally engaged includes “innovative behaviors, demonstrations of initiative, proactively seeking opportunities to contribute, and going beyond what is, within specific frames of reference, typically expected or required.” (Macey and Schneider, 2008, p. 15).

In previous studies, Organizational Citizenship Behavior¹⁴ (OCB) has also been used to measure behavioral (and sometimes emotional) engagement. Debate over whether OCB should indeed be treated as a *component*, or rather as a *consequence* of employee engagement, persists. Dalal et al. found empirical evidence for employee engagement being a predictor of OCB rather than a component (2012). Thus, this paper will follow these findings in assuming that OCB is indeed a manifestation of employee engagement.

It is important to note that behavioral engagement does not necessarily have to be observable, as it is a psychological state of intention that is not necessarily action-related. “It is not enough to just work harder; behaviorally engaged employees see themselves as psychologically *willing* to give more” (Shuck, 2019, p. 33). At the same time, employees may be behaviorally engaged without physically manifesting this. Take employees that are willing and eager to go above and beyond,

¹⁴ Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is defined as “employee behavior that is at least somewhat volitional and that improves the functioning of the organization” (Organ & Paine, 1999).

but personal circumstances such as childcare, limit the time and energy they can put into their work. Therefore, it is not always easy to measure behavioral engagement in its less overt forms.

Table 1: Types of Engagement

	Cognitive Engagement	Emotional Engagement	Behavioral Engagement
Question	How do you think about your work?	How do you feel about your work?	How do you intend to do your work?
Appraisal	Availability Appraisal, Safety Appraisal, Meaningfulness Appraisal	Valuation Appraisal	
Cues	Enablement, Trust, Sense of purpose and belonging,	Pride, Belief, Accomplishment, Dedication, Identification	Commitment, Motivation, Enthusiasm, Passion
Behavioral indicators	Vigor	Dedication	Absorption
Influencing factors	Available resources (personal, social, job), communication and collaboration, processes, management	Management style, voice mechanisms, OCB, POS	Cognitive and emotional engagement
Related concepts	JD-R Model, COR	AOC	OCB

Source: Own compilation from sources (Alfes et al., 2010; Kahn, 1990; Shuck, 2019)

Despite ambiguity and persisting discussions in research, there is considerable agreement that employee engagement is a highly **energetic state of affective-cognitive involvement** characterized by **vigor, dedication, and absorption**. It goes beyond being focused on a task at hand, extending to a sense of enthusiasm and passion toward one's work, a feeling of belonging within a team, as well as **pride** and **identity** toward the organization. As research evolves in the field it becomes easier to understand and measure employee engagement. A strong consensus in research up to date is the overwhelming positive effects of high engagement rates.

2.2.2 Outcomes of Employee Engagement

High employee engagement has been seen to benefit employees and organizations alike. Employees generally benefit on multiple levels. In their report, Alfes et al. outline some of the most prominent positive outcomes of highly engaged employees: they (1) have higher well-being, (2) are more likely to stay with their employer, (3) are more productive and innovative, and (4) perceive their workload to be more sustainable (2010, p.2).

Next to benefitting employees, high employee engagement has also proven to benefit employers by boosting financial returns, overall efficiency (Young et al., 2017; Alfes et al, 2010, p.2), and organizational productivity by around 23% (Gallup, 2022, p. 4). Engaged employees are also proven to be more innovative. Data collected by Alfes et al. confirms that “[e]ngaged employees are more likely to search out new methods, techniques or instruments, make important company members enthusiastic for innovative ideas, and transform innovative ideas into useful applications” (Alfes et al., 2010, p. 43). Higher productivity and financial returns are typically a result of especially high *cognitive* engagement.

Another important outcome of high employee engagement rates is substantially reduced turnover rates (Young et al., 2017). According to Gallup, absenteeism and turnover are reduced by 41% and 24% accordingly (2017). A high intent of workers to stay within an organization “ensures that human capital is maintained, morale is good and recruitment costs are reduced. Conversely, people’s intention to leave is a close proxy for actual leaving behaviour” (Alfes et al., 2010, p. 43). These highly engaged employees are less prone to quit or look for new job opportunities and usually exhibit especially high levels of emotional engagement.

The positive effects of employee engagement on workers and organizations listed above are indisputable. Research up to now has seen that “physical working conditions play an essential role in employee satisfaction and especially in employee engagement.” (Duque et al., 2020, p. 4). How this physical space can be bridged considering increasingly virtual work settings, has yet to be further investigated. The different elements that constitute employee engagement, must be reassessed considering remote and hybrid working models (Yang et al., 2022). The following section will provide an overview of existing research in remote and hybrid engagement.

2.3 Remote Work

Remote work, also known as teleworking, home office, work from home (WFH) or work from anywhere (WFA), is defined as “working outside the conventional workplace and communicating by way of telecommunications or computerbased technology” (Bailey and Kurland, 2002, p. 384). Even pre-pandemic, the Future Annual Workforce Report estimated that by 2028, 73% of all business teams will employ remote workers (Upwork, 2019). Employees in remote work settings have been a field of study for many years.

Organizational Pros and Cons of Remote Work

Albeit potential challenges of managing new forms of collaboration, facilitating remote work can have various positive outcomes for organizations. Lower operating/real estate costs, a broader talent pool to source from, and increased organizational output and productivity are just some of the observed positive effects (Pattnaik and Jena, 2020, p. 874; Popovici, 2020, p. 470). Bloom et al., for example, registered a 13% performance increase in a Chinese company of 16,000 employees during a remote work experiment, assuming fewer sick leaves and a greater focus on work activities at home led to this boost in efficiency (2015).

On the other hand, organizations have also cited “a loss of organisational synergy, increased concern about data security and a loss of management control over remote employees” (Pattnaik and Jena, 2020, p. 874). Other pitfalls include poor communication among teams, more potential for distractions, reduced work motivation, lack of in-person collaboration, and difficulty of monitoring performance (Golden and Gajendran, 2019; 2017; Adisa et al., 2021)

Personal Pros and Cons of Remote Work

The personal benefits of remote employees have become clear in past years. Some prominent advantages of remote working include flexibility concerning how and where to work, more net time due to fewer commuting hours, a better overall work-life balance, and for many people, a better focus due to fewer office distractions (Buffer, 2022; Popovici, 2020; Surma et al., 2021). These are proven to translate into higher job satisfaction, as well as lower absenteeism and turnover rates (Pattnaik and Jena, 2020, p. 874).

A large majority of remote workers seem to enjoy working remotely and would like to continue to do so. The tech firm Buffer has been monitoring the state of remote work since 2018 through annual surveys with remote workers. In 2021, 97% of participants in the study¹⁵, would recommend working remotely to others (2021 State of Remote Work). However, simultaneously only 61% of the surveyed employees would describe their overall remote working experience as ‘very positive’.

Contrary to the perceived benefits of remote workers themselves, studies suggest that virtual working arrangements may in fact have negative effects on work-life balance, employee health, and performance (Eurofund, 2020; Gallup, 2020; 2021 State of Remote Work). This is linked to the **autonomy paradox**, in which flexible working arrangements can lead to irregular and unpredictable time patterns and/or to an intensification of actual workload, resulting in the exact opposite of work-life balance (Popovici, 2020, p. 471).

Commonly observed negative consequences of remote work include professional and social isolation, anxiety, difficulties in unplugging, longer working hours, a lack of visibility, as well as inferior communication and collaboration (Adisa et al., 2021, p. 4; Alexander et al., 2021, p. 2; Buffer, 2022; Popovici, 2020, p. 470). Next to the social isolation, studies have exhibited career hazards for remote employees: 45% of respondents believe that it is more difficult to achieve career growth, while only 14% believe it is less difficult (2021 State of Remote Work). Personal growth and career development opportunities also contribute to cognitive engagement.

Ambiguous and at times contradictory results of remote work studies could be associated to a slew of different factors, such as time of research, (i.e., pre-COVID-19, vs. during COVID-19), geographies, industries, and demographics. These inconsistencies further highlight the complexity of the topic. There are numerous pros and cons to remote working, but what do these imply for engaging remote employees.

¹⁵ This study included over 2000 remotely working people from 16 countries (2021 State of Remote Work). Results may contain some bias, as they also included freelancers who are not committed to one single employer. They also only provide insights into individual preferences, not into how this kind of work affects the overall organizational success.

2.3.1 Remote Engagement

As remote work increases, companies have already understood that engaging their workforce virtually is becoming more important. Offers to meet these needs are popping up in the market. Employee Engagement Solutions, such as Officevibe.com, are offering new products tailored to the demands of remote employees. They enable employers to analyze and monitor the engagement of their remote workforce through regular surveys. This trend underlines companies' need for solutions to tackle engagement challenges.

Academia has also begun investigating remote engagement more thoroughly. There have been numerous studies up to date discussing the interrelation between remote work and employee engagement (Pattnaik and Jena, 2020; Adisa et al, 2021). Remote employees are completely detached from the office atmosphere and informal hallway chats, which impacts the way in which social ties are formed and how engagement and motivation overall can be encouraged. Remote engagement is defined as “the agility, sense of communality and encouragement the workforce exhibits while they operate from a remote location” and constitutes “one of the toughest challenges faced by the organization in the latter part of 21st century” (Pattnaik and Jena, 2020, p. 878). The following chapter summarizes the most relevant findings to date.

In literature, the most prominent challenges of remote engagement include a sense of social isolation, poor interpersonal interactions, siloed communication, and a lack of identification and commitment toward an employer (Cooper and Kurland, 2002; Yang et al., 201). This chapter attempts to categorize findings into cognitive engagement (specifically availability and safety appraisal), and emotional engagement (specifically affective organizational commitment pertaining to the valuation appraisal).

Cognitive Remote Engagement

Availability Appraisal

To analyze cognitive engagement in remote teams, the Job-Demand Resource (JD-R) model and the Conservation of Resource Theory (COR, dating back to Hobfoll, 1989) are often used as a starting point. Without diving deeper into the technicalities of the two concepts, both postulate that **personal and job resources** are vital for achieving high engagement rates. These resources can take the form of “objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies“ (Hobfoll, 1989, 117).

In their quantitative study within a Dutch engineering company, Xanthopoulou et al. (2007), supported these assumptions by exhibiting a positive correlation between job and personal resources, and employee engagement.

Especially the depletion of job resources is a focus for many academics. An inadequate work setup and environment at home or conflict between work tasks and household chores can lead to a reduction of personal resources (i.e. energy levels). Adisa et al. indeed observe that within remote settings, social and personal resources are often depleted, resulting in lower engagement rates (2021, p. 11). This highlights the challenges faced by employers in making sure sufficient resources are available to all team members. There is a certain sphere that the employer cannot control or influence, making it more difficult to monitor cognitive engagement in remote settings.

Safety Appraisal

As elaborated in chapter 2.2.1, **trust** is a cornerstone of the safety appraisal. Literature has identified trust as an even more essential component to fostering engagement in remote working settings (Derven, 2007; Pattnaik and Jena, 2020). When there is no physical contact with colleagues, decisions become less transparent as communication streams are more intricate. In this scenario, trust sets the foundation for fast decision-making processes and creativity to persist (Pattnaik and Jena, 2020, p. 878; Staples, 2001, p. 1). One must trust that effort is seen, camaraderie is acknowledged and decisions like promotions are conducted fairly. Effective and transparent communication is essential to foster high levels of trust in an organization.

Communication needs to be **transparent** and **consistent** to safeguard efficient collaboration, foster trust within teams, and ensure that employees stay committed to their goals (Kerber et al., 2004, 9). Establishing these effective communication channels and rituals can be challenging in remote scenarios. While asynchronous communication (by ways of email, chat, shared documents, etc.) increases, synchronous communication (i.e., meetings, informal chats) decreases, creating “more siloed and less stable” communication patterns (Yang et al., 2022, p. 44). This bears the risk of hampered knowledge transfer, reduced productivity, and less innovation.

Emotional Engagement

Remote work has also shown to reduce the strength and quantity of ties¹⁶ between colleagues, impacting the quality of communication and collaboration (Yang et al., 2022, p. 43). Siloed communication and weaker social ties are stress factors which “present major risks and challenges for remote workers because they influence employees’ perceptions that their efforts and opinions are not valued by their colleagues and the organization” (Adisa et al., 2021, p. 5). This interpersonal dimension impacts employee’s cognitive engagement, as well as their emotional engagement.

A commonly articulated challenge of remote employment is a reduction in organizational identification, which closely correlates with **affective organizational commitment** (Nguyen et al., 2020, p. 3459). As elaborated above, AOC is a vital part of emotional engagement and contributes to higher overall productivity and reduced turnover in a firm¹⁷. Literature has observed that the identification with, and sense of connection toward an employer can be inhibited by communication barriers in the context of remote work (Santa, 2022, p. 30).

Potentially siloed communication streams and feelings of social and professional isolation discussed above, add to the often-observed reduction of AOC. “It is a common phenomenon for remote workers to feel less engaged, unfocused and disconnected from the job and the organization, as they are not in the office or with their teams“ (Pattnaik and Jena, 2020, p. 875). According to Wiesenfeld et al., remote employees working highly autonomously may perceive themselves as independent contractors without strong ties to the actual employer (1999, p. 789). Various other studies support the view that remote work has an overall negative effect on organizational identification (i.e., Charalampous et al., 2019; Pattnaik and Jena, 2020; Santa, 2022).

¹⁶ The „ties“ refer to connections with co-workers. The stronger a tie and the more ties among employees exist, the better collaboration, communication, and ultimately organizational output (Yang et al. 2022).

¹⁷ Organizational identification (OI) and affective organizational commitment (AOC) also closely correlate with Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). As this is more of an “outcome” of engagement while AOC and OI are seen as components of engagement, we will disregard this concept going forward.

However, recent studies are yielding different results. In his quantitative study with 387 participants, Szyszko (2021) found that remote employees can have just as high (or even higher) AOC rates as their on-site colleagues. Perceived organizational support (POS) had the most impact on high AOC rates, regardless of location (Szyszko, 2021). Similarly, the results of Santa's qualitative field study "identified limited feelings of workplace isolation and strong organizational identification and affective commitment among the respondents at all-remote organizations" (Santa, 2022, p. 3). These findings highlight that high engagement levels are feasible in remote settings and that there are likely other, more relevant factors than location at play.

2.4 Hybrid Work

Hybrid workspaces inherit various IT solutions to facilitate work and are "multiply located" (Halford, 2005, p. 4), allowing employees to work flexibly from (almost) anywhere (Petani and Mengis, 2021, p. 1). As employees call for more flexibility and remote options, the hybrid work model is the way to go for most companies, especially those that already have office spaces.

Hybrid working models bear many advantages, parallel to remote work. They can reduce an organization's operating cost, allow companies access to a broader pool of talent across countries and time zones, and allow for high flexibility and agility (Alexander et al., 2021, p. 8). At the same time, they also provide a physical place for (at least some) employees to meet, unlike entirely remote models.

Cisco's Global Hybrid Work Study 2022¹⁸, which surveyed 28,000 hybrid workers across 27 markets, revealed that contrary to the expectations of many, 60% of hybrid workers see their productivity and quality of work to have improved in a hybrid setting. Around 78% of survey participants say their work-life balance and overall well-being have improved since their company implemented hybrid working models¹⁹ and 55% report decreased stress levels. The study concludes that "[h]ybrid working can improve company culture and make employees happier, more motivated, and more likely to stay" (2022, p. 13).

¹⁹ Across the board, younger survey participants were more likely to see positive improvement through hybrid work, than older colleagues.

However, working in a hybrid team also portrays fundamentally different challenges than collaborating on a fully remote or fully on-site basis, such as managing meetings with virtual and physical participants as well as ensuring information symmetry across all workspaces. According to Conway et al., “the ways in which employees interact with the potentially conflicting HR practices that they experience under the hybrid model of employment relations is complex and requires active management” (2016, p. 912), highlighting the intricacy of the field.

Communicating and living a shared company culture and assuring employee engagement from afar may further complicate collaboration. Albeit increased subjective productivity and well-being, only 25% of employees believe their company is “very prepared” for a hybrid work future and around 66% agree that “their company needs to rethink its culture and mindset to make hybrid work truly inclusive” (“Cisco Global Hybrid Work Study 2022”, 2022, p. 3). These responses illustrate that there is still much room for improvement and a need to learn more about how hybrid working models can be made truly engaging.

2.4.1 Hybrid Engagement

First attempts to dissect employee engagement before the backdrop of hybrid working models have been made (Conway et al., 2016; Popovici, 2020; Surma et al., 2021; Szyszko, 2021; Yang et al, 2022), although the total amount of research in the hybrid space is considerably smaller than in remote or physical employee engagement realms. The discussed benefits and risks of remote work largely also apply to remote team members in hybrid settings. However, having parts of the team work on-site simultaneously presents even more challenges for managers, businesses, and employees alike. This chapter briefly summarizes the scarce results of academics who looked at engagement in hybrid settings.

Cognitive Engagement

Availability Appraisal

As is the case in remote teams, the availability of resources is also identified as a vital factor for engaging hybrid teams. Bakker et al. (2005) demonstrated that job and personal resources have a buffering impact of job demands on exhaustion and cynicism, which portray antipoles to engagement. In other words, the more resources available, the more resilient and engaged the employees. Based on these findings, Conway et al. established that in hybrid teams, next to

mitigating exhaustion and cynicism, resources additionally reduce the risk of burnout (2016, p. 907). This suggests that availability appraisal may be *even more* important to engagement in hybrid teams, than in entirely remote or on-site teams.

In their study analyzing remote workers at Microsoft, Yang et al. identified negative impacts of the hybrid model on both remote workers, and the employees in the office. Their study exhibited a deterioration of interpersonal relationships, communication, and productivity of both remote and on-site employees once team members worked from a different location (Yang et al., 2022). Although these findings were made during COVID-19 lockdowns and forced home office arrangements, they remain an interesting observation yet to be further explored. As siloed communication has been identified as a challenge in remote communication, it can be assumed that this problem will pervade in hybrid settings.

Safety Appraisal

Cisco's 2022 survey also provided insights pertaining to the differences between remote and on-site workers: 60% of participants believed that fully remote employees will have problems engaging with their colleagues and company in comparison to those employees that have access to an office ("Cisco Global Hybrid Work Study 2022", p. 20). This is not yet evidence for remote colleagues being less engaged, but it underlines the challenges hybrid work models face. Similarly, literature has identified the potentially "detrimental risk of remote work" as "inhibiting organizational socialization and affecting its cognitive and relational components, considered key facilitators of knowledge transfer between teleworkers (and non-teleworkers)., also impact on-site colleagues in hybrid teams" (Popovici, 2020, p. 470). These observations highlight the potential threats to effective knowledge transfer and collaboration in hybrid teams that still need to be further explored.

Corresponding with studies on remote workers, the Cisco Global Hybrid Workforce Study 2022 revealed that the increased well-being rates of remote workers are primarily attributable to a better work-like balance and relationship with friends and family. Although employees feel their productivity has increased, "over half (55.3%) belie[ve] micromanaging behaviors had increased with hybrid and remote working." In addition, while 70.5% of respondents believe they are trusted by their managers, only 58.9% think their colleagues can be trusted to work remotely ("Cisco

Global Hybrid Work Study 2022”, 2022, p. 13). These statistics suggest that trust may become a major concern for hybrid structures in the future. Colleagues trusting on-site staff more than remote workers could deepen the rifts between the two groups.

Emotional Engagement

The Cisco Global Hybrid Work Study 2022 revealed that while 68% of employees report improved *mental* well-being, *social* well-being was least improved with only 43%. A similarly low number of participants (44%) say that their relationships with colleagues improved (“Cisco Global Hybrid Work Study 2022”, 2022, p. 13). These statistics underscore that while personal well-being may improve, social ties which are related to an employee’s sense of identification with, and loyalty toward a company, may deteriorate in hybrid settings.

Apart from some findings in Cisco’s quantitative study, there has been little research related directly to emotional engagement or AOC in hybrid teams. In an explorative thesis similar to this one, Nicolas Szyszko found that “as long as employees are provided with the proper support from their direct superior, those employees will have the same level of AOC whether they work remotely on the site location, or a hybrid of the two.” (Szyszko, 2021, p. 24). These findings cannot be supported or dismissed by other papers.

It can be assumed, that as remote employees have greater challenges to cognitive and emotional engagement than on-site employees, hybrid teams may experience even greater siloes in engagement and social interactions. Based on the discussed literature and findings discussed, it can be hypothesized that employees who have contact within the office can create much stronger social ties than those participating from remote locations, leading to skewed communication and collaboration, and reduced engagement rates for remote employees. These assumptions are to be examined in this study.

2.5 Development of a New Theoretical Approach

Based on the existing research around employee engagement in remote teams, the challenges of remote engagement are primarily (a) **reduced cognitive engagement** due to a potential depletion of job and personal resources, a lack of trust, and siloed communication, and (b) **reduced emotional engagement** due to weaker social ties and professional isolation, resulting in a

depletion of affective organizational commitment. While there is an academic consensus that engaging remote employees requires a set of different measures than engaging fully on-site employees, results of studies continue to contradict each other. The results concerning emotional engagement are especially ambiguous. While many scholars have found evidence for remote work negatively affecting commitment (i.e., Adisa et al., 2021; Pattnaik and Jena, 2020; Yang et al., 2022) more recent studies are coming to different conclusions (i.e., Santa, 2022; Szyszko, 2021).

As studies concerning remote engagement are increasingly reporting novel results, the even younger field of hybrid engagement will likely also hold unprecedented insights. So far research around hybrid working models has seen greater flexibility, autonomy, productivity and overall higher well-being levels, the challenges to cognitive engagement are similar to those of remote workers. Affective organizational commitment as part of emotional engagement has not yet been dissected within the two groups of hybrid teams; remote vs. on-site employees.

Drawing upon previous research on remote and hybrid work arrangements, this paper aims to develop a theoretical understanding of the differences in cognitive and emotional engagement levels between remote employees in hybrid teams and their on-site counterparts. Building upon existing literature on remote and hybrid engagement, this paper will delve deeper into the difference within hybrid teams, theorizing that **remote employees in hybrid teams have lower levels of cognitive and emotional engagement** than their on-site counterparts.

In the context of hybrid organizations, where both on-site and off-site employees coexist, even greater disparities in emotional and cognitive engagement between these two groups are anticipated. The blend of on-site and remote work arrangements within hybrid teams may create dynamics that impact engagement levels differently. For instance, remote employees may feel a sense of exclusion or isolation from the physical workplace, leading to lower emotional engagement with the team and organization as a whole. Physical and virtual barriers can contribute to the formation of siloes, preventing effective communication, collaboration, and the development of strong interpersonal relationships. These asymmetries could potentially further widen the gap in emotional engagement between on-site and remote team members, increasing the asymmetries previous research has observed.

There has been little research dedicated specifically to hybrid engagement. As business and HR practices are outpacing literature in this field, it becomes increasingly important to explore this field further. Ever more software solutions are being created that attempt to mitigate siloed communication streams and weakened social ties in hybrid teams. Tandem, for example, has created a solution for hybrid teams to meet in virtual and physical spaces simultaneously (<https://tandem.chat/hybrid>). This further demonstrates the importance of understanding employee engagement in hybrid settings. There have been researchers calling for new ways of measuring employee engagement in increasingly virtual workspaces. This paper will not solve this issue and come up with completely new frameworks and metrics. However, it will further tap into the field and provide insights into challenges in hybrid workspaces.

To limit the scope of this paper, the empirical study will focus on the main findings of remote engagement literature to date: cognitive and emotional engagement. An emphasis will be laid upon dissecting the safety and availability appraisal (cognitive engagement), as well as the valuation appraisal (emotional engagement). Nevertheless, it is important to understand employee engagement in its entirety, due to the strong interdependencies between emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement. By exploring and understanding these dynamics, organizations can better recognize and address the challenges associated with remote and hybrid work arrangements. Identifying strategies to bridge the gaps in cognitive and emotional engagement can help foster a more inclusive and cohesive work environment, promoting higher levels of engagement among all team members, regardless of their physical location or work arrangement.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology and Data Analysis

This study aims to explore potential differences between the engagement of remote and on-site employees in hybrid teams. A qualitative research approach was chosen to better understand subjective experiences, relevant life circumstances, and general sentiments around the topic. Qualitative research “is driven by a desire to explain social behavior and thinking, through existing or emerging concepts” (Yin, 2015), making it especially suitable for tapping into complex psychological and sociological concepts such as employee engagement.

For this qualitative research, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees of hybrid teams. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed using the simplified transcription system according to Dresing and Pehl. This included transcribing the interviews verbatim, capturing all the words spoken by the participants as well as non-verbal cues such as pauses, sighs, and tone of voice. The transcriptions were pseudonymized and anonymized, replacing or deleting all names of people, cities, events, and companies, to guarantee the full anonymity of the participants. The names used to refer to interview partners within this paper are changed.

The obtained data was analyzed with a structured content analysis approach according to Mayring (2000). This involved breaking down the data into smaller units and coding them according to themes and categories that emerged from the data. As the overarching categories (emotional and cognitive engagement) were clear prior to conducting the interviews, a grounded theory approach would not have been fitting. Meyring's approach was deemed most fitting due to its flexibility and accuracy.

The collected interview data was coded and analyzed using the software MAXQDA. The primary codes were clear due to the previous research and categorization of employee engagement into the different appraisals. Several new codes came up in the process of coding, i.e., company culture, personality traits, or home life which may be interesting for further analysis, but do not constitute the core of this paper. Table 2 portrays a list of the most important codes and sub-codes used to dissect the interview. An extensive list of all the codes is included in the appendix.

Table 2: Codes and Sub-Codes used for analysis

Code	Sub-Codes
Cognitive Engagement	
Availability Appraisal	Communication/Collaboration; Information exchange; Job resources; Personal Resources; Meetings; Asynchronous communication/ collaboration
Safety Appraisal	Enablement (Feedback, Onboarding); Work Environment (Distractions); Trust

Meaningfulness Appraisal	Learning and Development; Job fulfillment
Emotional Engagement	
Valuation Appraisal	Accomplishment/Recognition; Identification/AOC; Dedication; Pride
Relationship to Colleagues	Physical encounters; Social ties
Other Codes	
Remote Work	Remote work motivation; Remote work advantages; Remote work challenges
Hybrid Work	Hybrid Work Challenges; Hybrid Work Advantages
Company Culture	Company Initiatives; Vision and Mission; Product; Company events; Office Life

In summary, the methodology of this study involved conducting qualitative interviews with 8 participants from 2 different organizations, transcribing the interviews according to the guidelines of Dresing and Pehl, and analyzing the data according to the guidelines of Meyring (2000). This method was chosen to attain a deep and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives related to the research topic and potential other influential factors next to location.

3.2 Population and Sample

It is important to clarify the definition of “hybrid work” and remote workers within this paper. In this study, companies with a hybrid working model, employing “remote” and “on-site” workers, are analyzed. Within the context of this study, “on-site” workers refer to employees who have access to a company office, where physical exchange with colleagues takes place. As outlined in the introduction of this paper, fully on-site workers are a dying species, especially in the tech industry. Considering the low statistics on employees willing to go back to the full-time office model, this will also be a more realistic definition of on-site workers in the future.

“Remote” workers will consequently refer to all employees who don’t have access to an office on a regular basis. These employees will usually live in a different city, country or even continent,

and only meet their colleagues physically a few times a year for special team events, if ever. We are likely to see less emotional bond and identification from employees who never meet colleagues in person, than from those who have social contact in the office.

As a criterium for the selection of interview partners, the following guidelines were defined beforehand: Interview participants had to be (a) between 25 and 40 years of age, (b) in a collaborative role that demands communication with the team, (c) in their current company for at least six months, (d) report to an office in Germany. Additionally, the working language needed to be English. Due to field accessibility, two different companies were chosen to take part in this study: a small German tech start-up with 50 employees (referred to as “the start-up” from now on), and an American Software MNC with over 1000 employees (referred to as “the MNC” from now on). Within the global company, employees in the German office (consisting of 45 employees) were interviewed. This makes the size of the local offices very similar and comparable, while the organizational setup of the two companies is very different.

A total of eight employees from two different software companies were interviewed. Four respondents within the same firm were interviewed, two remote and two on-site, for the sake of greater comparability of remote and on-site effects. Within both companies, two fully remote, as well as two fully on-site employees were interviewed. The interview participants came from Germany (5), Belarus (2), and Poland (1). The age ranged from 27 to 35, with an average age of 32 years. Interview partners worked in Sales (5), Product (2), and Marketing (1).

Table 3: Respondent Demographics at Time of Interview

Name	Company	Location	Department	Age	Time at company
Brian	SU	Remote	Marketing	28	14 months
Francis	SU	Remote	Product Management	32	13 months
Oscar	SU	On-Site	Sales	34	11 months
Matt	SU	On-Site	Sales	33	8 months
Emma	MNC	Remote	Sales	35	14 months

Jake	MNC	Remote	Sales	34	15 months
Audrey	MNC	On-Site	Sales	32	23 months
Simon	MNC	On-Site	Product Management	29	18 months

For the sake of better comparability, the citations in this paper will include whether the employee is from the start up (SU) or the MNC (MNC) and whether they work remote (R) or on-site (O) – i.e., “SU/R” is a remote employee from the start-up, while “MNC/R” refers to a remote employee in the MNC.

3.3 Study Procedure

To find suitable interview partners for this study, software companies that portrayed a solid foundation for dissecting the hybrid working model were identified. Next to industry criteria, the chosen firms had both been working with a hybrid model for over two years and planned to continue to do so. The identified participants were contacted via email and asked to book a 45-minute meeting slot. The interviews were conducted virtually. All interview participants were sent an Informed Consent and Data Privacy Agreement which they read and signed. In addition, before each interview, the data privacy regulations were reiterated, and the anonymization was reassured. All interviews worked seamlessly with no connection disruptions or troubleshooting. From each organization, two on-site and two remote employees were interviewed.

The interviews were conducted between September and October of 2022. This time frame is highly interesting, as forced home office lockdowns in Germany date back over a year, and a sense of normality had returned to wide parts of the business world. Simultaneously, companies are adapting to the “new normal” after the pandemic years proved remote work to be a valid option and firms are consequently increasing hybrid and remote work practices.

The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of a list of 14 open-ended questions. Follow-up questions were prepared and asked according to the conversation flow. It quickly became clear that setting up the interview in more of a casual conversation mode and sharing experiences

amongst one another, provoked more candid answers from interview partners. Interviews lasted 37 minutes on average.

Expectations and Assumptions

Based on the prior research on remote engagement and ongoing research on hybrid teams there are two main expectations for this study.

Expectation 1: Remote employees in hybrid teams have lower rates of cognitive engagement than their on-site colleagues.

It is expected that remote employees have lower rates of cognitive engagement due to reduced availability of resources, impeded communication and collaboration, and lower levels of trust due to missing physical interactions.

Expectation 2: Remote employees in hybrid teams have lower rates of emotional engagement than their on-site colleagues.

It is expected that remote employee in hybrid teams have a lower emotional engagement than their on-site counterpart, due to weaker social ties and decreased affective organizational commitment caused by the absence of physical encounters.

Limitations

Despite the ambitions of this research, there are several limitations to this study that need to be considered. As the population sample is heterogeneous, there may be several different factors contributing to a participant's answer: nationality, culture, location, age, family situation, department, and so on. Thus, in the following analysis of the subjective experiences, the differences will be interpreted as an interesting case study while the causal inference cannot be scientifically validated. However, identifying the commonalities of the hybrid employees will be extremely valuable given the heterogeneity of the interviewees.

4. Results

This chapter contains the findings of the qualitative study and will present them along the engagement dimensions. It explores personal experiences, thoughts, and opinions related to cognitive and emotional engagement in remote and hybrid working environments. The analysis examines similarities and differences between remote and on-site workers, occasionally highlighting distinctions between multinational corporations (MNCs) and startups to illustrate the potential impact of company size. However, the primary focus of this paper is the comparison of remote and on-site employees within hybrid teams.

The results of this study are analyzed in two sections: cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement. In the realm of cognitive engagement, the availability appraisal and the safety appraisal are dissected. Next, the emotional engagement of interview partners is assessed by looking at the strength of social ties and affective organizational commitment within the organization. By comparing and contrasting the experiences of remote and office workers, this study identifies specific challenges faced by individuals working in remote or hybrid setups and provides insights into the potential advantages or disadvantages associated with each work arrangement. The meaningfulness appraisal will not be included, due to the length of this paper and the fact that previous literature did not identify it as a key challenge in remote teams.

4.1 Cognitive Engagement

As elaborated in previous chapters, cognitive engagement is made up of the availability, meaningfulness, and safety appraisal, and portrays the foundation of employee engagement. This chapter will focus on the major issues literature has identified that potentially lead to a reduction of cognitive engagement in remote work: (1) the availability appraisal, including a potential depletion of resources, as well as siloed communication and collaboration, and (2) the safety appraisal, which is influenced by management style and trust. As these aspects are impacted in remote teams, they are likely also relevant to hybrid teams.

4.1.1 Availability Appraisal

As discussed in chapter 2.2, the availability appraisal examines whether employees have all the necessary resources to conduct their job effectively. In this context two main topics stood out particularly throughout the interviews: (1) the availability of job, social and personal resources, and (2) hybrid communication and collaboration. How well teams communicate and collaborate impacts the availability of personal, social and job resources creating bilateral dependencies between the two. By addressing these dimensions of resource availability, this chapter contributes to the existing body of knowledge on remote and hybrid collaboration, emphasizing the significance of resource availability for successful collaboration in modern work environments.

4.1.1.1 Availability of Resources

Previous studies have observed a depletion in social and job resources in remote and hybrid collaboration (Adisa et al., 2021). This chapter explores the disparities between remote and office workers in terms of their access to social, job, and personal resources. Specifically, two key job resources emerged frequently during interviews: the work environment and access to and exchange of information. The work environment encompasses factors such as physical infrastructure and ambient conditions, while access and exchange of information are vital for productivity.

Job Resources

The most vital job resources mentioned by employees were software tools. Respondents attribute a very high importance to the software they work with. This becomes clear when hearing them talk about the tools they work with daily: “Oh Salesforce! Salesforce and Sales Navigator [...] I use them every day. Without them I would die!” (Audrey, MNC/O, Pos. 36). Tools were mentioned by all eight interviewees, regardless of location, as they constitute indispensable resources for communication, collaboration, and other work-related tasks.

In general, both remote and on-site employees were very happy with the work set-up of their company. They felt they had all the necessary hardware and software to complete their job effectively (Matt, SU/O Pos. 32; Francis, SU/R, Pos.45; Audrey, MNC/O; Pos.24;). “In terms of physical resources [...] Yeah, everything is there that I need!” (Matt, SU/O, Pos. 28). The

foundation for cognitive engagement seems to be solid in both companies as the basic requirements for working in a hybrid team are understood and met. There was no difference between remote and on-site employee's perceptions of the basic resources available.

Information Exchange

Information is a key job resource needed to conduct work effectively. How information is created, shared, and stored is essential for every business. In teams that are physically dispersed, implementing solid information exchange and knowledge management systems becomes even more important to counteract the risk of siloed communication and information asymmetries. Both studied companies are not new to hybrid working and managed to implement well-designed information and knowledge management processes early on. Interviewees described how this works in their unique teams.

In general, employees did not perceive any drastic information asymmetries between on-site and remote workers. Some noted that there will probably be small details or scraps of information that get stuck in the office (Jake, MNC/R, Pos. 50), but that the important things do get shared with the entire team: “there is no advantage of being in the office for the spread of information. It's more for us to find this ideal tool, ideal flow, ideal amount of information that is needed for each team member. But in general, everything is online“ (Francis, SU/R, Pos. 70). Overall employees felt well informed and up to date, as Audrey highlighted: “I feel pretty well informed because this company is distributing information very well and quickly” (Audrey, MNC/O, Pos. 52).

Online databases and tools are a cornerstone for keeping information and knowledge up to date and sharing it with colleagues. Employees in both companies are encouraged to save all information that could be relevant for others on these platforms and to keep as little as possible on their private desktops: “we are also asked not to save data on our desktop, we should put it in the OneDrive, so that it's synchronized with internal platforms and staff” (Audrey, MNC/O, Pos. 40). This concerns updates on current projects, but also important files or collaborative documents. This type of knowledge and information management works well for the employees (Oscar, SU/O, Pos. 98). Francis was impressed with the amount of content accessible on their online database:

“I’m so impressed by the amount of input. I would never expect something like that from a startup, to be honest. It’s the most structured thing I’ve ever seen. Basically on any topic - everything about the product, about the company about anything [...]. I guess that’s also why onboarding and everything was so much easier here. (Francis, SU/R, Pos. 71).

Having this system in place helped her navigate through the company and understand the product from the beginning, leading to high cognitive engagement from the start.

On the downside, due to the amount of data stored, navigating through the information can be challenging at times. Especially remote employees talked about the difficulty of navigating through the information in the beginning: “Some things you need to keep asking. In Notion²⁰, for example, we have all kinds of information, but you don’t even know sometimes what you need to search for. From time to time, you need to get back to somebody who knows” (Brian, SU/R, Pos. 38). Similarly, office employees report this being a challenge at times as well: “the question is then of navigating all the information, right. And that’s definitely a challenge“ (Matt, SU/R, Pos. 40). Nonetheless, all employees attribute great value to these central knowledge management systems and believe it has made their work much more efficient.

Work Environment

The access and availability of a suitable work environment also constitute an important job resource. Next to the right software, hardware and fitting processes being in place, the work location is crucial to engage with one’s work. On-site employees in the startup reported a positive sentiment toward working in the office environment. Specifically, they valued the physical presence of colleagues as a key aspect of their job satisfaction. In the startup, employees did not talk about any issues with keeping focus and concentration at work, which may be attributed to the relatively small size of the office, which typically houses between 5 and 20 employees daily.

In contrast, office workers from the MNC also expressed appreciation for the social interactions in the office environment, yet identified certain challenges. Audrey, in particular, cited various distractions within the office as impeding her ability to effectively perform her job duties:

²⁰ Notion is a productivity platform that the startup uses for knowledge management and collaboration.

„Let's be honest, the colleagues are a big distracting factor. They distract you because they're chitchatting here and having a coffee here, and then some people look out for having a cigarette together. That's cool for mingling and feeling the connection. However, it's also noisy when you have a presentation in front of the client via telephone or teams or whatever. It's just noisy, the murmuring and the mumbling“ (Pos. 119, MNC/O).

Audrey states that these impediments encourage her to work more from home where she can work in a more focused manner with fewer distractions from co-workers. Especially when she has meetings with clients, she feels the noise levels in the office are a big disturbance to her work.

Meanwhile, the work environment was one of the main benefits for remote employees, as they reported fewer distractions and more autonomy. This was particularly true for Emma and Jake from the MNC who were provided with dedicated office spaces. Emma specifically cited the time saved by not engaging in non-work-related conversations with colleagues as a contributing factor to her productivity, stating “I treat my workspace as a very task-oriented space. I'm not coming here for chit chat. Yes, of course, I love to make fun with my colleagues and so on. But I came here to work“ (MNC/R, Pos. 77) . It should be noted that remote employees working from home may still face distractions, such as those arising from care-taking responsibilities, as was implied by Francis (Pos. 216, SU/R). These could potentially impede full work focus. Despite these potential distractions, remote employees generally reported higher levels of satisfaction with their work environment.

Remote employees cited increased autonomy and a reduced perception of judgment from peers as further perks of the remote working arrangement. Emma mentioned the autonomous structuring of one's work schedule as a significant advantage: “the biggest perk and the main objective is that you are alone [...] nobody is going to judge you that you have got a bad day and you're not making those calls. (Emma, MNC/R, Pos. 77). While remote work can offer increased independence, it is important to note that effective communication and collaboration with peers remain crucial, particularly in hybrid team settings. The impact of these findings on team dynamics will be further examined in the following chapters.

All in all, basic job resources seem to be evenly distributed amongst office and remote employees within the observed hybrid organizations. The fact that most job resources are online within the

B2B SaaS industry helps reduce asymmetries in this regard. Within this study, remote employees reported a slightly better work environment, providing more focus for job tasks. Next, personal and social resources are examined.

Personal Resources

Regarding personal resources associated with well-being and work-life balance, remote employees who had an office job before reported a major improvement since starting to work remotely (Francis, SU/R, Pos. 216; and Emma, MNC/R, Pos. 89). All remote interviewees list the flexibility of working from home as one of the biggest perks. The ability to stay home if the child is sick (Francis, SU/R, Pos.17), spend more time with the family (Emma, MNC/R, Pos.49), go to private appointments (Jake, MNC/R, Pos. 106) or work from wherever (Brian, SU/R, Pos. 122) all allow for a more efficient management of private time and an increase in personal resources. Jake echoed this sentiment highlighting the increased flexibility and freedom remote employees are granted in terms of structuring their day: „it's a nine to five job, but it's not really a nine to five job. [...] So, I'm very free when it comes to what I want, what I need to do. (Jeff (DS), Pos. 106). Despite great flexibility, all interviewees highlight that goals need to be met and these flexible working arrangements are an outcome of reliable job performance and resulting in mutual trust.

Even employees that are usually in the office do highlight the advantage of occasional home office for increasing personal resources by saving commuting time or preparing lunch meals the day before: “I find it a waste of time to sit in the underground [...] and just go from A to B. [...] It's just so stressful to prepare a meal because you have to wake up an hour earlier“ (Audrey, MNC/O, Pos. 112). Consequently, employees with access to the office also reported working from home occasionally. These observations hint at slightly higher personal resources available for remote employees due to increased flexibility and autonomy, although on-site employees make use of flexible working arrangements as well.

Social Resources

Overall, respondents seemed to be content with their basic social resources²¹, especially when talking about collegial and managerial support. They described the social resources in their company as strong and felt they could always ask for support from the team: “If I need some help from my managers or my colleagues, I can easily reach out to them via teams, calls, anything. So this is very well organized, I would say” (Jake, MNC/R, Pos. 30). In addition, employees mostly knew who to reach out to for which problem and found this works seamlessly in their company (Audrey, MNC/R, Pos. 64; Francis, SU/R, Pos.45; Oscar SU/O, Pos. 30; Matt, SU/O, Pos. 28). The only challenge mentioned by remote employees was the availability of colleagues, which will be further discussed in the following section.

4.1.1.2 Hybrid Communication and Collaboration

Communication in hybrid teams mainly takes place online. Remote and on-site employees alike listed digital communication platforms and video conferencing software as their main channels for direct communication. As hybrid colleagues are often physically removed from one another, virtual communication naturally becomes the preferred method. This appears to work well in both companies as employees see no drastic differences in work-related communication between on-site and remote employees:

We have a very communicative company culture, [...] there's a lot happening in Slack channels, where it's going back and forth. So the communication is actually quite good I think. It's more about setting up a proper process [...] but I don't think that has anything to do with being remote or not (Matt, SU/O, Pos. 32).

As communication takes place primarily online, extensive information asymmetries are mitigated.

Interestingly, while the MNC encourages on-site employees to talk to each other in the office, employees in the startup are encouraged to communicate through digital platforms, even when

²¹ Within this paper, social resources are regarded from a strictly work-related perspective, i.e. how strong communication, collaboration and collegial support are perceived. Although the strength of social ties and the relationship to colleagues can be interpreted as social resources as well, these more personal and emotional topics will be discussed in the context of emotional engagement.

sitting next to each other in the office. This virtual communication when in the office is one measure the company implemented to make hybrid collaboration more effective:

Although I didn't fully like it in the beginning, when I went to the office... but the company actually prefers slack messages [...] So before when you asked a question, you would go and ask. So instead of that, the company prefers that you first shoot a Slack message. And if possible, you shoot that Slack message in a group so everybody can see. So there is this mentality of first asking questions online, even if you're in the same office. (Brian, SU/R, Pos. 62).

We try to not have so many personal conversations one on one, where it's hidden in a Slack one on one chat, [...] so anything that's work-related should be out in the open, in a way where anyone else could benefit from it. (Matt, SU/O, Pos. 36)

The company set up multiple Slack channels for different topics. The entire team is encouraged to use these channels so that information is saved and made more accessible to all. The MNC does not have such strict digital communication guidelines in place but works a lot with digital tools, nonetheless. In all interviews, employees rated the quality of information exchanged through these channels as good. However, they also mentioned potential challenges and drawbacks.

The availability of colleagues was described as one bottleneck that can hamper effective hybrid working. In the context of virtual collaboration employees are only reachable when they are online on the specific medium used to communicate. When they are not online (due to other internal or external meetings, running errands, or even a faulty internet connection), there is usually no way of reaching out. This can delay work processes and lead to frustration amongst the team, especially for remote employees who don't have colleagues to reach out to in the same room. Jake listed this as one of the biggest challenges for him while working remotely: "If I have some urgent things, I need to reach out to someone. And if they don't immediately pick up then I lose time. Right? [...] And then, what was so easy to do, still takes half an hour. I think that that's the most challenging thing" (Jake MNC/R, Pos. 110). Jake also states that the threshold to ask smaller clarification questions is much bigger in a remote setting. Tapping someone on the shoulder is much more casual than writing a message (MNC/R, Pos.50). Consequently, smaller uncertainties are often left unresolved.

Next to *when* communication via digital channels occurs, *how* it takes place can also be challenging. Brian from the startup noticed that how communication mediums are used can foster or inhibit communication: “A bunch of people have different ways of communicating. I like to shoot like 100 messages, not structured at all” (Pos. 46). With his direct manager, this type of communication works well, however, there are other colleagues that don’t appreciate this form of communication, ignoring messages or asking for more structured communication. This occasionally leads to frustration on both sides: “So whenever I see that, I’m kind of like.... [sigh] I don’t want to reach out to you again. (Brian, SU/R, Pos. 46). Brian states that as a result of these conflicts, there are indeed people he no longer collaborates with closely. This example highlights the necessity of implementing global communication guidelines for digital tools, as they bear the risk of either increasing communication to exorbitant levels or decreasing communication due to frustration.

Virtual Meetings

In the realm of communication and collaboration, hybrid meetings were heavily discussed in the interviews. The employees of the MNC reported having many hybrid meetings, with multiple colleagues sitting in an office, while others connect virtually. Interestingly, within the small startup, even employees who were in the office together, tended to join virtually: “I guess everyone is just so used to sitting in front of their machine” (Francis, Startup, Pos. 62). Along with the preferred chatting over Slack when in the office, this suggests that communication in the startup is much more digital than in the MNC.

Overall, interview partners found remote and hybrid meetings to work well or seemed neutral toward them: “I don’t see any benefits or any negative points about it. It’s nice when you see people in the office in the same screen, kind of like talking to them“ (Brian, SU/R, Pos. 74). Some challenges in the virtual format, such as connectivity issues were expressed: “Sometimes there is a problem with the connection, you have some noises. Or people just lower their voice for some reason, so that it’s a bit difficult to simply hear them. But other than that, it’s easy. (Audrey, MNC/O, Pos. 48). Having the right hardware and a stable internet connection in place is indispensable in a hybrid setting and something companies must account for.

There was a common agreement that hybrid or remote meetings worked quite well with few participants, but that the larger the meetings get the more difficult an active participation of participants is: “I think the virtual calls or team meetings work quite well, if the call is smaller. If they're getting bigger, 10 or more people, it's sometimes a bit hard to exchange information“ (Simon, MNC/O, Pos. 66). “And yes, If there is a lot of people it always makes it less personal“ (Emma/MNC/R, Pos. 44). Francis mentioned the power of the “mute button”. In her experience, the inhibition threshold to *unmute* yourself in large remote meetings is much higher than in person, leading to a decreased overall participation: “if there are 20 people on the call, then five people will unmute themselves on the call if you don't call names. Everyone is so polite they are afraid to interrupt each other” (Francis, SU/R, Pos. 86-88). This highlights the need for active management of remote meetings, to ensure participation.

The type of collaboration that takes place in hybrid meetings is very distinct. Multiple interviewees discussed the more structured and planned setting of remote meetings implying different advantages and challenges of this setup. Meetings involving brainstorming or creative thinking are perceived to be done less in online settings. Remote employee Brian sometimes feels left out on these types of meetings, as he feels the team on-site is much more involved in creative processes:

“You don't have so many ideation sessions online. Whenever people want to discuss a new project or something, a new exciting idea, they would just meet in the office, and they would talk about it for hours. And whenever you have it online, you don't really do that. I feel like you're a bit more structured; then you prepare more. Yeah, I feel like this type of stuff will be missed out. (Brian, Startup/R, Pos. 62).

This implies a unique challenge in hybrid teams. If everyone were remote, these kinds of meetings would be held online too. Since, at least currently, these kinds of collaborative tasks may seem easier when everyone is in the same room, they are often conducted in the office, excluding remote team members.

On the other hand, since meetings are usually better organized, they are often more effective. There are no personal conversations before and after the meeting. Everyone gets straight to the point and tackles the agenda. Multiple interviewees enjoyed the consequential efficiency gains and having more time to get things done. Jake noted that “it's much more focused what you're doing during these calls. And therefore the whole work is more focused I think” (Jake, MNC/R, Pos. 46). Even

office employees did not see any complication with colleagues being remote due to the effective possibilities of online communication:

“In terms of collaboration, I find it very easy to collaborate borderlessly [...] Because you know... what do you need? You need information from people. Do you need to see them in front of you? Sometimes, yes, that could be helpful. Otherwise, if you already know each other, why not just pick up the phone? And that's pretty easy for me” (Audrey, MNC/O, Pos. 32).

This concept of efficiency seems to be increasing as remote work becomes more widespread.

Interviews with remote employees revealed that meetings with a larger number of participants seem less beneficial to them:

“So we have scheduled meetings [...] but if I need to be honest about that, it doesn't add anything to my work life. Yes, it's great to see people face to face, online face to face, because I truly like everyone from my team. But I'm not more attached to [company] because of those meetings. I'm not more informed about everything we're discovering because of that meeting. And I'm not a bigger expert in the market because of that. I get that they need to be held and organized, but from my personal point of view, they don't bring me much value” (Emma, MNC/R, Pos. 40).

Francis and Brian, the remote employees from the startup, hinted at similar feelings. While companies often schedule bigger “all-hands” meetings to bring everyone up to speed and create a sense of unity, it seems that this type of meeting is not very helpful for remote employees – neither for getting information nor for building a deeper connection to peers or the company, i.e., fostering emotional engagement. Remote employees seem to still feel disconnected from the rest of the company.

An interesting tool to give the virtual space a more personal feel is used by the start-up: a software called gather town acts as a virtual office space. Within this ‘mini metaverse’, employees can walk around as avatars and communicate with colleagues. Once an avatar is directed in the proximity of another, the screens of both parties synch, miming crossing paths in the office. Oscar, an on-site worker at the startup implemented the tool to make remote employees feel more connected. As he enjoys being in the office, he feels the technology does help compensate for the less personal feeling in virtual interactions: “It feels a bit more as if you are working in the same space. And of course, you can be more efficiently connect with each other” (Oscar, SU/R, Pos. 46). The issue of

creating more personal communication in hybrid teams is discussed further in the context of emotional engagement (section 4.2). The following chapter explores the safety appraisal.

4.1.2 Safety Appraisal

Only when employees feel safe, seen, and valued can they bring their full self to work, voice authentic opinions and contribute to the organization in a valuable manner. The safety appraisal looks at whether employees are **enabled** to feel confident and voice their opinions in **a trusting environment**, and whether they understand what their role involves and can fulfill that role with assertion. As literature has identified trust to be a common challenge in remote working relationships, this chapter will focus on this aspect of the safety appraisal. In the interviews, trust was often associated with management²². Therefore, the relationship to management and the concept of reciprocal trust are discussed here as well.

4.1.2.1 Trust in Hybrid Teams

Previous studies have identified a depletion of trust in remote settings (Derven, 2007; Pattnaik and Jena, 2020). The trustful relationship between colleagues, and especially between management has been seen to deteriorate when colleagues were physically removed from one another. Previously, management reportedly often granted their remote employees little autonomy due to the lack of trust and the desire to monitor their work (Morgan²³, 2022). This chapter will dissect how the assessed interview partners were affected by the hybrid working model and whether they experience high levels of trust in their teams.

On-site and remote workers alike regard trust as a cornerstone to collaborating successfully in a team. Asked about the importance of trust in the team, Brian described it as “really very relevant. I want full trust.” (SU/R, Pos. 98). Audrey noted that “trust is definitely very important. Because of course, our managers and also colleagues, they trust me, and I trust the other - that we're a team...that we're not working against each other“ (Audrey, MNC/O, Pos. 80). It seems that

²² Management style affects all levels of engagement: cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement. In the interviews for this study, management style was mentioned particularly often pertaining to the safety appraisal, particularly the trust between managers and employees foster productivity.

²³ A [LinkedIn article](#) by Jacob Morgen, though not entirely scientific, summarized the preconceptions of “outdated leaders” on remote work very well.

especially in remote working arrangements, the mutual trust is even more important. Jake noted that “working remotely is all about trust” (Jake MNC/R, Pos. 74). All employees reported experiencing high levels of trust in their organization.

The perceived sources of high trust levels in these hybrid teams are diverse. Many believe that trust is largely formed through good communication, collaboration and results that prove that the team can work together effectively (Jake, MNR/R, Pos. 74; Brian SU/R, Pos. 106). An empowering company culture also supported the creation of a trustful environment. Office employee Oscar believes that trust is “completely independent, be it remote or in person” (SU/O, Pos. 70). He believes that high levels of trust are the outcome of regular and personalized feedback, clear job descriptions, expectation settings, and a well-thought-out design of the working relationship (Oscar, SU/O, Pos. 70) – in other words, the outcome of a high safety appraisal. The fact that all employees, regardless of their location, felt very high levels of trust, supports Oscar’s hypothesis.

Some employees highlighted the impact of management on the establishment of trust in a company. Matt believes that an important way to foster trust in remote and hybrid settings is by “leading by example [...] my boss is in the office most of the time, but one of the other founders is, for example, working from Hamburg. He’s still obviously 100%, more than 100%, participating in everything and engaging and doing everything he can to move the company forward. So I think leading by example is one thing” (Matt, SU/O, Pos. 64). Next to embodying the values of the company, management also possesses the ability to empower, motivate, and engage employees. The topic of management was discussed in nearly all interviews without being explicitly prompted. Thus, the next section will dissect how management can foster trust in hybrid teams.

4.2.2.2 Management

Management style and relationship with managers was often discussed throughout the interviews. Interviewees talked about management styles without being explicitly prompted to do so. All interview partners were very satisfied with their direct managers and their style of management. The high levels of trust and the resulting autonomy and support that managers provide were underscored by multiple interview partners, remote and on-site alike: “I come from a background

where I had my own startup, I used to work by myself, put in all my creativity, and not be micromanaged. And here with this job, I still have a lot of freedom. I'm not my own boss, but I can do what I want, as long as the results are given.” (Jake, MNC/R, POS:). Especially for employees who are very independent by nature or have worked on their own in the past, this type of enablement appears to be valuable.

Multiple employees, both on-site and remote, underscored the impact of management style and mentioned the importance of not being micromanaged:

“This is not a micromanaging company. So it does trust their employees to do their work and to contribute to the company's success in a way that's meaningful. It does trust the people to work fully remote or to, just like me today, sit here in my kitchen and take a day where I am at home and not in the office“ (Matt, SU/O, Pos. 60).

“In Polish, we have the statement that the fish gets unhealthy from the head. So it means that when your boss is stupid, then the entire team will not perform well. So [manager] is a very mature and polite manager, he sees your potential and guides you. He's not like this micromanagement type of guy. And saying that, we have got a very partnership relationship“ (Emma, MNC/R, Pos. 57).

These statements highlight the importance of trust and autonomy for all employees, especially those working remotely. During the interviews, all participants expressed feeling a high level of trust from management to perform their work effectively and acknowledged that not all organizations provide the same level of trust and autonomy to their workers.

Francis reported experiences with past employers where employees were not trusted to do their jobs when they were not physically in the office:

“In my previous company, that was a completely different approach. [...] after we moved to this remote setup, you could feel that they [the managers] really wanted you back in the office. They didn't know how to do it. When I was leaving the company, it was still a bit of a COVID situation happening, so they couldn't make you come. But there were so many attempts to make you come back. [...] Here I never felt that someone wants to make sure I'm doing my work or check what exactly I'm doing. That the job is done, that's what matters“ (Francis, SU/R, Pos. 108).

Francis found her current work environment and management to be much more trusting than her previous one. She further recounted that her husband's company was implementing a policy of mandatory return to the office, which she surmised would likely result in a significant loss of personnel from the company's development teams: “they're trying to make them come back [...] to the office. [...] And that's the reason why I think half of their dev teams²⁴ will be leaving them. They really, really want full remote. They just want their time, their flexibility and they don't want this feeling of someone overseeing you“ (Pos. 212). These observations underscore the imperative for management to adapt to evolving employee expectations, particularly with regards to trust, autonomy, and flexibility. Without addressing these key values, companies risk losing valuable talent to competitors who better align with the evolving preferences of their workforce.

Comparing how remote and on-site employees talked about their managers, it seems like managers play an even more vital role for remote employees. Emma hints at very high attachment with her manager: “if [manager] was different - if I didn't like him, if I didn't respect him - working remotely it would to be one big pain [...]. But he trusts me, he knows what I'm doing. So this is [...] a partnership relation. (Emma, MNC/R, Pos. 44). Compared to their relationship with the rest of the team, the relationship of remote employees toward their managers seems stronger. When talking about colleagues, remote employees mentioned their managers overproportioned without explicit cues, while office employees included other team members more often. This comes as no surprise as direct managers of remote employees are the one person they meet with regularly and who (ideally) support and invest in their career growth.

In summary, high levels of trust between colleagues can be fostered regardless of location. Having mutually high trust levels of remote and on-site team members in hybrid teams is feasible. The importance of the relationship between remote employees and their managers seems to be higher than on-site employees. As they are usually their main contact person with the company, the social ties toward managers heavily impact how remote workers feel toward their organization. In the next chapter, the importance of social ties and how these are manifested in hybrid teams will be further discussed within the realm of emotional engagement.

²⁴ Dev team: developer team

4.2 Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement examines how dedicated, committed, and loyal employees are toward their organization, whether they feel valued at work, and how high their sense of identification with the company is. While high cognitive engagement enables employees to conduct their work effectively, high emotional engagement also contributes to retaining talent in a company. In the context of emotional engagement, previous studies have seen remote work to weaken social ties and affective organizational commitment (AOC) in organizations. (Pattnaik and Jena, 2020; Yang et al., 2022). Thus, this chapter examines expectation 2 by dissecting whether remote employees do indeed have lower emotional engagement than their on-site colleagues.

The first section of this chapter discusses the relationships between colleagues and the resulting strength of social ties, as these impact the emotional bond and commitment toward an employer. The second chapter takes a closer look at the affective organizational commitment and indicators of the valuation appraisal like pride, dedication, and identification, which ultimately lead to affective organizational commitment.

4.2.1 Social Ties

The relationship and sense of connection with colleagues is an important indicator of emotional engagement. Usually, when employees feel connected to their colleagues, they are more likely to experience a greater emotional connection toward the company as well (Nguyen et al., 2020; Pattnaik and Jena, 2020). As studies have routinely seen social ties weaken in remote contexts, this is a particularly interesting indicator to study in hybrid teams where some employees see each other daily, while others barely ever see their colleagues. Some differences between remote and office workers concerning social resources were already discussed in the previous chapter, such as the availability of colleagues and management. The differences between these two groups of employees become even more evident when regarding the relationship to colleagues.

The negative effect of physical distance on social ties was indeed observed throughout the interviews. Remote and office workers both reported feeling less connected to their colleagues when being physically removed from one another.

”Of course, I feel more connected with them when I see them [my colleagues] physically. I'm a human being, they are human beings and we need the physical exchange. We're not cut off, you know, here [gesture of being cut off from the chest down]. (Audrey, MNC/O, Pos. 60)

“I think the only challenge is that basically, I did not see people personally. And that's always a bit hard to get to know each other when you just have these regular calls and you don't run into each other in the office, don't see the faces. And I think at some point, it was like I don't even know all the names of the people that work in this company. And we're not that big. [...] We simply don't interact. (Francis, SU/R, Pos. 45).

These statements highlight the lack of connection to peers that solely virtual collaboration can create.

A common sensation among remote workers was that meeting colleagues in person helped integrate them into the team and build meaningful connections.

“Well, the good thing was, when I started it was summer, so we were allowed to travel. And so I was in the company about one month and I was already in [German HQ city] and met everyone. So this this helped also to integrate [...] the bonding is much much bigger when you actually meet and not only work remote (Jake, MNC/R, Pos. 54).

Seeing that all employees felt an increase in social ties when seeing colleagues physically and deemed them important for their future work performance, it seems that virtual interactions still cannot compete with physical interaction. Even elaborated virtual onboarding processes and online team events cannot seem to bridge the physical distance.

While, as discussed in the previous chapter, remote employees felt little to no impairment in cognitive engagement, most do miss the office for social reasons (comp. Brian, SU/R, Pos. 30;):

“I don't miss it [the office] for work purposes, to be honest. But I miss it for [...] meeting the team. And mostly coffee breaks and lunch, you know, this kind of stuff. So I don't think that the productivity of the team, at least in the teams where I worked, was affected by not being in the same room. [...] But there's all these little things that go together with being in the office besides work“ (Francis, SU/R, Pos. 37).

There was no remote employee who did not miss the social events and casual office encounters that being in the same space with colleagues provides.

The difficulty in hybrid teams is that an office culture does exist, but remote employees are not part of that segment of the company culture. Consequently, some remote employees reported feeling left when on-site colleagues spend time together:

“Yeah, [I feel left out sometimes]. I mean, they don't share it that much. But when they do then yes. Yeah, totally. And I guess that's why this summer get-together felt so great, like really good, because you're like, “Oh, my God, that's exactly how I imagined this can be”, or “Oh, wow, that's a completely different person” (Francis, SU/R, Pos. 84).

“You go there. And if everyone else is together, and you meet as the outsider, it will take a little bit again, and then you're in there again“ (Jake, MNC/R, Pos. 54).

This observation suggests that social ties between office workers are much stronger than those with remote employees, potentially leading to relationship asymmetries.

Teams are looking for ways to feel more connected to each other in hybrid settings. As mentioned earlier, Oscar from the startup implemented the tool gather town, to make remote employees feel more connected to the team and simultaneously also feel closer to remote colleagues himself.

„I use it [gather town] really for social reasons. Because one of our new entrants, she's from Rotterdam, and she is also a very extroverted person. So I think, for her, I made this decision to onboard her as best as possible. She shouldn't be sitting there all day alone in her room and translating slides or something. So she should feel like an interactive workplace. So that's why we work there a lot“ (Oscar, SU/O, Pos. 50).

Oscar feels that the tool has indeed helped to feel more connected, but it is still far from replacing a physical office entirely (Pos. 53). Such initiatives exhibit how important the “office feel” and the resulting connection to colleagues is to some employees.

Fostering social ties in a hybrid team can be challenging, as certain team-building activities cannot be transferred to the virtual space. Brian commented on this issue, feeling that the HR department at times seems to forget about integrating remote employees in planned events. He believes that as human resources in their organization are mostly in the office, they plan events out of a very comfortable position without putting themselves in the shoes of remote employees:

“A lot of these initiatives and thoughts of people proposing ideas, they're not coming from a fully remote ideation and whatnot, but they're coming from this more comfortable place. [...] So that for me like this whole mentality of being fully remote or being hybrid and proposing

ideas to remote workers doesn't work that well. I would say you need somebody who is fully remote and trying to then propose something for socialization, teamwork, and all of that“ (Brian, SU/R Pos. 58).

This issue underlines the difficulties of promoting social ties in hybrid teams. While organizing events for on-site employees is important for increasing office social ties, remote team members may feel left out. Brian proposes a fully remote HR colleague to promote more inclusive events and initiatives.

The companies discussed seem to have realized this and are experimenting with different initiatives intended to foster closer relationships amongst colleagues. These included virtual coffee breaks, virtual after-work events, online lunches, or virtual game nights (Francis, SU/R, Pos.96;). While these did work well for some employees, especially in times of COVID lockdowns where there was little else to do after work, interviewees believed that they could not compete with meeting teammates physically in terms of building a relationship (Francis, SU/R, Pos. 75). Some mentioned that it is possible to build a relationship virtually (Francis, SU/R, Pos. X). However, it takes much more time and dedicated one-on-one meetings, while ties build more easily and naturally in a physical setting.

4.2.2 Affective Organizational Commitment

Affective organizational commitment (AOC) is the result of a high valuation appraisal and constitutes an important part of emotional engagement. It includes feelings like identification with and attachment to an organization. Employees with high AOC are more likely to stay at their company and are more dedicated and motivated at their jobs. Past studies have been ambiguous concerning the effect of remote and hybrid work on AOC. Many studies have seen the identification of remote workers deteriorate due to physical distance and being removed from the company culture (Cooper and Kurland, 2002; Nguyen et al., 2020; Pattnaik and Jena, 2020; Yang et al., 201). Conversely, Szyszko's study exhibited no negative impact of remote work on AOC (2021).

Within this study, remote employees were seen to have significantly lower levels of AOC than their on-site counterparts. Out of the remote respondents, Jake was the only employee who stated

that he identifies with the company (MNC/R, Pos. 94). All others made clear that they did not feel a great amount of attachment and identification with the company. Remote employee Emma saw remote working to be the main factor for her feeling less identification and commitment toward her company: “I do believe that working remotely detaches you from the company. And I think that overall when people are working remotely from home, especially the younger generation, they are not so attached to the organization“ (Emma, MNC/R, Pos. 45). She thinks that remote working can be a great perk for employees, but doesn’t bring many benefits to organizations, as it’s harder to bond with colleagues making it easier to change employers (Pos. 45).

Remote employee Brian also stated not feeling a deep sense of identification and connection with the company: “I don’t have an emotional attachment to the people or to the company that much, although both the purpose and the way of work and the people are great” (Brian, SU/R, Pos. 110). Francis also reported difficulties with saying “we” when talking about the firm, albeit stating that this might still develop with more time in the company (Francis, SU/R, Pos. 149). Talking about the company with “it”, “them” or “they” conveys a sense of distance to one’s employer and a lack of identification thereto.

In contrast, office employees indicated much higher levels of identification. Office employee Oscar feels a strong sense of identification with the company; “maybe even too much” as he put it (SU/O, Pos. 94). Audrey (MNC/O, Pos. 104) and Simon (Pos. 110) felt that they do identify with their organization as well. Merely office employee Matt reported feeling little identification with his company, but believes it is a personality trait of his: “I mean, I don't think I have ever been somebody who strongly identifies with a company [...] but I do identify with the people and with the overall like goal that we have” (Matt, SU/O, Pos. 88).

When asked how difficult it would be for employees to leave their firm, a similar tendency of remote and on-site workers could be seen. Despite nobody explicitly wanting to leave their firm, on-site workers seemed to have a stronger bond with their organization. Simon (MNC/O, Pos. 122), Audrey (MNC/O, Pos.104), and Oscar (SU/O, Pos. 98) stated that it would be difficult for them to leave their company, stating they would miss the product and their colleagues especially.

Only Matt, who already commented that he usually doesn't build up a strong sense of identification with a company would have little difficulty leaving (SU/O, Pos. 92).

The remote employees seemed less emotional about their employer and tended to answer more neutrally. Nobody felt the urge to leave either, however, they seemed much more rational about the decision. Francis said she will probably not stay in the organization forever but sees no reason for leaving at the moment (SU/R, Pos. 152). Jeff also felt a sense of identification to the organization and had no intention of leaving (MNC/R, Pos. 94). Remote employee Brian even stated that it would be "very easy" (POS) for him to change job, underscoring the ease of disconnecting emotionally from afar. Talking about the factors that are keeping them in the organization, remote employee talked less about their colleagues and more about their personal growth, learning curve, empowerment, and personal flexibility as well as the entire company culture.

Remote employee Emma talked in detail about her feelings of commitment, or rather the lack thereof, with her organization. When asked whether she has a strong sense of connection toward her organization, she responded:

"To the higher organization - No. You know if I need to go extra mile for my team and for my boss, I will do that. For [UK city]'s team, no. For [UK city]'s boss - Yes, because I should. [...] But my biggest commitment, loyalty, trust, emotions are towards [manager]. Period, that's all." (Emma, MNC/R, Pos. 73).

She highlights the strong sense of commitment toward her manager repeatedly while making clear that she does not identify with the overall organization: "my main goal is to secure [manager's] business. This is my main objective for the business. Because when I'm doing that, he's going to secure my business" (Emma, MNC/R, Pos. 44). This highlights the importance of direct managers for remote employees once again. It also shows that the commitment of Emma is less toward the entire organization, but more coupled to individuals.

Emma also makes clear that her priorities lie with her family, and she will not fly to the headquarters just to meet colleagues occasionally:

"I'm 35, I've got a husband and a kid. And it's great to meet my friends from the office. But from my personal point of view, where my business is here, and when I need to say

goodbye to my kids for a few days, only for... you know... networking inside the organization... It's amazing, but I need to think about priorities“ (Emma, MNC/R, Pos. 12).

She talks about her priorities multiple times and makes clear that these lie with her family “because I’m so replaceable here at [company] and in every organization. But the only place where I’m irreplaceable is my home“ (Emma, MNC/R, Pos. 89). These statements exhibit the importance of ones’ personal situation when looking at employee engagement and suggest that it may indeed be easier for remote employees to detach emotionally from their firm.

Brian made an interesting statement, saying that in his opinion, being a remote employee in a company is more neutral: “whenever it's remote, it can't be *really* bad. I feel like, companies where you're physically in there can be much worse on multiple scales. Remote is always much more neutral. (Brian, SU/R, Pos. 110). This implies that it may be much easier for employees to disconnect emotionally from an employer when they are physically removed. Overall, it can be said that within this study office employees seem to have a greater identification with and connection toward their company than remote employees.

5. Interpretation

Throughout the interpretation of study results it is vital to keep in mind the multi-faceted nature of employee engagement. A slew of factors next to the location will impact employee engagement: local culture, company culture, job description, personality traits, age, gender, or family situation are just a few. The casual inference of remote and on-site work needs to be further examined. Nevertheless, some striking differences between the two employee groups have become evident in this study which will be exhibited in the following interpretation of results.

5.1 Cognitive Engagement

As past research has illustrated, the availability of resources strongly moderates the engagement in all teams, but in hybrid teams especially (Bakker et al., 2005; Conway, 2016). Within this study, remote and on-site employees both had an overall positive cognitive work experience in their hybrid setting. It is important to note that both companies were already adapted to hybrid work to

some extent and may have facilitated more sophisticated hybrid work arrangements than the average software company.

5.1.1 Availability Appraisal

Job Resources

As both software companies regarded in this study were not new to hybrid work, they had already set up fitting tools and processes to facilitate hybridity. These mostly consisted of different communication, collaboration, and knowledge management software. It was precisely these resources that interview participants talked about most in the context of their job. It comes as no surprise that these software tools portrayed one of the most essential job resources for hybrid team members. As collaboration happens virtually, all team members use the same tools to work and feel they are well set up to fulfill their job demands. Consequently, no apparent difference in the perceived availability of job resources between remote and on-site employees could be seen in this study. The congruence in job resources can lead to streamlined communication and collaboration within a team, making work overall more effective. The number of tools used and the importance attributed to them, highlight the growing importance of choosing and implementing adequate software solutions in hybrid teams.

Information Exchange

Contrary to previous studies, no relevant information asymmetries between remote and on-site workers could be observed within this study. This can be attributed to adequate knowledge management software within both firms as well as fitting process governance in these areas. Employees of both companies revealed that management strongly urges everyone to store and share information in cloud systems. By using cloud platforms to store knowledge, information asymmetries can be mitigated as documents are always up to date and available to the entire team. The only downside of this strategy consisted of occasional information overflow or difficulties finding certain information in the vast amounts of data. These findings highlight the need for not only for sophisticated knowledge management systems but also for adequate guidelines and processes, allowing employees to navigate and find specific information easily and store vital knowledge. The findings in this paper provide evidence that information asymmetries can be mitigated in hybrid teams.

Work environment

The final job resource that was discussed repeatedly throughout the interviews was the work environment. While there seemed to be no significant differences of basic job resources (i.e., software and hardware) and access to information between the two employee groups, the effectiveness of the work environment did differ. All remote employees surveyed in this study reported increased levels of productivity when working from home. Even office employees who work from home occasionally shared this sentiment, stating that high noise levels in the office and increased small talk with colleagues occasionally leads to overproportionate distractions.

In terms of focus and productivity, remote workers seem to have a slight advantage. Factors such as reduced pressure from peers, increased autonomy in structuring one's daily schedule, and decreased distractions were identified as contributing to this perception. Furthermore, employees who were provided with dedicated remote office spaces reported particularly high levels of satisfaction with their work arrangements. It is important to note that individual living circumstances may play a role in determining the overall efficiency of working from home. Nonetheless, these findings raise the question of whether designated office spaces for individual use could enhance the appeal of working in an office setting and highlight the importance of an adequate office environment to facilitate different types of work.

The reported high levels of flexibility, autonomy, and work-life balance among on-site and remote employees suggest that hybrid teams may experience higher overall levels of cognitive engagement than traditional on-site teams. Remote employees even seemed to have slightly greater job and personal resources than their on-site colleagues. In terms of personal resources, remote workers highlighted time saved in commuting, getting ready in the morning, or preparing meals, leaving more time for leisure, friends, and family. Looking at job resources, employees felt they had fewer distractions in their remote workspaces and could get work done more effectively. It is important to note that these findings cannot be generalized to all remote workers, as some may have less suitable work environments at home. It does, however, highlight the need for companies to provide a suitable environment for all types of work in order to improve cognitive engagement in the company.

The job resources employees in software companies require differ from those in other industries. As tech products are digital, more online work is done to begin with. The additional factor of hybridity means that most communication and collaboration also take place virtually. Thus, online tools constitute vital job resources for employees in software firms. Companies in other industries that have not yet integrated technological tools to the same extent, may have even greater challenges in adapting to hybrid working models.

Personal and Social Resources

The high level of personal resources reported by remote employees was mainly due to high levels of autonomy and flexibility. Being given the possibility to work from anywhere and organize one's schedule to accommodate chores, leisure, friends, and family, improved the participant's work-life balance and the personal resources available. Nevertheless, on-site workers enjoyed this flexibility as well. As in well-functioning hybrid teams, all necessary resources are available to work outside the office, on-site workers also make use of this flexibility. Thus, personal resources for the on-site employee group in this study did not differ much. Without the flexibility of occasionally working from home and flexible working hours, office employees who are bound to come to the office may report lower levels of personal resources. Therefore, the assumption can be made, that personal resources are more tightly linked to flexibility of working arrangements, than to location alone.

Not only remote employees profit from the flexibility of working from different locations at the hours that suit their schedule best. As collaboration in hybrid teams is already set up to accommodate the needs of remote workers, office workers are usually granted flexibility as well and don't need to come to the office daily. The new ways of collaboration and communicating also facilitate asynchronous communication, giving more flexibility to all employees.

Similarly, the amount of social resources at work did not differ much between both studied employee groups. Both employee groups reported feeling strong support from colleagues, suggesting that a supportive and empowering company culture can be created in hybrid teams. While social resources at work do not exhibit striking differences between on- and offsite employees, there is a divergence in social ties that tie into emotional engagement.

All in all, slight differences in social and personal resources could be observed between on-site and remote colleagues, with a slight advantage toward remote employees. However, the work model of well-functioning hybrid teams grants both remote and office workers autonomy and flexibility which heavily impacts personal resources. The social resources available also highly depend on the unique personalities within a company, as well as the overall company culture. Thus, the study outcomes suggest that it is possible to create even levels of resource availability throughout hybrid teams.

5.1.1.2 Hybrid Communication and Collaboration

Digital Communication

The shift toward an increasingly virtual work setting is also apparent in hybrid communication and collaboration. Communication primarily takes place online. Interestingly, employees from the startup are encouraged communicate virtually, even when sitting in the office next to one another for the sake of information symmetry. The increasing use of digital communication pathways even in the office setting is an interesting development inherent to hybrid teams. The awareness over the importance of creating information symmetries and sharing knowledge across an organization seems to have increased in the hybrid setting, as the inability to do so leads to a decrease in productivity.

While overall online communication seems to work well in the teams studied, two challenges did stand out. Firstly, the availability of colleagues was a hindrance to many employees, especially those working remotely. Having to wait for a response if somebody is not available and not having the ability to stop by their desk, can delay work progress. In a flexible work setting in which employees can choose when they work, this issue is amplified. Companies may need to implement core working hours and/or make sure that the availability to key stakeholders is regulated and communicated to mitigate this risk.

Secondly, the quality and quantity of information amongst colleagues can portray a challenge as well. The rapid evolution of digital communication means that employees may have different

approaches to using communication media. While some tend to overcommunicate, others may under-communicate. The convenience of sending short messages can lead to frequent distractions for colleagues and may invite some to write first and structure their thoughts afterward, robbing colleagues of their time. Others may regard a seemingly banal question as unworthy of a dedicated message, leaving uncertainties unresolved. Implementing dedicated training and guidelines on digital communication within the organization may help to mitigate these issues and improve communication among team members.

Nonetheless, virtual communication and collaboration worked well overall for the teams regarded in this study. As more communication and collaboration has shifted to the virtual space, asynchronous work is promoted. Having important documents in a cloud environment allows employees to work on tasks simultaneously while always keeping the team up to date. Some respondents mentioned that chatting online despite being in the same room did need time to get accustomed to. However, all employees understood the necessity of these measures as they contribute to higher efficiency in a hybrid team. These outcomes exhibit that hybrid teams do need to foster a shift in communication culture toward more virtual and (in this context) inclusive platforms.

Virtual Meetings

Larger meetings also portrayed an interesting topic in this study. While smaller virtual meetings tended to work very well, many participants highlighted the missing involvement of all participants in larger meetings. Interview participants observed that the inhibition threshold to unmute oneself in larger meetings can be much higher than participating in live meetings, especially for remote employees who may have weaker personal connections to colleagues. There can be numerous reasons for this lack of participation, especially from remote employees, such as nervousness, a lack of interest, or fleeting engagement. To avoid having to speculate over the reasons for disengagement in meetings, regular conversations with remote employees as well as more inclusive meeting formats should be fostered by organizations.

One remote employee, for example, stated that larger team meetings have absolutely no value to her. She does not feel better informed, nor does she feel like she is creating a larger bond with colleagues or the organization as a whole. She perceived large team meetings more as an

unnecessary obligation. These two points highlight the importance of holding well-thought-out group meetings and involving all necessary parties in the calls. Some companies like Shopify have already begun cutting all group meetings due to similar observations (McGregor, 2023). It is questionable whether a radical cut of all group meetings truly is the solution, or whether this may lead to even more detachment. However, it does highlight the importance of creating more meaningful and engaging touchpoints amongst colleagues in hybrid teams.

In general, virtual meetings were described as more efficient than in-person meetings as they were more structured. Setting a clear agenda in meetings with a dedicated moderator, discussion points, and deriving next steps, has become best practice in most companies. In virtual meetings, it has become apparent that a clear structure is even more important to guarantee meeting effectiveness. However, this type of meeting prohibits more spontaneous and explorative sessions.

The risk of excluding certain employees from specific types of meetings is perilous. One remote employee felt that he was not included in the more creative ideation sessions. These are often still perceived to be easier to conduct in a physical location with everybody in the room. He feels these meetings are often scheduled spontaneously with only the on-site employees. This bears the risk of misalignment, exclusion, and ultimately disengagement of remote team members. It is essential for companies to be aware of this location bias and prevent it from the beginning. In hybrid teams, all relevant stakeholders should be invited to designated meetings, regardless of location. This shift in mentality may take a while to internalize, however, without it a truly hybrid work culture will not be feasible.

5.1.2 Safety Appraisal

In the context of the safety appraisal, trust was a key focus of this study, as previous research showed a deterioration of trust in remote teams. These observations could not be supported in this paper, as all interview participants reported high levels of trust throughout the entire organization. Remote and on-site employees alike attributed great importance to trust for their engagement levels and believed that without feeling trusted by their organization, colleagues, and particularly management, they would not be as productive and satisfied in their workplace.

Employees saw reasons for the high degrees of trust in their organization as a result of an empowering company culture, palpable in high levels of autonomy. Management played a vital role in the establishment of a trusting environment. Not only did the management in the companies dissected give their employees trust, but they also led by example, fostering an environment of reciprocal trust. Albeit not exhibiting lower levels of trust, it did seem that trusting and empowering management was even more essential for remote workers in hybrid teams than for on-site colleagues.

Management was discussed over-proportionally by remote employees in the context of trust. All talked about the importance of their managers in making their work successful. They believed that mutual trust and the absence of micromanagement was a key factor for their productivity. Many compared their current work situation with past jobs, stating that the trust that is placed in them makes for a much more positive and effective work environment. They described past experiences with more “traditional” management styles in which in-person attendance was mandatory and micromanagement a given, as incompatible with the hybrid framework. Most said they would no longer work for an organization with these types of management.

These observations concur with past research that calls for more trusting, enabling, and empathetic leadership styles in remote and hybrid frameworks and underscore the importance of managers adapting to new work settings and acquiring management styles. It is crucial for companies to recognize the need for these new managerial capabilities and hire and train their leadership team accordingly. Managers seem to have an even greater importance for remote employees, as on-site employees usually have a set of other strong organizational ties with colleagues that they can fall back on if there are difficulties with their management.

In this study, remote employees tended to talk more about their managers than their colleagues and seemed to have a stronger bond with them. However, this cannot be interpreted as a general truth as many different factors are at play. For employees in jobs that are less dependent on collaboration and teamwork (i.e., sales), managers will automatically be more important than other

colleagues, as not much other collaboration or meeting time is available with peers. Still, the observation escalates the importance of management in hybrid teams.

Summary

Based on the findings in this study, expectation 1 cannot be dismissed. Despite only minor differences, the interviewed remote employees seemed to have slightly lower cognitive engagement than their on-site counterparts. Differences in the availability of resources between on-site and off-site employees – remote employees had marginally higher personal resources, while office workers had slightly higher social resources. No significant differences in job resources could be seen between the two groups. Remote employees seemed to be at a slim disadvantage concerning collaboration, as they sometimes were excluded from more collaborative sessions. All in all, cognitive engagement was relatively high for all study participants.

5.2 Emotional Engagement

5.2.1 Social Ties

The results of this study indicate weaker social ties of remote employees with colleagues and the company, while office workers tended to have stronger social ties. These findings align with prior research on remote and hybrid teams (i.e., Cisco Global Hybrid Work Study 2022; Pattnaik and Jena, 2020). All interviewees believed that physical interaction remains a vital element of building strong relationships with people. Thus, office employees mostly felt closer to on-site colleagues, while remote employees often lacked a sense of connection and belonging with the team.

While reporting no major disadvantages for productivity and efficiency as a remote employee, interview partners did state that the social aspect of work is much more challenging. Almost all remote respondents felt they were sometimes missing out on physical company events and missed social interactions like coffee breaks or after-work drinks with colleagues. Having physical team gatherings, especially when starting a new job at a company, was very important to remote employees. All study participants reported experiencing a boost in engagement and an increased sense of connection after meeting their colleagues in person. This supports the assumption that organizing regular in-person team events is essential to fostering social ties in hybrid teams.

Companies have begun to understand the importance of forming social ties even when physically dispersed and have tried implementing virtual alternatives for team-building activities. These include virtual coffee breaks, lunch chats, after-work events, or virtual game nights. While these worked well during lockdowns where there were few other possibilities for social engagements, they are less effective in post-lockdown times. Not only do on-site employees prefer spending their leisure time offline, but remote employees also prefer engaging with people face to face when outside of work, highlighting the importance of creating social ties during office hours.

Solutions like gather town, which virtually simulate the office space, portray a potential tool to build stronger team relationships at work. They also highlight the longing for a centralized space for all colleagues to meet. Interestingly, within the organization that used gather town, especially office employees talked about the importance of this tool. Remote colleagues did not mention it, indicating that office employees may have a larger desire to get everybody together than remote colleagues. This suggests that personality traits may be decisive for whether remote working suits a person, or whether they prefer the office, or a mix of both.

The challenge in hybrid teams consists of the at times vastly different social experiences for on-site and remote colleagues. As on-site colleagues can meet personally, they can form stronger social bonds which can potentially lead to relationship asymmetries and company internal siloes. This is something hybrid teams must be aware of and try to avoid. It can be a balancing act to create the right mix between on-site activities to foster a strong company culture in the office while still integrating all remote employees at all possible occasions. Regular physical team gatherings or flying in remote employees for bigger company meetings can help strengthen the relationship between all colleagues. These sporadic events will not be able to bridge the gap entirely. Thus, virtual solutions like gather town, virtual one-on-one meetings between physically removed colleagues, or virtual team events may contribute to engaging remote employees as well.

What has also become clear in the interviews is that companies are actively trying to bridge the gaps between physically removed colleagues. It is apparent that companies still haven't found the perfect way to do so and are still looking for ways to strengthen social ties. Organizations have

experimented with virtual lunches, events, and new solutions blending the physical and digital world, such as gather town. However, before the backdrop of these study results, these initiatives still cannot substitute physical interactions.

5.2.2 Affective Organizational Commitment

Within this empirical study, the differences between both employee groups were greatest regarding their affective organizational commitment. While three out of four office employees had strong feelings of connection and identification with the company, three out of four remote employees did not. The specific root causes for these differences need to be assessed further in future academic studies, however, this study suggests that it is primarily the weaker social ties that cause lower AOC for remote employees. This underscores the challenge of binding remote employees to a company in a hybrid setting.

Promoting high levels of AOC in hybrid teams may be more difficult than in entirely remote teams, due to the greater asymmetries between the two employee groups. While office colleagues may have much stronger social bonds, remote employees are at risk of feeling left out as they are at a disadvantage in creating similarly strong bonds. While creating strong social ties with colleagues happens during working hours for office colleagues, remote employees usually need to invest much more time outside of the regular working hours to form social ties. While some remote employees consciously invest in forming these bonds with added time investments, for others this is difficult to do considering other commitments and relationships with family and friends.

Hybrid companies need to be aware of and address these asymmetries and potential incongruent creation of social ties within their team. As higher rates of emotional engagement bind employees to their company, it is an aspect firms should focus on if they want to retain top talent. While it was a common practice for tech startups to attract and retain talents with offerings like foosball tables, regular team barbeques and social events for the past years, this value proposition needs to change in more remote and hybrid settings. Interviews revealed that it is less the social aspect of work that keeps remote employees within in company. Instead, having a valuable company vision and mission, creating a productive and supportive work environment, granting employees

autonomy and flexibility, as well as providing a steep learning curve seem to be more important for employees. These factors have always been relevant in work settings, however, their importance has increased as shortcomings in these areas cannot be amended with team activities for remote employees.

6. Summary

The results of this study partially concur with the theory elaborated in chapter 2.5. Emotional engagement levels of remote employees are significantly lower than those of respective office colleagues, mainly due to weaker social ties resulting in lower affective organizational commitment. The results on differing cognitive engagement levels are not as conclusive, suggesting that evenly high levels of engagement can indeed be established in hybrid organizations. The foundations can be set with fitting tools, and processes, streamlining communication and collaboration, and providing employees with all necessary resources to conduct their work effectively. Thus, expectation 1 is not supported, while expectation 2 cannot be dismissed.

6.1 Cognitive Engagement

Summarizing the findings regarding the availability appraisal, some differences between remote and on-site employees could be observed in this study. Access to basic job resources seems to be homogeneous. Information and knowledge are spread evenly across the studied organizations. Merely the work environment appears to be slightly advantageous for remote employees. Social resources such as support from colleagues and managers are also in place for all employees, despite the availability of colleagues being a bottleneck for some remote colleagues. Personal resources displayed the greatest differentiator, with remote employees having more personal resources available due to increased autonomy and flexibility.

The study results suggest that the hybrid work setup does indeed impact the cognitive engagement of employees. However, the potential negative effects can be largely mitigated by companies themselves, by implementing fitting tools and processes. Asynchronous communication and collaboration can be facilitated with fitting software and procedures, increasing overall cognitive engagement as well as efficiency in teams. Therefore, expectation 1 cannot be supported.

A depletion of cognitive engagement for remote employees can be largely mitigated by implementing suitable tools and processes.

An interesting trend that could be observed in this study was the increase in online messaging, even when employees were in the same office. Digital communication has achieved a new significance for white-collar professionals, becoming omnipresent in much of business communication. Companies should be aware of this paradigm shift, implementing technology thoughtfully and training teams on the correct use of these platforms.

Regarding the safety appraisal, no striking differences could be observed. Remote and on-site workers both felt high levels of trust within their organization. This was attributed mainly to a supportive company culture and the right management style. Managers of interviewed employees were described as encouraging, enabling, and authentic, granting their teams high levels of autonomy and flexibility. They were able to manage both on-site and remote employees in an equally empowering and engaging manner, creating a sense of mutual trust. A trusting environment increases the cognitive engagement of employees and especially important to engaging remote employees. The study results highlight the importance of the right management style to foster a trustful and empowering environment, especially for remote employees. Having weaker social ties in the company, a positive relationship with one's manager is even more impactful for employees who do not have access to the office.

This paper assumed that cognitive engagement is lower for remote employees compared to their on-site colleagues. Based on the finding, expectation 1 cannot be supported. If companies have the necessary infrastructure and procedures in place, as well as a strong and empowering company culture, then cognitive engagement is not necessarily lower for remote employees in hybrid teams. The more experience companies gather with hybrid working models and the more innovative soft- and hardware tools come on the market, the better companies can adapt and facilitate cognitive engagement, as we are already seeing today. The two studied firms in this paper, already managed to establish an effective infrastructure to enable remote and hybrid collaboration, mitigating

information asymmetries and siloed communication, and in turn facilitating high levels of cognitive engagement.

6.2 Emotional Engagement

The study results reveal a striking difference in the levels of emotional engagement between remote and on-site employees. Remote employees tended to have much weaker social ties to colleagues and identify less with their company. This was mainly due to having fewer physical interactions with colleagues or feeling left out in particular work activities. In addition, remote employees reported much lower levels of AOC than their on-site counterparts, feeling less identification with their employer and feeling lower barriers to changing jobs. The lower levels of affective organizational commitment of remote employees are the biggest difference observed in this study.

Remote employees exhibited weaker social ties and affective organizational commitment than their on-site colleagues.

Numerous factors contribute to the multifaceted nature of AOC, including personality traits, cultural influences, living arrangements, familial structures, and other pertinent variables. It is crucial to acknowledge that *not* all office employees will automatically feel a strong connection and commitment toward their organization, just as not all remote employees will inevitably feel detached. However, it does appear that building a strong AOC is more challenging for remote employees of hybrid teams.

Throughout all interviews, the inferior social ties between physically removed colleagues were highlighted. Combined with the lower rates of AOC, the research findings support expectation 2 that remote employees have lower emotional engagement than their office counterparts. The outcomes of this study suggest that while cognitive engagement can be successfully facilitated for all employees, emotional engagement is more difficult to foster from afar. Hybrid teams will need to adapt to ensure high engagement levels of all employees, regardless of their location.

7. Conclusion

In a growing digitalized and location-independent world, more business interactions are moving online. Especially in hybrid software companies, most interactions have been moved to the digital workspace. While the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this trend, it was an inevitable evolution considering the globalized and digital economy. While digital tools do portray extensive solutions and new opportunities for business productivity, they are not the holy grail for the future of work. Personal interactions and connections remain a vital component of organizational relations. Efficiency at all costs will not be a viable solution for companies going forward.

Employees know what they want from their employer and are less hesitant to change jobs than ever before. The flexibility and increasingly international nature of working in a hybrid team is a perk that all employees in this study cherished. Most want to continue working in hybrid teams and view the challenges incurred in hybrid teams as manageable. Facilitating excellent hybrid work environments and creating strong social ties within the organization, is key to ensuring high levels of employee engagement in hybrid teams and will be a cornerstone for retaining top talent and entrepreneurial success going forward.

The findings of this study have highlighted the relationship between location and employee engagement, partially confirming the theory presented in chapter 2.5. Emotional engagement levels among remote employees are lower compared to their on-site counterparts. This discrepancy can be attributed to weaker social ties, resulting in reduced affective organizational commitment. However, the results concerning cognitive engagement are not as clear and suggest that it is indeed possible to achieve high levels of engagement across an entire hybrid organization. As a result, expectation 1 cannot be supported, while expectation 2 is supported.

One key takeaway from this research regarding cognitive engagement is the importance of empowering employees through essential resources, effective tools, and streamlined communication processes. The results indicate that organizations can mitigate the potential negative effects on cognitive engagement by investing in the right technology and procedures.

These measures can enhance cognitive engagement and foster efficiency within teams, suggesting that location is not an inhibiting factor to engagement or productivity.

Another noteworthy finding is the increasing reliance on digital communication platforms even within physical office settings. The rise of online messaging, especially among white-collar professionals, emphasizes the evolving nature of workplace communication. This shift presents an opportunity for organizations to recognize the importance of thoughtfully adopting digital technology and providing adequate training to maximize its benefits.

Lastly, this study highlights the role of management in fostering a trusting and empowering environment. Effective leadership is crucial, especially for remote employees who may experience weaker social ties within the organization. Managers who encourage autonomy and flexibility, regardless of employee location, can play a vital role in building trust and enhancing cognitive engagement. As this study has shown, positive relationships with managers are even more impactful for those who lack physical access to the office.

Promoting high levels of emotional engagement seems to be more of a challenge in hybrid teams. Physical distance is still perceived as an inhibitor to the creation of strong social ties in a team. The dilemma of fostering a strong company culture with in-person events while not excluding remote team members is a balancing act. Creating a strong affective organizational commitment seen in a high sense of identification with an employer seems to be much more of a challenge in hybrid teams than in fully remote or on-site teams. As emotional engagement is key to binding employees to an organization, companies should focus on promoting high levels of emotional engagement in their company to retain top talent.

As organizations continue to adapt to the challenges and opportunities of hybrid work models, it is essential to acknowledge the complex and varied factors that contribute employee engagement as a whole. While not all remote employees will inevitably experience lower levels of emotional engagement, it is evident that building a strong AOC can be more challenging for this group. Recognizing the complexity and intricacy of employee engagement allows organizations to tailor their approaches to foster emotional engagement effectively.

In conclusion, this study contributes valuable insights into the evolving landscape of employee engagement in the context of hybrid work environments. While the emotional engagement of remote employees poses distinct challenges, cognitive engagement can thrive with the right strategies and tools in place. Organizations should focus on creating empowering and trusting work cultures, as well as embracing digital communication tools and training to bridge the gap between on-site and remote employees. The ongoing evolution of the workplace, driven by advances in technology and changing employee preferences, requires adaptable approaches to employee engagement. As organizations continue to navigate these changes, future research is encouraged to dive deeper into the intricacies of hybrid work models, their impact on engagement, and the evolving strategies needed to sustain a motivated and productive workforce.

7.1 Limitations and areas for further research

While this study has provided valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The findings cannot establish a definitive cause-and-effect relationship between location and employee engagement based solely on the data collected. Employee engagement is influenced by various complex factors such as management strategies, cross-cultural dynamics, and organizational culture. To explore these causal relationships further, a more comprehensive investigation using both quantitative and qualitative research approaches is needed.

Furthermore, this study was very broad, cutting into multiple different areas of employee engagement and related hybrid work practices. Future research should focus examinations on individual elements, providing a more in-depth understanding of what drives engagement in hybrid teams and identifying specific causal inferences. Such studies could then identify the critical factors and strategies that organizations can leverage to enhance employee engagement more effectively.

Given the ever-evolving nature of the workplace, further research should keep pace with emerging trends and technological advancements. Investigating the impact of evolving digital tools, changes in work models, and external factors, such as global events or economic shifts, can provide

valuable insights. Considering the relative novelty and importance of research on engagement in hybrid teams, a slew of new studies and research results can be expected in the coming years.

In conclusion, while this paper has provided important findings, it comes with inherent limitations that point the way for future research. Analyzing causal relationships with greater accuracy, concentrating on specific aspects of engagement, and keeping a up with emerging workplace trends, are all viable directions for future studies. Future findings may deepen our understanding of employee engagement and equip organizations with the insights needed to foster a motivated and engaged workforce within future work environments.

7.2 Outlook

While the trend toward global hiring and increasingly remote staff increased rapidly since the pandemic, newer statistics are beginning to show a decline in fully remote roles. According to Flexa Careers, 35% fewer European companies have been looking for fully remote roles in 2022, while still offering flexible work arrangements like home office (Partington, 2022). These numbers suggest that companies may have indeed seen some of the challenges discussed in this paper and want to give employees a chance to meet in a central office. Nevertheless, the hybrid work arrangements that have evolved throughout the past years will persist for year to come and must be better understood and designed.

A new skillset from employees, managers, and organizations is required to foster high levels of engagement in hybrid firms. Employees need to acquire new digital skillsets and ways of working that contribute to a functional hybrid collaboration. This includes the use of digital knowledge management and communication tools, as well as understanding how and when to communicate certain information to the team. Managers must create a trusting and empowering environment in which remote and on-site employees are treated and promoted equally. And organizations themselves must provide the needed software, hardware, trainings, and overall organizational culture to facilitate all parts of an organization in their hybrid work and collaboration. If all parts of an organization manage to adjust, high employee engagement rates are very well feasible in hybrid teams. As the academic and business world gain more insights and experience in the field, even more tailored approaches will be found to improve the work experience for all employees.

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9. Appendix

9.1. Transcript – Interview with Brian (Start-Up/Remote)

Date: Thursday, 29.09.2022

Age: 28; **Department:** Marketing; **Nationality:** Belarus; **Time at company:** 14 months

Speakers

Interviewer: Camilla

Interviewee: Brian

7 **Camilla** 00:01

8 Perfect. All right. So to start off, can you tell me a little bit about your role?

9 **Brian, SU/R** 00:08

10 About my role. So I've been working student working part time for a year now on the website, taking parts of the designers and a bit of a development side for the website. And now I switched. The technical name is the growth hacker growth marketer (in full-time). But I continue doing a bunch of stuff related to websites now also combining the marketing side of things as well.

11 **Camilla** 00:34

12 Nice. That was basically also my position when I was still working in startups as well. Nice. Very interesting bunch of stuff. Yeah. So you're currently a fully remote right for over a year now? How often do you see your colleagues in Germany

13 **Brian, SU/R** 00:50

14 In Germany, so I've gone to the summer party, which was in July, I think, first of July for a couple of days. Then went to explore Germany for a bit and came back to the company a week after and stayed there for like four days working with the people. And I came back for a week again in August to work again with the people. So I also got to know my marketing manager a bit more in to kind of get into the team. And the plan, I guess would be maybe go there at least four times a year. And probably at least for a week.

15 **Camilla** 01:29

16 Okay. And how did it feel for you, when you were in the office for the first time?

17 **Brian, SU/R** 01:33

18 It felt weird, because the company is super German based people. So it's like 95% of people are Germans. And then for them, it's also weird to like have to... although the main language is English, but then I used to physically understand that there are like no non German speakers in the room. So it took a bit of an adjustment. But then it went better and better, basically, as the days went by,

19 **Camilla** 02:03

20 okay, yeah. It's a transition process. Have you ever worked remotely for a company before? Or in a hybrid company? Or is this your first time?

21 **Brian, SU/R** 02:13

22	I've only actually worked remotely for companies. Before that it has been primarily internships and some social impact roles and stuff like that volunteering. But it has been mostly remote, I would say.
23	Camilla 02:24
24	okay, and was that a decision that you only want to work remote? Or is that just the way it happened?
25	Brian, SU/R 02:32
26	Just the way it happened for you. But I would probably go for a remote role now, if I were choosing. Or my ideal plan would be to be able to be fully remote, but still have the possibility of going to the office... but still be completely remote. Like for example right now I am, but there is no office in [Spanish city] yet. Maybe there will be one in the future.
27	Camilla 02:56
28	But to be able to like go into the office once in a while to see your colleagues in person. Have a beer.
29	Brian, SU/R 03:00
30	Yes, exactly. Just primarily that. Have a beer. That's mainly the only thing that's missing, in my opinion. Some social, physical activities that you want to do after work, or maybe some like, ideation sessions. And like the ease of just like, going to someone for a quick question in between, those would be like the main things.
31	Camilla 03:24
32	Yeah, I see. How empowered do you feel in your roles since your entire onboarding and everything was remote? Do you feel like you have all the necessary resources?
33	Brian, SU/R 03:35
34	I mean, my entire onboarding wasn't fully remote since I went to [city] to Germany for a week in August, again, to get better onboarded and whatnot. But yeah, I don't think there's any difference to be honest. I also had been with the company for a year right? So I kind of knew of everything. I didn't need to like get onboarded on the tools and stuff.
35	Camilla 04:00
36	and look like a year ago, when you started fresh, it wasn't a problem either. It worked fine.
37	Brian, SU/R 04:08
38	Worked fully fine. Some things.... some things you need to like keep asking. In Notion for example, we have all kinds of information, but you don't even know sometimes what you need to search for. And yeah, from time to time, you need to like get back to somebody who knows and like: Oh, what is this thing? What is that thing? Or, you didn't mention a couple of things beforehand... but I feel like it could for sure happen the same way with a physical onboarding. Because people just forget to include certain things so they don't think about certain things. So it's not so much because it was remote, but mainly because yeah, certain parts were just forgotten or were thought of needed to get back to them and ask them: what's this?
39	Camilla 04:53
40	I mean, I'm only interviewing people in the software industry. It probably helps to have a digital tool anyways, where you have to be on a screen anyways to show someone anything.... so it probably makes less of a difference where you are?

41	Brian, SU/R 05:06
42	Yeah. Don't think that onboarding has any difference whether it's online or offline, especially for like tools and the way of working, not so much for getting some help. That's for sure.
43	Camilla 05:20
44	Can you tell me a bit about what collaboration in your team looks like? Like how often do you work with colleagues? What are your main channels you use?
45	Brian, SU/R 05:28
46	Yeah, we basically only use Slack. And notion for some documentation, which is like, more of when something needs to be written down and reused later, you would like to create an SOP entry notion or something like that in a database. But in general, for any type of communications we use Slack. Bunch of people have different ways of communicating. I like to shoot like 100 messages, a bunch not structured at all. And that works out very well with like... I mean, we have a team of four right now. So two interns, and me and the marketing manager. My boss, [name], me and her, I love working with her. Because this way of working of shooting, like any messages, any time of the day. Nothing needs to be structured, and then you talk more, and then you see each other and like, it is much more personal. And then for some other people could be like: "structure your message, go straight to the point, I will only read it for 10 seconds and reply in five seconds. And that's it. I have not enough time". So whenever I see that, I'm kind of like.... [sigh] I don't want to reach out to you again.
47	Camilla 06:42
48	Yeah. Yeah. Especially like if you only have a small question. And you don't feel like structuring it. And then you don't want to ask it though. Because you know, the person's going to be pissed off. And then you just don't ask us. Yeah,
49	Brian, SU/R 06:54
50	for sure. Yeah. But I guess it could be the same in real life as well. Like, they just don't want to.
51	Camilla 07:04
52	We had that problem in our cologne office. We had like a colleague who we always bothered like with a small questions. At some point he was like: Guys, I really want to work. Please don't bother me. And he got this tomato that he put on his desk saying "when this is on my desk, you can't talk to me". And it was just there all day.
53	Brian, SU/R 07:26
54	So yeah, yeah.
55	Camilla 07:29
56	I'm looking at the fact that you guys are hybrid so that there are some people especially in [German city] that see each other in the office physically. Do you see any problems or challenges with that kind of hybrid collaboration?
57	Brian, SU/R 07:42
58	Yeah. Yeah, for sure. Because, for example, the, let's say, the human manager, the HR people and whatnot, when they think about what type of activities to do, you know, how to bring everybody closer and stuff, but they physically located in the office, they sometimes forget.... whatever they propose, they propose from a

place of being very comfortable going into the office, you know, like, of course, they're remote, they can stay at home, but then they can choose to go to the office to saying when people choose to go for lunch, anytime they want. So they think that's, that's the same for everybody. But it's actually not. So then I would say a lot of these initiatives and thoughts of people proposing ideas. They're not coming from a fully remote ideation and whatnot, but they're coming from this more comfortable place. And I'm like, "Yes, of course. Good idea. But you can also do all of that in real life so you need to do something else. So that for me like this whole mentality of being fully remote or being hybrid and proposing ideas to remote workers doesn't work that well. I would say you need somebody who is fully remote and trying to then propose something for like socialization, and teamwork, and all of that.

59 **Camilla** 09:01

60 True. Yeah, that's a good point. Especially because you guys are remote first firm. Right. But all the HR people are physically in [German city] mostly. Right? Yeah. Yeah. Interesting. And looking at information flow in the company, do you feel the hybridity makes it more difficult that maybe some information just stays in the office and doesn't get out? Or is that managed well?

61 **Brian, SU/R** 09:24

62 Hmmm... I think that's [information exchange] managed well. Although I didn't fully like it in the beginning, when I went to the office... But the company actually prefers slack messages. So before, when asked a question to somebody, you would go and ask. So instead of that, the company prefers that you first shoot a Slack message. And if possible, you shoot that Slack message in a group so everybody can see. So there is this mentality of first asking questions online, even if you're in the same office, before going for something. Although, from that point of view, it's kind of nice. Second point of view is that they do a bunch of ideation sessions in the office. And for sure, you don't have so many ideation sessions online. Whenever people want to discuss, like a new project or something, a new excited idea, they would just meet in the office, and they would talk about it for hours. And whenever you have it online, you don't really do that. I feel like you're a bit more structured; then you like prepare more. Yeah, I feel like this type of stuff will be missed out. Yeah.

63 **Camilla** 10:41

64 Do you ever have any hybrid ideation sessions that people are in the office with a whiteboard? And you guys are joining remotely?

65 **Brian, SU/R** 10:44

66 No!

67 **Camilla** 10:45

68 So that all happens physically in the office?

69 **Brian, SU/R** 10:47

70 Yeah, like, when is heavy ideation. We did have fully remote ideation sessions in the design team, mostly. But only like one or two times. I'm not sure if others are doing a bunch of individual ideation sessions online for me it hasn't happened.

71 **Camilla** 11:05

72 Okay. And looking at the meetings. Are there any meetings where it's hybrid? Or is everyone remote? And how does that work?

73 **Brian, SU/R** 11:16

- 74 Yeah, I mean, if, for example, when we had weeklies and stuff like that, or when I was at the office, it would be like, either a people at the office, multiple people who speak in the same meeting, they could either go to separate rooms, or you could go to the same meeting room where you had like four people in the office, and then the rest joining online. That's where it's fairly fine. I don't see any like benefits or any negative points about it. It's nice when you see people in the office in the same screen, kind of like talking to them. Yeah. But it wasn't really ideation type of thing, right? It was mostly with the people individually expressing their opinions. If you try to start like ideating a point, and then working with groups this we didn't have. So then I don't think it would work that well.
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- 75 **Camilla** 12:19
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- 76 Yeah, I had that with a company once where we tried to like with 20 people in a remote meeting, find our brand, or branding and our market. And that was so difficult. It took like five hours, and we still weren't there. It was chaos. Could you tell me a bit about your relationship to colleagues and the team? Do you have examples where you felt very connected or disconnected?
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- 77 **Brian, SU/R** 12:46
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- 78 Yeah, I mean, when I went to Germany, I was very much pushing for this more friendly vibe communication than this separation between personal and professional life. Let's see the relationship or the connection. I mean, going for lunches and then going out for dinner after work with people and stuff like that. A lot of people definitely disconnect, like the professional environment and the personal environment in the sense that they still disconnect it with the same people. So like, whenever you have working hours, you'd have one type of relationship, whenever you finish those working hours you get out, and the same type of people will have a much more personal environment. So I think that can have a lot of benefits in general, but I'm not so sure about it. And I mean, I definitely felt connected to a couple of people like we went out for like a friend date or whatever, like the two of us, with Stephanie a couple of times. It's nice to get to know each other and talk about things deep questions, stuff like that. Definitely felt a lot of connection. Some other people, a couple of people higher in the hierarchy or whatever. There's been like some very different like ideologies and stuff like that, to which like a bit of like a conflict arise. It wasn't like a conflict conflict, but you could see a bit of a tension and stuff like that. During like, in a bar setting type of thing, when like in the restaurant setting type of thing, which was kind of fun. And I think sometimes it can also be good if it's then, reflected upon, and... I think deviated with the question a bit. What was it again?
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- 79 **Camilla** 14:47
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- 80 What your relationship to your colleagues is like. So it's more professional except for the people that you went out with one on one when you're there.
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- 81 **Brian, SU/R** 14:55
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- 82 I think, I think with people who are like not co-founders, let's say, everything is not professional. Everything is like the same vibe, both at work and both afterwards. I don't feel that there is a separation. Because nobody is nobody's bosses, and then they just you don't need to like, whatever. But with people who are higher, so for example, my boss or the co-founders, they definitely try to create a bit more separation at least in the work context. With my boss, it feels super good. But with the co-founders... kind of hard to say, right? When you start like leading a big company, what time do you want to leave the party? How much do you want to say? How much of your opinion do you want to express and stuff like that? There's definitely separation there. I'm not sure if you can get very deep with them.
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- 83 **Camilla** 15:54
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84	Yeah, yeah. Let's see. You already mentioned the planning of events and general HR practices. Do you feel that there are any other events where remote employees are treated differently than on site employees?
85	Brian, SU/R 16:15
86	Can you give an example of other instances or events
87	Camilla 16:22
88	maybe promotions, that you feel that people are in the office more often are more likely to get promoted or get more learning opportunities?
89	Brian, SU/R 16:33
90	Yeah, I mean, the thing is that you get to know the people in the office much better than you get to know your remote coworkers. Either it would mean that you get closer with them, and then whenever you go closer to people, you probably feel much more inclined to help them. Or you feel, you know, more attraction towards them, to help them in a certain way. I haven't personally [pause] I don't know, it hasn't happened to me personally, for example with regard to promotions or in regards to some other treatment around the quality of work, or something like that, I didn't feel any, any of that personally, but I could see it happening. It's just normal. The more you hang out with people, the more you'll probably end up liking them or not liking them. That can also be. I feel like with the remote workers, they can be much more neutral. Because you don't personally know them that well. Nor, you hate them. Nor, you love them. Therefore, it's a much more objective in comparison to on-site people.
91	Camilla 17:40
92	You look at the work they do and it's objective. Sorry, I forgot to ask, do you have any consecutive meetings? Do you need to leave at a certain point?
93	Brian, SU/R 17:50
94	I was planning. Yeah. I have like nine more minutes.
95	Camilla 17:53
96	Okay. All right, then. Skip a few questions. How relevant is trust for you in your work context?
97	Brian, SU/R 18:04
98	Really very relevant. I want full trust.
99	Camilla 18:10
100	And do you feel that you have mutual trust in your team?
101	Brian, SU/R 18:14
102	Yeah, in my team, for sure. Yeah. My team and other teams, I'm working across design and marketing team, yes! I'm also working with other teams, sometimes and there I feel much less trust, but also certain teams work differently. Seems that in departments working with very high goals and numbers, like sales, they operate very different. So I don't want to get too close to those dudes.
103	Camilla 18:44
104	How do you feel that your company managed to create that trust, although you're a remote company?
105	Brian, SU/R 18:56

- 106 I mean, I feel trust from my marketing manager, and then from the design leads, marketing design leads. How did I get trust from them? And I guess they saw my work, and I liked it. And then we had some feedback sessions on both sides. And we felt like both I provide value, they provide value to them. And I think we just trust each other's work. Based on the work, I guess,
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- 107 **Camilla** 19:32
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- 108 We're getting to the closing questions. How difficult would it be for you emotionally to leave your company right now?
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- 109 **Brian, SU/R** 19:39
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- 110 [Pause] Probably very easy. I mean, I'm in love with the culture. Thing is that I haven't seen a lot. So I haven't seen bad companies. Okay, so for me, it's only been remote companies and whenever it's remote, it can't be really bad. I feel like, company's where you're physically in there can be much worse on multiple scales when it's remote. Remote is always much more neutral. So I've only worked remote. And this remote culture that I have right now is much better than the one before and the people that I've met, especially certain leads, and stuff, I love them. And I love the trust I have, how flexible I can be with my working hours, how flexible I can be, whatever. So finding this in another company, and finding another company that is like this would be very difficult, I think. But I don't have like an emotional attachment to people or to the company that much, although both the purpose and the way of work and the people are great, but I don't... I'm not sure I don't feel like I am like a shareholder type of thing in this company, you know, that it's my company, I don't think I don't feel like it's my company.
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- 111 **Camilla** 21:00
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- 112 Yeah, do you have an idea what the company or management or HR could do to make you feel more connected.
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- 113 **Brian, SU/R** 21:06
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- 114 I mean, they tried to create a bunch of those events. Social events, like lunches, and all of that and whatever. Which, in my opinion, doesn't really work remotely, but you know, it's good that they're trying. And on the other side, the leads that I have, are always super open for a quick call after work or during work to discuss whatever issue you might have. And there's also a bit of personal and professional development plans going on there. Just being open to communicating.
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- 115 **Camilla** 21:55
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- 116 So the things that makes you want to stay in a company or that are most important to you really are is that flexibility and the trust.
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- 117 **Brian, SU/R** 22:02
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- 118 Yeah. Flexibility and the trust and the people from whom I can learn. And the vibes that I get from those people - when it's not stressful at all, you know?
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- 119 **Camilla** 22:16
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- 120 Nice. What do you enjoy most about working remotely.
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- 121 **Brian, SU/R** 22:23
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- 122 So, for me, it's both remotely and super flexible, in terms of hours. From week to week I can decide what hours I'm working on. So remotely, I can work from anywhere that I want in the world. I can work from my house, from the co working, for example. Also the company's giving you space. Like this thing with the
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	coworking space, which is also for example, something very good although you don't connect with your co workers, you might connect with other people working. So that's another thing that needs to be considered. I can go to another country work from there, so obviously remote work is incredible. Flexible work also. If you are the office, however flexible it is, people have their like judgments. Like if somebody comes late, even though it's fully flexible, they will be like, "ah, but I came here earlier". And they also know how much time you spend in the office how much time you don't. So I feel like this full truly flexible work can only be achieved remotely, because people have a lot of preconceptions in their minds. So those two things I love the most.
123	Camilla 23:29
124	And what do you think is most challenging about working remotely?
125	Brian, SU/R 23:32
126	Not hanging out with people. First after work. So the first thing is completely outside of work, not hanging out with people and getting to know them better and stuff like that. Second thing would be missing out on this like quick - either ideation workshops, or like some like small interactions. Whenever you're in the office, you always have these small interactions everywhere throughout the day. You're like, "Oh, how's your day been? Oh, let's grab a coffee or let's do that." To get all of this, like small interaction throughout the day. So I feel like the after work stuff and the small interactions throughout the day (some of them can be work related, some of them can be quick ones about the day) how did this go, and stuff like that.
127	Camilla 24:14
128	Yeah. And looking again, at the hybridity, you already said like that the planning of the HR in the events but anything else about that hybrid model that is challenging to you.
129	Brian, SU/R 24:29
130	Anything else by the hybrid model? [long pause]
131	Camilla 24:33
132	the language? [laughing]
133	Brian, SU/R 24:37
134	Language. I was thinking about something like they wanted to propose at some point like the habit of... because again, it's hybrid, but then the office is in [German city], right? So it's not very distributed across places. And I feel like if you want to go for hybrid, you need to go for some kind of a distributed ideation where it's like when you don't just have one office and people can go there, but you can have different locations. And then every like, I don't know, four months, people could meet up and work there. But all of the company. Kind of like a planned work away type type of thing. So I think this hasn't been implemented. And that's what's going on is just that we have an office, you know. You can come if your manager approves that you can come for a bit. But if you like, yeah, not sure.
135	Camilla 25:28
136	True, that would be a cool idea to have more distributed and more hubs. Yeah. Those were all the questions. Do you have anything else on your mind about the topic?
137	Brian, SU/R 25:40
138	No, no, no, nothing on my mind. Just answering questions. Okay.

139 **Camilla** 25:45

140 Thanks a lot for your time!

9.2. Transcript – Interview with Francis (Start-Up/Remote)

Date: Monday, 26.09.2022

Age: 32; **Department:** Product Management; **Nationality:** Belarus; **Time at company:** 13 months

Speakers

Interviewer: Camilla

Interviewee: Francis (SU/R)

6 **Camilla** 00:00

7 Could you tell me a little bit about your role and your job at [company]?

8 **Francis, SU/R** 00:09

9 Yeah, so I work as the Senior Product Owner. I work mainly with the product team, which consists of developers, a couple of designers and some other stakeholders, which are partly involved. But I also work with basically all the other teams that bring information from the market or from our clients, collect the feedback from our users. And so basically put it all together and just form the roadmap for the product and then prioritize it with engineers, define some requirements and then make sure it goes to the product at the right time in the right shape.

10 **Camilla** 00:55

11 Very interesting role product owner...

12 **Francis, SU/R** 01:01

13 The best one!

14 **Camilla** 01:05

15 You work pretty cross departmentally as well then, right? With product, sales, marketing... cool. You guys have an office in [German city], right? But you're not there often.

16 **Francis, SU/R** 01:20

17 I was not there even once, because in order to add a little bit more complexity to the hybrid work model, I also have a three year old son, who goes to Kita, and sometimes he doesn't. And then we need to manage the schedule with my husband, and we just don't spend the time to work at the office or to go to the office. So it's kind of difficult.

18 **Camilla** 01:48

19 So you never see your colleagues physically? It's all remote for you.

20 **Francis, SU/R** 01:54

- 21 Yeah, so we went on a summer party to [German city] actually, to our headquarter and there I met everyone. I mean, in general, I like the idea of having this opportunity to go to the office, but also the office in [German city] doesn't have anyone from the product team itself. So it's more like, nice to have lunch with the guys from let's say, sales team, for example. But still, this is not someone who is working closely with me day to day.
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- 22 **Camilla** 02:22
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- 23 Okay, when did you start at [company]?
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- 24 **Francis, SU/R** 02:25
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- 25 I think it was March.
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- 26 **Camilla** 02:27
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- 27 Have you ever worked remotely or hybridly before?
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- 28 **Francis, SU/R** 02:34
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- 29 Yeah. So at some point, I used to work as the project manager, as a freelancer project manager for a company in Israel. And then basically, I worked all the time in the office before the COVID started. And then I worked for my company in Stuttgart, from home. And then I moved to [German city] and still continued working for a company in Stuttgart. I started there (before COVID and before my parental leave) as an office employee. And then COVID and parental leave happened. All this combined. And then I worked remotely from [German city] for them.
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- 30 **Camilla** 03:14
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- 31 So you're a remote work pro already.
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- 32 **Francis, SU/R** 03:18
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- 33 Yeah. Still miss the office though.
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- 34 **Camilla** 03:21
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- 35 Do you miss the office?
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- 36 **Francis, SU/R** 03:24
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- 37 Yeah, **I don't miss it** [the office] **for work purposes**, to be honest. But I miss it for like all this, you know, meeting the team. And mostly like coffee breaks and lunch, you know, this kind of stuff. So **I don't think** that the productivity of the team, at least in the teams where I worked was affected by not being in the same room. Still feels good, and very nice. But there's all these little things that go together with being in the office besides work.
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- 38 **Camilla** 03:50
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- 39 Yeah. Yeah. So if you wouldn't have a small kid at home, you'd be in the office more often.
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- 40 **Francis, SU/R** 03:57
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- 41 Yeah, I think so. I mean, it's still nice to **save some time** and be able to work from wherever you want. But yeah, occasionally I think I would have **visit them**.
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- 42 **Camilla** 04:07
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43	Okay. How empowered do you feel in your role if the entire onboarding process was remote as well? Did you always have all the resources there for you? Or was it were there any challenges along the way?
44	Francis, SU/R 04:21
45	No, I think the only challenge is that basically, I did not see people personally. And that's always a bit hard to get to know each other when you just have these regular calls and you don't run into each other in the office, don't see the faces. And I think at some point, it was like I don't even know all the names of the people that work in this company. And we're not that big. And yeah, as you mentioned, I work with multiple teams - with the sales and marketing and content team. But still, I don't know everyone, for example, people and talents. I mean, I don't see them that much. We simply don't interact.
46	But other than that I would say the onboarding was, like, super easy and nice. Yeah, everyone was available. The resources were in place. But I guess these guys by the moment I joined had quite some experience with onboarding of their remote employees,
47	Camilla 05:21
48	because you guys are a remote first company, right? So the entire management and stuff works well, remotely.
49	Francis, SU/R 05:32
50	Yeah. I mean, the company has four co-founders, that are all located in different cities of Germany.
51	Camilla 05:38
52	Oh, really? Okay. So that's basically the fundamental to making this work.
53	Francis, SU/R 05:45
54	I mean, at some point, I think in history, they were all in the same place and this is how they met. But right now, they are located in different cities.
55	Camilla 05:54
56	Can you tell me a little bit about what collaboration looks like in your team? So how often do you meet with colleagues? How do you brainstorm how do you meet? What tools do you use?
57	Francis, SU/R 06:10
58	Yeah, so I mean, we have, I think most of the agile teams now have, where we have our daily stand ups where we do a daily check in and not that much to update regarding the project, because we're more or less in synch. So we know what's happening and if there is some problem, we don't wait another day for a call. But it's actually more to see the faces, make sure you still work with people. Yeah. And then we also have some regular meetings, which are scheduled once per week, for some more high-level check ins, I would say. And then, at least in my role, around three hours of calls on demand, per days. With people from several teams, just to discuss some concepts to discuss some feedback just to update each other on something or go into details on one specific feature we are building. And as for the tools, so we use Slack for this asynchronous conversations. And we use JIRA for the ticket basis. I mean we also have emails and stuff, but we don't use them that much inside teams.
59	Camilla 07:30
60	Yeah. And looking at the meetings, are all participants remote then? Or are some sometimes maybe in [German city] in the office together while you're joining virtually?

61	Francis, SU/R 07:44
62	No, even those that are in the office mostly also join each one from their laptops. I mean, sometimes they can lock themselves in one room and then speak from one laptop. But I guess everyone is so used to just sitting in front of his machine.
63	Camilla 08:00
64	I think that makes it easier somehow.
65	Francis, SU/R 08:03
66	Yeah, I mean, you can mute yourself and never unmuted. If you're like all in the room together, you kind of have to say something. And so yeah.
67	Camilla 08:12
68	Looking at the fact that you guys, that there are people in the office in [German city] sometimes, how would you rate the entire information exchange in the company? Do you feel like everyone also the remote people get the same quality and quantity of information as those that might be in the office together daily?
69	Francis, SU/R 08:33
70	Yeah, I'm and this is something like a work in progress, I would say, to actually make sure that the information is spread well enough. But there is no advantage of being in the office for the spread of the information. It's more like for us to find this ideal tool, ideal flow, ideal amount of information that is needed for each, let's say team member. But in general, everything is online . So we don't have any private chats anywhere where some information stays just in the office.
71	Another tool, which I forgot to mention is notion, which is like future database here. I mean, I'm so impressed by the amount of input. I would never expect something like that from a startup, to be honest. But it's just like, it was the most structured thing I've ever seen. Basically, on any topic, like everything about the product, about the company about anything, and that's like super amazing. And I guess that's also why this onboarding, everything was so much easier here. Because it was like that from the very beginning. So it's not like yeah, let's find a way to share information. So it's more like just okay, how can we make sure we learn even more transparent even more, make sure that everyone gets this piece information that he's needed. So, I'm not sure how much we're like outliners in your resource, because I think like here I clearly really well structured and well prepared for this hybrid mode.
72	Camilla 10:04
73	That's a good example, because I'm looking at what managers need to look out for and how you can make it work. So it's good to have an example where it actually works. Oh, yeah, to see why it works. So well. Are you guys really encouraged to then not save anything locally on your desktop, but to put everything in a drive and really, protocol, the work that you do now? Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with your colleagues and the team? Do you have an example where you feel particularly connected to them maybe.
74	Francis, SU/R 10:41
75	So I think, in general, if I compare, half a year in a different company in an office set up, I would find much more, let's say personal conversations. And that's actually for me, it's very important. So I know a lot of people who really don't care about this stuff, but I do care. And we do have here some attempts, let's call it this way to socialize online more. But it's never the same to be honest. So that's something that probably, I

didn't see any example of this working in any company. Like really working so that we can say we are absolutely connected.

76 But still, I do have a very good example of a guy who is the designer here. And I think, at least in the beginning, we worked maybe the closest to each other and I was doing basically half of the three hours of meetings per day with him. And it somehow really worked well. We tried to balance a bit of personal conversations with work. But I guess that's not because the format of the conversation worked, but that it just clicked personally. That's also cool, but I would say this is a very lucky case. It's not because something was set up in a way that it will work this way. I mean, I don't know, maybe we were picked somehow by our manager, and that's not a coincidence. But, yeah, this example, I would say, was just a very lucky case.

77 **Camilla** 12:21

78 So when you have a lot of one on one calls with one specific person that really builds a relationship, but if you're like in big group meetings remotely, a personal relationship?

79 **Francis, SU/R** 12:35

80 Yeah, you said there's big meetings there. Like, I also work a lot with developers who are not sometimes that eager to participate in big group meetings. And I mean, you really need to know what you want to say. So in a room of people, you would probably somehow participate in a way. Of course, there is still someone who is super silent and will not participate. But somehow even this person will be engaged a bit more. But here it's this mute button. I mean, you cannot not mute yourself and immediate of 20 people. But most of the cases, if there are 20 people on the call, then like five people will unmute themselves on the call if you don't call names. Everyone is so provide they are afraid to interrupt each other. And then it's like... "yeah, okay, someone else is talking then, that's fine". So, yeah that's not replaceable.

81 **Camilla** 13:36

82 Do you sometimes feel like you're missing out when the [German city] colleagues go for drinks after work?

83 **Francis, SU/R** 13:45

84 Yeah, [feels left out sometimes]. I mean, they don't share it that much. But when they do then yes. Yeah, totally. And I guess that's why this summer get together felt so great, like really good, because you're like, "Oh, my God, that's exactly how I imagined this can be", or "Oh, wow, that's completely different person".

85 **Camilla** 14:08

86 Or like "wow, you're tall. I wouldn't have thought."

87 **Francis, SU/R** 14:11

88 Yeah, they're like, all surprisingly tall. I didn't see that many tall people like in my life probably. Is that some criteria? Like why did you hire me? I'm just like [gesturing a small person].

89 **Camilla** 14:24

90 Yeah, you never notice in the new virtual settings!

91 **Francis, SU/R** 14:27

92 That's true. Yeah.

93 **Camilla** 14:30

94 Do you have an idea what maybe management could do to make you feel more connected?

95 **Francis, SU/R 14:39**

96 I mean, the management is experimental with a lot of things here and yeah, some of them work. Some of them don't work. So at some point there were these Team Socials where we just played some virtually games, board games and then you were on the call and that what felt good. But I think it worked really well during COVID, when no one could have any alternative. But when you can go outside and actually meet people... yeah, you somehow tend to skip it in the evenings. Now they're also experimenting with some new formats for the lunchtime. So it's not like you actually have so many things planned instead of that. Hmm, yeah, we'll see.

97 **Camilla 15:24**

98 Would you like to have more meetings or events where you all get together physically?

99 **Francis, SU/R 15:40**

100 Oh, yeah, that's for sure. I mean, it's tricky, of course. And even if we are not that big, to get everyone in the room it can be pretty tricky. But yeah, for sure. That's, that's a very good idea.

101 **Camilla 15:57**

102 Are there any instances that you maybe felt that on site people were maybe treated differently than remote employees?

103 **Francis, SU/R 16:00**

104 No, no, no, never. I mean, some of the [German city] employees do regular go to the office, but still. Maybe it's the role of product owner, because you actually need to talk to them all the time... no matter if that's digitally or physically. So I do feel that I'm involved in a lot of stuff. I don't care if that's online or not, we just collaborate the whole time together. So maybe for other roles, that's different. But since my role involves so much talking, and so much conversations with people, I feel that work wise, we are connected.

105 **Camilla 16:51**

106 Cool. Very nice. How relevant, would you say is trust in your work context in your organization?

107 **Francis, SU/R 17:03**

108 Hmm, so... [Pause]. You know why I'm making the pause? Because I'm also comparing it to my precious work experience in the previous company. And that's also actually pretty cool, because here, I came to the company where it's remote first by default. I don't know how it was before COVID? But right now it's really complete transparency. No one actually makes you write reports on what you did. The job needs to be done, no one cares with what means and how much time you invested. But in my previous company, that was a completely different approach. Because there we used to book time, because our clients were billed for the hours we spent on their projects. And so everyone was super cautious about what is happening. And then after we move to this remote setup, you could feel that they really wanted you back in the office. They didn't know how to do it. When I was leaving the company, it was still a bit of a COVID situation happening, so they couldn't make you come. But there were so many attempts to make you come back. And so yeah, that's what I was thinking. Here I never felt that someone wants to make sure I'm doing my work, or check what exactly I'm doing. That the job is done, that's what matters.

109 **Camilla 18:28**

110 So you feel that maybe management now, trust the employees more than maybe in the prior organization.

111 **Francis, SU/R 18:36**

- 112 Yeah, but that's also I think that in that company, it's also the transition period, because like, we used to work in the same room, everyone was like: "Okay, I know how many times you went to the kitchen and stuff". And now you kind of don't know it, and they will learn it, I'm pretty sure. They're still a very young company. And I think we'll get there. But yeah, if you build it like this from the very beginning, and you have this, like, you know, in mind the whole time, it's probably much easier than actually transitioning from this old style to where the world is going..
-
- 113 **Camilla** 19:12
-
- 114 Yeah, definitely. Do you feel you said you have a lot of interaction with colleagues? How were you able to build that was that just because of the regular conversations that you had and knowing how they work?
-
- 115 **Francis, SU/R** 19:31
-
- 116 Honestly, maybe that's even not remote not remote, but more this **startup spirit**. Because I mean, managers do a pretty good job here when selecting the people who work here. And it doesn't matter if the person is here for two years, more than me or just like two weeks joined. I can feel they manage to select the people who are super interested and eager to build this project. So they're not doing it because of their job and they're getting paid, so they should do it. But it's more like, "Yeah, let's build this! This sounds so cool! And you can actually feel it in all these conversations. When you just brought some update and there are so many people from different teams jumping in with some comments. And designers are getting annoyed because everyone has an opinion on design. And developers get annoyed because everyone like knows how to build a database. But they just really want to be involved so much, that I think this is one of the main factors because you actually see that people just want to make it good. And want to make it work.
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- 117 **Camilla** 20:40
-
- 118 So it's more like the vision and the mission that really connects and unites the people.
-
- 119 **Francis, SU/R** 20:46
-
- 120 Yep. And I think it comes from the founders in the first place. Because I mean, for me, personally, I cannot speak for everyone, of course, but for me, it was like that, from the moment of the interview when I was just interviewing for this company. Like, yeah, they're nice. Sounds cool. But then, after a couple of rounds... the interview process was not long, but there were a lot of conversations with different people involved. Also, maybe because my role involves so many teams. And with each call I just thought "Oh, they're so cool. And they really are so committed to their goal and have the vision to not just build this to earn money." And, for me, the moment I joined, before I even joined, when they made me an offer, I just thought: "Yeah, I just want to work in this culture. I really want to try it out, how it feels. Since then I can feel it in most of the employees, this enthusiasm of "Yeah, let's make it better!".
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- 121 **Camilla** 21:52
-
- 122 I mean, everyone I talked to up to now from [organization] was so amazed by the culture and how everything works and how they managed to make it work remotely so well. So I think they built something really, really great there. That's very cool.
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- 123 **Francis, SU/R** 22:08
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- 124 That's true. I mean, they're like, really amazing, guys. They have a vision, and I think that's what's important. After that you can make everything work if you just find the right people and then find the right goal.
-
- 125 **Camilla** 22:27
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126	Okay, I'm going more on like a meta level. A little funky question: How would you describe your company in three words?
127	Francis, SU/R 22:36
128	In three words? [Pause]... I never was goo in these kinds of questions. Do we still talk about the working culture or like about the company in general?
129	Camilla 22:54
130	Culture is probably good.
131	Francis, SU/R 22:58
132	So I would say empowering. [Pause] Dynamic. And young.
133	Camilla 23:11
134	Interesting. Can you remember an instance where you felt especially proud to be part of your company?
135	Francis, SU/R 23:18
136	Yeah. Yeah, I'm glad you asked [laughs]. I remember a really proud moment when we were preparing for them [Trade Fair], that was a fair for B2B [software product] companies, let's put it like that. And we were building a some feature that will be presented there, in some not that ready mode, but in a mode where it can be presented. I just had an idea, I had it in mind and I shared it with the guys from just the product team, no one else. And then the designer instantly designed it and we developed it. Several days later it was presented by our co-founders on the fair there. And that was a moment of "Wow, yeah, that's how it actually feels like to own the product". You just have this idea. You shared it with the team, it sounded cool. So you did it. It was not something big. But then it is shown in this huge crowd at the fair. It's like yeah, nice. And also with this fair, there was a distinct moment. I think there was a day when all four co-founders were on vacation. And I was like: "I cannot imagine that this is how much they trust their team, that everything will be prepared! There will be no problem. That they can just go there and relax for even one day... and all of them. Yeah, that felt good"
137	Camilla 24:56
138	Yeah, empowering and dynamic.
139	Francis, SU/R 25:00
140	Yeah, exactly. Yeah.
141	Camilla 25:02
142	Not bad.
143	Do you feel very committed? And do you feel a strong sense of identification towards the company?
144	Francis, SU/R 25:23
145	I do feel committed. I don't know about identification. But maybe if you just explained what you mean with that,
146	Camilla 25:30
147	If you like, identify with the culture of the company, and you really say: "We did this!"

148 **Francis, SU/R** 25:38

149 Yeah, I think I'm still in the process of adapting talking about "we". But it's probably not because of the culture of the company, because it's amazing. But more that it's a completely new field for me. [industry specific information]. So although I am the Product Owner, and I try to own the product as much as possible, there is still so much stuff that I just have no experience with. This whole [mission statement] is a very new thing for me. And, of course, I learned a lot in this more than half a year already. But still, I feel like these guys were in this for so long. And they basically know everything. So this identification will still come I would say. I cannot say "we", for some of the parts of it. So I definitely feel "we" when I talk about the product team right now. That's like, absolutely there. But for the whole company, I think I'm not there yet.

150 **Camilla** 26:41

151 Work in Progress. How difficult would it be to leave your company at this point in time?

152 **Francis, SU/R** 26:55

153 [Pause] Well, I mean, so for now... I will not say that I will never leave them or something... but right now, I don't see any reason why would I decide to leave. So I cannot imagine what I should be offered, to make me want to leave. So for me, it's never about money. And I mean, yeah, you can argue that maybe it's not the most sexy product that you can find, it's not SpaceX. But it really feels very good. And it is very important for me to feel that I can learn from someone and I mean, just to work... looking at half of the people in this company and just sitting watching them the whole day working. Like oh my god, I learn so much from you. So yeah, I cannot imagine why I would decide to leave right now. Because it still feels so fresh and so interesting and super exciting. And this SpaceX example it comes not out of nowhere. Actually, when I was looking for a new job. I saw one job posting on LinkedIn for some company that was doing something with satellites. And I was like "Oh, my God, space is so amazing. I just, I need to do it". And I went in a couple of rounds and interviews. But then since I couldn't work full time, they just stopped interviews. And I was like yeah, now I need to find something this space industry, I need to do it. And I think a couple of months after I joined [company] I honestly talked to one of the cofounders saying: "you know what, you actually made me stop thinking about space. Like, how did you do it? I don't know, but I don't need space anymore! So that's... yeah! Answering your question. I have no idea. It will be probably easy for me to leave once I kind of have reason. So I just know the person who jumped from one job to another. But when I leave, it's like a very important reason and here I don't see this coming anytime soon.

154 **Camilla** 29:21

155 If you were to leave, what would you miss most?

156 **Francis, SU/R** 29:32

157 I mean, it's very hard to say culture because it's about everything, right. But if I need to pick something specific, for example, that was so one of the co-founders who is kind of my direct manager who was also in the product. And we have this weekly check ins like one to one where we discuss like everything from the vacation plans to like roadmap planning and stuff like that. So this is something that is pretty interesting. This super close collaboration with someone who is basically the author of the whole product we are building. And like you can I think I will miss that then. Just seeing super awesome guys talking, chilling. Yeah probably that. Feeling this super flat hierarchy. You will never feel like you're working student here and I'm the co-founder of the company. And that's really nice to have the super equal conversations and to actually feel that if you have some idea, and you even feel that the guy has a different opinion, but he truly respected it. You're the product owner, that's your decision! I don't have to agree on that. But okay.

158 **Camilla** 30:49

159	Well, so no micromanagement and a whole lot of trust.
160	Francis, SU/R 30:53
161	Yeah. And from the very beginning, I would say, it's also probably the why the hiring process takes some time, because they kind of want to make sure that they hire the right people they can trust from the very beginning. So yeah.
162	Camilla 31:09
163	Nice. I might have to apply. It sounds so good.
164	Francis, SU/R 31:16
165	I just also feel that this whole conversation when I hear like in my head... am I promoting you. Like, is it what I'm doing?
166	Camilla 31:26
167	But no, if it works so well! It's not a given, right? There's so many companies where it doesn't work at all.
168	Francis, SU/R 31:34
169	Yeah, I totally get it. And I mean, I did have an experience in this company from Stuttgart. I would not say it's not working there. But still it was this transition period. And you could see all the struggles they had, and how it felt for them. But they will get there.
170	Camilla 31:53
171	I think especially like management style, I think if they're so used to having everyone in the office and seeing them, and that's like, what they've been used to for years, and then everyone's gone. And they need to really, really trust the people to do their work. And that transition for many managers, I think is difficult. And if that doesn't happen, then it's hell for employees.
172	Francis, SU/R 32:15
173	But the weird thing is actually that, I mean, they had to work in this world mode [remote] for almost two years. And for most of the companies, I think it even had the positive effect, because the employees were more relaxed, because they didn't need to stress out about the role. They don't need to waste like two hours of the day just to get there. And even though they kind of saw that everything is working, and people are even used to working like that, they still somehow try to bring it back despite the fact that it is working already. So the argument that we're afraid you will stop working if you're not in the office anymore, is not there anymore. Somehow it's still in the mind.
174	Camilla 32:57
175	definitely. It's super weird. But like also looking at I read a lot of interviews and papers also for managers, and so many actually still play that concern that concern card. And it could be there are of course there are people that won't work as productively at home more than need to be forced. But if you have the right culture, the right resources in place, and if you hire the right people, then it shouldn't be a problem.
176	Francis, SU/R 33:30
177	Yeah, and some of them even tried to sell it like "yeah, we are fine with hybrid mode, so you only can come to the office just three days per week" ... like how is that hybrid?
178	Camilla 33:46

179	Let's see how that goes forward. I think I hope more managers are going to understand that I mean, like small especially b2b sauce I feel like their managers are super forward thinking and super progressive and they really understand the topic and are committed to that topic and put it into practice but the bigger global companies it's a different story.
180	Francis, SU/R 34:10
181	That's true.
182	Camilla 34:14
183	We're almost at the end I just have a couple of closing very open questions.
184	Francis, SU/R 34:18
185	I was waiting for some tricky one where I would suddenly say something
186	Camilla 34:24
187	What do you enjoy most about working remotely?
188	Francis, SU/R 34:38
189	I think the possibility to choose the place where I work from not even the time. Because like still since so many conversations are involved in my job I still like need to have this fixed time slot so it's not like I can work from Taiwan during their day and it's night here. But it is the place, because it makes you so much more free. I went to England to visit my brother and I didn't need to take a vacation for that, which is nice. Especially for those you who come from different countries, they always have this: should I waste my whole vacation to go and visit my family, or can I also have the normal vacation? And so this choice is not there anymore, which is super cool. So I think if we just pick like, office versus not office, this flexibility is something that is like really cool.
190	Camilla 35:31
191	Yeah. And what about being a remote employee is most challenging?
192	Francis, SU/R 35:42
193	Probably to build this personal connection to people. Because you can be just a group of people working on the same project, or you can be like a really cool team. And in order to be a really cool team, you need to connect and something more than just the tasks you're working on right now. It can be super random, like 10 minutes per day when you're in the office, you do just connect to people. And you also have, as you mentioned, to a beer after work. Since you're already there, it's so much easier than just planning something. We even met a couple of times with the colleagues who are in [German city] right now. But it's still, it's so hard, I don't know why. When you're in the office, you easily go for beer, like for another hour after work. But when you're like in two different parts of [German city], somehow it becomes more difficult. But I think it's also a transitional period. Because we are so used to one thing, and now we're trying to find these ways to stay connected remotely, but that's probably the most challenging one.
194	Camilla 36:51
195	Okay, yeah, [German city] is too big. And there are too many other options.
196	Francis, SU/R 36:58
197	And you know, after this coffee, there is also an option, should I not go anywhere?

198	Camilla 37:05
199	And now it's so dark and cold is like, do I really want to leave the house now?
200	Francis, SU/R 37:10
201	Yeah. So yeah, that's, that's the one.
202	Camilla 37:15
203	Can you think of specifically looking at the hybridity of your team that you do have an office where many people are something that is particularly challenging in that hybrid setting?
204	Francis, SU/R 37:30
205	No, not really. Okay.
206	Camilla 37:35
207	Okay, yeah. Is there anything else on your mind? about the topic? Anything else you thought? Yeah, yeah.
208	Francis, SU/R 37:42
209	Yeah, I just wanted to ask you back, like, how was it studying in the remote world, like in person, this come to university because basically, university is not about studying that involves like connection to people. So how is it for you?
210	[private chat]
235	Francis, SU/R 44:27
236	No. I even don't know... he joined a couple of months ago, right? Maybe I did see him. No, I didn't. He was. Maybe at the summer party. There were so many people I saw for the first time. I don't know too many faces. That's a different topic for your search. German speaking companies, vs. employees in German speaking companies. So employees who don't do German in German speaking companies. So, despite everything being in English here... there were so few employees who don't speak German, that in these casual events, it's so hard sometimes for people to switch or even keep in mind that they need to speak English. That's the difference research maybe for your PhD or something. You can also invite me for the interview because my previous company, I actually saw this whole process in the office, right in front of my eyes. Because I was employee number three who didn't speak German. And when I was leaving, there was it was just the management who spoke German. So I saw these kitchen meetings, turning from German to English... that is so interesting to observe! It's so cool. And I never took it personally and I don't have a problem. I understand it's just the habit. And it was so interesting. So yeah, the summer party as well. We talked a lot. And then you stand there, like, shall they come up to this table? But is the German it will be such an effort for them to switch... Yeah.
237	Camilla 46:28
238	That's I also I'm doing the interviews in English, because all the software companies I know have like English as a German, you also have English as a working language. And usually, there are so many international people.
239	Francis, SU/R 46:42
240	I wouldn't be able to tell you a lot in German. So that's a good choice of language.

9.3. Transcript – Interview with Oscar (Start-Up/Office)

Date: Friday, 30.09.2022

Age: 34; **Department:** Sales; **Nationality:** German; **Time at company:** 11 months

Speakers:

Interviewer: Camilla

Interviewee: Oscar

7 **Camilla** 00:04

8 Alright, thank you again for taking the time. To start off, can you tell me a little bit about your role?

9 **Oscar, SU/O** 00:12

10 Yes. So I work as a training lead. So I design all the trainings in the digital skills space. So related to data, agility, remote hybrid work skills for large enterprises. So when there's a team that needs a specific skill, I design a training and with our learning platform, we give them the content to actually learn the skill. So that's what I do.

11 **Camilla** 00:48

12 I actually saw your course on hybrid learning already. So you're actually an expert for this topic. Perfect. Maybe you can give me some more insights afterwards as well. But to continue with the catalogue for now, have you ever worked hybridly before?

13 **Oscar, SU/O** 01:07

14 Yes, so I did a PhD in psychology. And there I worked three days per week, remotely, two days in the university.

15 **Camilla** 01:16

16 Okay. So you're already experienced in that, when did you start with [company] and how was your onboarding?

17 **Oscar, SU/O** 01:25

18 I started in January, this year, so I'm now nine months in actually. My onboarding was because it was remotely a lot was based in notion. So there was a large document, explaining the culture, who I have to meet, to get to know the culture, what my tasks are. So basically, it left no questions unanswered. And if I had had questions, I easily could have asked my buddy. So I had an onboarding buddy, who met with me, I think twice or three times that week, and the week after, just to make sure that everything's okay. My direct supervisor, so my boss, one of the founders here, he gave me feedback, once every week, in the first three weeks, just to make sure that our processes are aligned, and to make sure that expectations are aligned. So a lot of knowledge management to sum it up a lot of knowledge management and a lot of hybrid and remote face to face interaction.

19 **Camilla** 02:45

20 Okay, I see. So your onboarding was remote, but you do work in the office admin stuff, or do you work remotely?

21 **Oscar, SU/O** 02:53

22	Well, in January, the office was closed because of COVID.
23	Camilla 02:56
24	And now you choose to go to the office regularly. How come?
25	Oscar, SU/O 03:13
26	Multiple reasons. So first reason is personality. So I am quite an extrovert and I enjoy and I get a lot of energy from meeting and talking to people to some extent. So I'm not like super extroverted. But yes, I do enjoy and get energy out of working with people that when they are actually in the same room with me. This can also be a video meeting, it doesn't matter, really. But I noticed when I'm at home for a specific amount of time, and I learned that during COVID When I'm at home alone, working alone, during a specific amount of time. I become unproductive. And mind wander a lot, start to procrastinate. And this does not happen in the office. So that's the first thing I think personality I just thrive on interaction. And the second is to choose the best combination of tasks that should be done socially, or that should be done in silence. So there are some tasks where I think it's best if you just have a person sitting next to you, but many tasks are analytical and you just need to have some peace and quiet time to get them done. And that's why sometimes I need to be home for a couple of hours, just to think something through. But yeah, that doesn't last very long. So I learned that during my work as a scientist that science is not for me because it's too much analytical work alone. So if I was interested in work, my personality unfortunately did not match it. So I had to find something else.
27	Camilla 04:57
28	That's a very valuable learning though. I had same learning during COVID. I went crazy alone, like work and studying and just staying at home all day, it was horrible. How confident do you feel? In your role at [company]? Do you have all the necessary resources you need? All the support you need?
29	Oscar, SU/O 05:20
30	Hmmm well, yes and no. So we are a startup. So there are never enough resources and never enough support, we have to basically do everything. You have to be comfortable with doing stuff that is completely out of your comfort zone. But I think if we talk relatively within the space of startups, yes, I'm very happy with the resources. So as a remote first company, we're very, very active on Slack. So whenever there's a question you have, you almost always get an answer very, very, very immediately within that hour. Most people are completely fine that you call them and drop them in the daily processes. But that's all that you can do with digital tools, right? I mean, it's like, you can just say, Do not disturb me, or you can say, Yes, I'm online. So technically, you can stop. So it's always a matter of communication. And that works quite well here. So I think because it has always been the remote first company, the processes here are perfectly set up to still foster communication. I mean, you cannot, of course, completely replace it. But we can approach I think, an optimum at least.
31	Camilla 06:28
32	Okay. Interesting. Yeah. I'm looking at your experiences with hybrid collaboration. Do you feel that you collaborate the same way with your remote colleagues as the on-site colleagues? Or are there differences in that hybridity?
33	Oscar, SU/O 06:49
34	Well, it's a difficult question to answer because the ones I do collaborate with, I work with, or I worked with by chance,
35	Camilla 07:05

36	the ones that you maybe usually work with, like your closest team that you meet with often how does that collaboration look like? How do you guys meet?
37	Oscar, SU/O 07:14
38	Yes, okay. That clears it up. So my team, they are scattered in [German city], Rotterdam and here in [German city]. So it's completely remote, my direct team. The people outside the team that I work with, they are luckily based completely in [Germany city]. So that makes it a bit more easy, I think. But my team is scattered around Netherland and Germany. And what we do is we try to do Agile workflows. So we have daily stand ups. When we do project work, we have sprints, so it's quite clear what the tasks are, what kind of meetings we need for that to accomplish these tasks. And we are a lot in gather town. So when we do stuff together, like for example, in a startup, everyone has to do outreach. So even if you're not a salesperson. So what we do is we did an experiment that we want to test, then we come together and gather town. And it's we discuss basically, while we're doing tasks, some people might talk while the others just continue. So that way we basically have group collaboration, even though we are not in the same physical space.
39	Camilla 08:32
40	Where did you say you meet, in Garda town? What's that?
41	Oscar, SU/O 08:37
42	Oh, my God, you don't know it?
43	Camilla 08:38
44	No!
45	Oscar, SU/O 08:40
46	You want me to show you? [opens screen share] You get an exclusive look; you can't tell anyone that I showed you. So gather town is basically a very, very, very small and uncomplicated metaverse. So, you have tiny, tiny people, that you can basically create and walk around there. And luckily, nobody is here right now so nobody will ask me why I bring strangers to our workspace. But here is that you can see. So that's basically like our [company] space and see, like all these little offices there where people can go and private so people won't hear them chat. But other than that, it's completely exactly the same, like actual interaction. So when I walk here, somebody would come up to me and our video screens would briefly sync with each other. But if we walk past each other, they would vanish again as if we were walking past each other on the street. And here you can just basically go through to a meeting room with five people and chat. As if you were doing that and zoom and everything. It feels a bit more as if you are working in the same space. And of course, you can be more efficiently connect with each other. The product, people are here a lot, the developers because they need to work on code together a lot. So they talk a lot. So let me see whether somebody is actually here. But I think it doesn't look like it. Oh, yes, [colleague] and [colleague]. But you can see that they are looking at desks. So they are in "do not disturb" right now.
47	Camilla 08:40
48	Cool! And you said the product people use that a lot? Is it mostly the product people or who uses it how often?
49	Oscar, SU/O 10:46
50	And the trainings team. So my team, we use it a lot as well. And I think [pause] yeah, no, I think our two teams use it for the most. I don't know, I mean I use it really for social reasons. Because one of our new

entrants, she's from Rotterdam, and she is also a very extroverted person. So I think, for her, I made this decision to onboard her as best as possible. She shouldn't like be sitting there all day alone in her room and translating slides or something. So she should feel like an interactive workplace. So that's why we work there a lot.

51 **Camilla** 11:26

52 And do you feel that that replaces some of the like Office vibe that it manages to do that?

53 **Oscar, SU/O** 11:31

54 Yes, I think so. So yes, for sure. I mean, it can definitely approach it. It has the same vibe to it that you are in the same space. You want to work alone.... so if you wear headphones at your desk, that's the same as if you just mute your tab or mute gather town so that you don't hear other people speak. But they can still ring a bell and you would get a notification as if you were sitting at a desk and somebody's like tapping on your shoulder. So I think definitely, I feel like when we are sitting there together, it definitely feels as if we're just sitting in an office space, where multiple desks are placed and multiple people are seated there.

55 **Camilla** 12:16

56 Cool, really nice solution. I saw these things like online already that there are those kinds of solutions. But I've never talked to someone who actually uses them because it always looked a little, like complicated, or, but nice that it works. Cool. Could you tell me a little bit about your relationship to your colleagues and the team? Do you have examples where you felt particularly maybe connected?

57 **Oscar, SU/O** 12:41

58 Yeah, so there I think I'm more connected to people that are also at least sometimes in the office, that's just the case. So I think in a hybrid setting, I mean, we do initiatives that try to connect everybody with each other. So like, for example, random coffee calls, learn and lunch, so that people have lunch together with somebody who's not in the same city. But yeah it has its limits. And just by nature, and convenience of somebody's always around you, just get to know that person more easily. So I think yes. I do think that those people that come to the [German city] office here that I see at least every two or three weeks, or sometimes even three to four times a week, I am closer to. So for example, one developer, we haven't worked together at all, but he's always present at the social occasion, because he lives 30 to 40 kilometers away. And that way we connected and we get along fantastically. And I think that could have been more difficult if he didn't join the social occasions. So for a hybrid or remote first company. I think you have to have three to four big social events per year to foster a culture, otherwise it's near to impossible.

59 **Camilla** 14:06

60 Yeah. And also interesting that you say that you're actually closer to the people that are in the office regularly and not to the people in your team like professionally, probably.

61 **Oscar, SU/O** 14:17

62 Professionally yes, but even the team members, they every once in a while they come to [Münster]. So I suggested to the new intern that she would, because her mother that was close by, that she would come for the first week for the first few days if she felt comfortable with that, of course, that you would come to [German city] so that she basically gets to know us face to face. And the other team members as well. Every once in a while just by chance they come to [German city] because they have friends here they have a girlfriend here or a boyfriend or because my boss is originally also from some town nearby and he I think also knows that it's important to show his face every once in a while. So that's why he joins. So yeah, my team members actually also, sometimes they come to the office or I plan to go to [German city] in October

	to work from there for a week. So I think these occasional social occasions, even if you just work together and important!
63	Camilla 15:22
64	Interesting. How would you describe the importance of trust in your team?
65	Oscar, SU/O 15:28
66	Trust, okay. Yeah. I don't know, very, very I mean, as always, I think that's independent from the setting you're working. I mean, how do you mean this question?
67	Camilla 15:42
68	Within collaboration, working with your colleagues? Is it important for you guys to have trust? Kind of rhetorical question, and how did you manage maybe if you have a lot of trust to build that trust in a remote setting?
69	Oscar, SU/O 15:56
70	Okay, so I see. So I think that's [trust] also completely independent, be it remote or in person. Because that's just I think, the conclusion of regular and personalized feedback. So if you talk to a person and you talk on a meta level a lot, what you expect from each other, at least once a week. Clearly define boundaries clearly define how you want to design the working relationship, I think that way you build trust immediately. And that does not matter whether you are the same space or not. I think that might even be it might even be easier if it's in a video setting, or in a remote setting. Because if you're in the same physical space, other things come into play. You start more with having coffee talks together, so it gets a bit more personal. So the boundaries become more fuzzy, I think. Right? Because with some of my colleagues, I don't know whether they are still my colleagues. Some of them are already my friends. But maybe I even haven't even noticed that. So I think this friendship colleague, boundary or supervisory friendship boundary is easier to maintain in the remote setting, while you are still be able to trust. Because that's just a consequence of talking to each other and giving feedback.
71	Camilla 17:14
72	Okay, cool. Are there any instances where you feel that remote and onsite workers are treated differently?
73	Oscar, SU/O 17:25
74	In general, or here at the company?
75	Camilla 17:28
76	Both maybe if you have any other experiences to share?
77	Oscar, SU/O 17:33
78	Yeah, I think in general, at least in Germany, the culture is still that people who work a bit more from home that they will be at a disadvantage. So I'm pretty sure that in many, many, many, many companies, particularly in the enterprise sector, they are still in older, patriarchal culture that benefits workabees at the office as opposed to effective workers at home. I'm very sure of that. But I think in a remote first company, particularly to start up with a younger workforce, that is a bit more progressive. I think it is there to a much, much, much, much lesser extent. But every person has biases. So I think even if the founders think that they are rational and will make every decision like a robot, they will not. And on the unconscious level, they will think always "prefer". And so for the recording, I just use air quotes. They will always "prefer" for a certain tasks, somebody where they had an accumulation of different personal experiences with I think. So I don't

	know, for what factors actually... I don't think it's necessarily only salary or promotions. I think it's a bit more subtle, like project work or something like those interactions, decisions. Who is responsible for what I don't know exactly what the base is there. But yeah, I do think that I think it's easier to prioritize people if you have a personal connection to them.
79	Camilla 19:07
80	And at [company]. Do you have that feeling there as well? Or is it different?
81	Oscar, SU/O 19:16
82	No, I haven't had this feeling yet. But it might also be the case that I haven't had this yet, because I'm one of the lucky persons that I have a lot of personal connections with these people. So I might actually be at the benefit. So but I don't notice that right. So I might be right now the beneficiary of the bias that's possible. But no, I don't want to sit here. I think it's because we have so many remote events or hybrid events.
83	Camilla 19:48
84	Nice little funky question. How would you describe your company culture in three words?
85	Oscar, SU/O 19:54
86	In three words? Uhm... progressive, [pause] intellectually demanding and fun.
87	Camilla 20:10
88	fun? Yeah, that's nice. That's important. How do you feel at your company in general? Do you feel a strong sense of connection and identification towards the company?
89	Oscar, SU/O 20:24
90	What was the second word?
91	Camilla 20:26
92	Identification?
93	Oscar, SU/O 20:27
94	Identification? Yes, I do. That's a bit unfortunately, also part of my personality. So when I was working at the University of scientists I also had this huge amount of identification and makes things a bit more difficult, that you cannot have distance. So yes, totally, I totally identify what we are, which I'm very annoyed by. I wish I actually has less identification for sure. But yeah, I think everybody identifies very strongly working at [company].
95	Camilla 20:57
96	Okay. If you were to leave, which I'm assuming you wouldn't, in the very near future, what would you miss most?
97	Oscar, SU/O 21:03
98	[very long pause] Depends on what the next case will be. But let's say I don't choose something from the startup space, then I will, of course, miss working with the amazing tools we have here. So in terms of knowledge management, or communication, it's a very different story when you work, I don't know, say at a large bank, or where they work here, so. So I really enjoy all the tools we have here for my productivity. And yeah, of course, it's probably a selection of eight to ten people, I would miss very dearly. So I really

would, I would hope that a there won't be forgotten forever. But yeah, I think I definitely build some really good connections to some, some people. Yeah, for sure. I would miss that. Yeah.

99 **Camilla** 22:06

100 Cool. We're already almost at the end. I have some closing questions. What about working in a hybrid team do you enjoy most?

101 **Oscar, SU/O** 22:16

102 In a hybrid team... that you can choose the environment that is most effective for certain tasks.

103 **Camilla** 22:29

104 True! And what is most challenging about working in a hybrid team?

105 **Oscar, SU/O** 22:40

106 as opposed to?

107 **Camilla** 22:42

108 as as opposed to everyone in the office.

109 **Oscar, SU/O** 23:02

110 Spontaneous brainstorming sessions and spontaneous meetings, I think. Because it's a lot more scheduled in calendars and stuff like that, so I think the spontaneity is a bit missing.

111 **Camilla** 23:17

112 And also, maybe what I heard from other interview partners, not at your firm but in others that sometimes the processes or the meetings are much longer if you're in person versus if they're virtually you have like these strict settings and usually back to back meetings and everyone has to leave and when you're in the office like they can take longer and even brainstorming Yeah, interesting. That's actually already what I have for the plan questions do you have anything else you want to add maybe from your experiences.

9.4. Transcript – Interview with Matt (Start-Up/Office)

Date: 02.10. 2022

Age: 33; **Department:** Sales; **Nationality:** Germany; **Time at company:** 8 months

Speakers:

Interviewer: Camilla

Interviewee: Matt

3 **Matt, SU/O** 00:03

4 Ok, let's go!

5 **Camilla** 00:09

6 Thank you for taking the time.

7 **Matt, SU/O** 00:12

8	Very welcome.
9	Camilla 00:13
10	To start off, can you tell me a bit about your role at [company]?
11	Matt, SU/O 00:18
12	I am an account executive, which means I am that's the sales role, the commercial team. So I am the one selling the product, the platform the software platform to clients. Doing demos and taking them to the funnel, and ultimately, hopefully signing the contract.
13	Camilla 00:36
14	Okay. So [company] is a hybrid company. Have you ever worked hybridly before?
15	Matt, SU/O 00:45
16	Not in that extent actually. Most were really on-site companies where it was really full office except for maybe a couple of days a week, or maybe one day a week or something. But there you always had to ask if you can stay home.
17	Camilla 01:00
18	Okay, interesting. So your first really, truly hybrid experience. Cool, yes. When did you start at [company] and how was your onboarding?
19	Matt, SU/O 01:11
20	I started three months ago. And I am in the [German city] office. So the company has several offices - or I mean two really like that you could call physical offices in [German city] and in [German city], so I am in the [German city] office. But my onboarding was in [German city]. So I it was more of my choice so that I offered that I could be there. And also, I think it was the I think the Friday before my first week was the summer party. So it was easy to combine. And also it was it was great to meet all the people at the summer party first, and then go into the onboarding week. So I had my onboarding in [German city], on-site in kind of the main office.
21	Camilla 01:50
22	Okay, so physical onboarding. Did that work? Well, were there any challenges?
23	Matt, SU/O 01:59
24	[Sigh] Yeah, I think there were some challenges that were internally, where some things were just not as prepared as they should have been. So in terms of, you know, account setup, and just overall, just me being able to navigate through all the content. So we had a notion page with the content.. just for the context, they try to do like a general onboarding for the entire company. And then they try to do like a sales onboarding, for the sales commercial team. And because of some internal changes, the sales onboarding was more was a bit rough. The general onboarding was actually quite like planned. And I could just go through that document and schedule my own calls in the first week and have some intro calls and coffees and yeah, that's kind of how it went.
25	Camilla 02:53
26	Okay, cool. How confident do you feel in your role at [company]? Do you have all the necessary resources to fulfil your role physically, but also support from managers and so on?

27 **Matt, SU/O 03:08**

28 Yeah, I actually do. I think that, like, there is a big challenge in this sales role, not only being a sales role, but also like giving a lot of feedback to product, because we're still in this phase of finding full product market fit. So it's a bit of a hybrid roles, so to speak. And that is very, that's very cool. It's very, it's a different challenge than only doing sales. And that's also something I like, and it's much like appreciated by the company. The one thing that I could use more of would be... Yeah, I mean, product market fit, right. Like just the product and how finished it is. But that's probably always the case with a lot of software products, and obviously, also with young companies. But other than that, in terms of physical resources, in terms of advice in terms of my manager being available, who's in the same office as I am in [German city], which is really cool. Yeah, there's, there's everything is there that I need!

29 **Camilla 04:07**

30 Cool. Can you tell me a bit about your experience with hybrid collaboration? So who are the people you were closest with? You already said your manager is in the office, but maybe, do you have other colleagues that you have to meet with regularly? What do these meetings look like?

31 **Matt, SU/O 04:25**

32 Yeah, so although I am mostly on site, where probably 80%-90% of the time I'm in the office, a lot of the company is remote. They could come into the office, but they're remote. A lot of it is the product team. So in [German city], there is not a single product person. So everything that's product related, especially when it comes to feedback and getting the prospects' needs and voice their opinion that's always digital right. There's hardly ever a physical meeting talking about these things with the product team. So that's mostly being handled in Slack, in notion, or we use notion a lot to just track things. And yeah, when you asked me about the experience [pause]... I'm very much an on-site person, I like to be in touch with people. But still, we do have some processes and some... Oh, let me put it a different way. We have a very communicative company culture, product is really open. And there are a lot of different Slack channels, for example, regarding different features for the product, that we try to take in a project way, forward together. So there's a lot happening in this Slack channels, where it's going back and forth. So the communication is actually quite good I think. It's more about, in general, more about setting up a proper process to build those things like to build the product, but I don't think that has anything to do with being remote or not. So it works quite well. And it's mostly with marketing.... marketing, as well is entirely in [German city] or remote. So that connection is also. But yeah, also works quite well.

33 **Camilla 06:21**

34 Okay, over slack communication works, then you do a remote meeting, collaboration works well. What about the information exchange? You already said you'd use notion I think. Do you feel that the information exchange in this hybrid format works well? Or is there maybe specific information that is held in the office involuntarily and doesn't get out to the rest of the team?

35 **Matt, SU/O 06:46**

36 Yeah, I think there is. I mean, yeah, we try to not have so many personal conversations. Like one on one where it's either hidden in a Slack one on one chat, or there's... so anything that's work related should be out in the open, work related in a way where anyone else could benefit from it. And yeah, we do have remote meetings. I mean, there are certain things that are hard to communicate in a digital way, I think. And it's maybe more the in between things. It's more the personal communication, because you hardly ever have a chat on slack with two or three people about lunch options or about football games. Right? It doesn't feel like that happens a lot. And that certainly is much easier on site and in person. But in terms of work... I

mean, I don't know, right? I don't know what I don't know. Could be, but I don't really have the feeling that there is necessarily a big problem or a big bottleneck of the work we do here.

37 **Camilla** 08:03

38 It seems like your company really managed to have that infrastructure in place, and really tell everyone to use those channels and use those platforms like notions to save that information. That's cool.

39 **Matt, SU/O** 08:16

40 Yeah, yeah. The question is then of navigating all the information, right. And that's definitely a challenge. But we are encouraged to do that. And usually it works well.

41 **Camilla** 08:28

42 Could you tell me a bit about your relationship to your colleagues? Do you feel close, not as close?

43 **Matt, SU/O** 08:38

44 So that's definitely the biggest thing, right of being not at the same place, is this personal relationship. And that's also one of the big reasons why I want to be in the office. I mean, one being, I just want to have some space away from my home where I live. And the other one is also to just be in touch with people and talk with them. So there is definitely a difference between the people that I need regular on a regular basis and the [German city] office, in terms of this personal relationship, and then also in terms of depth that we are what we are able to discuss not only personal but also workwise. I do think there is a difference. But I think what was really important was that I had the summer party, I had the first week of onboarding. So I did meet I think everybody that's working in the company, I did meet at least once and had a bit of exchange. So for me, there's a face to every person... or not only a face but living person in my head and I for me, that's really important. I could literally not imagine to work in a company that's fully remote where you might start and then you might see them like after half a year because that's when the Christmas party is or something. Because I need faces and voices and also not only remote on the video, right, but being in the same room and spending some time together. So I think that really helped with the relationship then also ongoingly in a remote setup. Yeah. So I would say it's definitely closer to the ones here in [German city]. But I also try to have a digital coffee every once in a while with people that are completely from different teams and somewhere else to just stay in touch. But yeah, that's much easier because I do know them in real life, as well, at least for a little bit.

45 **Camilla** 10:40

46 Yeah. In one company where I was before, there were so many people that I saw in the all hands meeting, where like "Oh, that's so cool, they're in Spain, I'd like to talk to them!". But I never had anything to do with them workwise and I never saw them in person. So I wouldn't like write them on Slack and be like, hey,

47 **Matt, SU/O** 10:55

48 Yeah, exactly. You also, you don't have many, many topics then Right? Because if you've met someone in person once, you kind of get their vibe, maybe a bit more, and then you do have something to start off. And of course, it's also probably possible, because we do try that right. I don't know if you've heard about this before in the other interviews, but we do try to do virtual socializing more. Like to have weekly events where we have this coffee circle thing, right? We're just randomly get assigned people to have coffee with. That's one thing, but we now also do kind of guided weeklies by HR. Where we are six, seven people, and then there is two rooms. And then there's a question and you discuss the question, and that could be everything. So we kind of encourage also to socialize a bit more, which I also think is cool. And if there's time, I'll always participate... or I make time, if there's like a customer interview or something, I will

	participate, because I think that's really important for a company and to feel some kind of togetherness and to get to know people better.
49	Camilla 12:02
50	And it has done that for you. It has made you feel more connected to the remote employees.
51	Matt, SU/O 12:06
52	Yeah!
53	Camilla 12:10
54	How would you describe the importance of trust in your team
55	Matt, SU/O 12:17
56	[Pause] hmmm the importance of trust in my team...
57	Camilla 12:24
58	Or also in the company, anyone you work with,
59	Matt, SU/O 12:29
60	Very important I would say. And in a way that it's kind of granted, or that it's assumed. So this is not a micromanaging company. So it does trust their employees to do their work and to contribute to the company's success in a way that's meaningful. It does trust the people to work fully remote, or to just like me today sit here in my kitchen and take a day where I am at home and not in the office or whatever I like. And also then in terms of the work itself, or the operations. Yeah, the organization trusts a lot! Maybe sometimes a bit too much I would even say. In terms of, you know, holding people accountable or tracking numbers, right. But that's also something that when a company grows, probably happens. So I would say it's important, and I would say it's granted, and I would say it works quite well. And it's also important for me as an employee, that this is the case. Because I did have other companies where it was a lot more micromanaging, and a lot more tracking, like a million times more tracking. And where it felt like they wouldn't trust the sole motivation or the just the work ethic of people.
61	Camilla 13:59
62	Cool. How do you think they managed to build that trust? Although it's a remote first company, and you guys don't see each other physically that much? How do they manage to build that culture of trust?
63	Matt, SU/O 14:15
64	That's a complicated question, right? Because I haven't been there too long. I mean, in general, I think what works well is leading by example, right? I mean, it's not only for working remote, but it's for a lot of things. So definitely leading by example, because also the founders are... my boss is often in the office, most of the times but you know, one of the other founders is, for example, working from Hamburg. Right? And but he's still obviously 100%, more than 100%, participating in everything and engaging and doing everything he can to move the company forward. So I think leading by example is one thing. Then probably hiring, just hiring, what kind of people you pick? Yeah, I think that works. And in terms of actually organizational... I don't think there's that many things in place yet to kind of guarantee that. I mean, we're still quite a small organization. So that still work. So we haven't come to a point yet where it's needed to kind of put some guardrails in place. I don't think there's many other things how this is encouraged.
65	Camilla 15:40

66	Yeah. Okay. I see. But nice that you have that that trust there and that the management is so forward thinking.
67	Matt, SU/O 15:49
68	Yeah, yeah, definitely. I mean, that's how they started from the beginning. They always have this in mind, right. They built the company, they started the company three years ago, with this setup. It was always like this. So it was always very clear that it had to work in a remote setting on all levels.
69	Camilla 16:12
70	Cool. Are there instances where you ever felt that onsite employees were maybe treated differently than remote employees?
71	Matt, SU/O 16:22
72	I mean, I'm only here for a short time. Right. So I don't, but it doesn't feel like it. I don't think so. I mean, I know about all the other benefits stuff that you could get when you work remotely, right. But obviously, the people in the office have a better just have a better setup. They have more drinks, more food, more tech infrastructure, right? That's of course a bit more complex when you are working remotely. So yeah.
73	Camilla 16:56
74	How would you describe your company culture in three words?
75	Matt, SU/O 17:01
76	What was the last word?
77	Camilla 17:03
78	Words? How would you describe your company culture in three words?
79	Matt, SU/O 17:08
80	Oh. [Pause] Oh, jeez. Do they have to be linked together in a sentence? Or can I just be can it just be random adjectives?
81	Camilla 17:19
82	Random
83	Matt, SU/O 17:25
84	Company culture, I mean, I will say positive. I mean, that's not because you that we talked about this, right, but Positive, Trusting. I actually say and the third thing... I don't only want to say positive things. But I mean, what could be something that could be improved. [Pause] Oh, yeah. There's a word that's positive that could be interpreted, interpreted negatively. Optimistic, I would say. Optimistic.
85	Camilla 18:14
86	How do you feel in general at the company? Have you already been able to build a strong sense of identification with the company?
87	Matt, SU/O 18:29
88	Yeah, interesting. I mean, I don't think I'm, I have never been somebody who strongly identifies with a company. Yeah, I mean, I will say, I start to identify with the challenge that this position is. And I do

	identify with the overall purpose of this company other than making money. I do identify with kind of the field of work we're in with education. And with education digitalization right those are two big fields we are trying to like do. And I do think that is something I'm very interested in. With the company itself... I mean, I do identify a bit with the people right with the founders, so I do I think they're cool. I think they're nice people. With the company I probably don't identify necessarily right, but I do identify with the people and with the overall like goal that we have. Yes.
89	Camilla 19:39
90	Mission. How difficult would it be for you to leave your company at this point?
91	Matt, SU/O 19:44
92	[Laughs] That's never too hard for me. I don't know. I mean, I wouldn't want to because I feel like there's a there's a challenge that I've taken and I want to fulfil it and help this company. So right now yeah, it would be hard. I mean, I would not want to do it right now.
93	Camilla 20:16
94	If, if you were to do it though, what would you miss most about [company]?
95	Matt, SU/O 20:23
96	The challenge. The challenge, because what we do is really complicated. It's a challenging field, it's a challenging product. Some things in the past haven't gone 100%, always in the same direction. So it's really a challenge to come into a company. And then to find a way... especially in sales, and then product market fit and trying to make this thing successful. Right. So I would really miss that challenge. Because I think it's hard to find that in other companies where you either you're very early, and you know, you it's not there yet, and then you're very late, and maybe product market fit is already there, or everything is a bit more set in stone, right. So at this company right now, we are very, everything is still very volatile. And we're still having to figure out a lot of things. And I really liked that challenge. So that would probably be very hard to find elsewhere.
97	Camilla 21:30
98	Okay. Cool. We're ready at the closing questions. What about working in the hybrid team do you enjoy the most?
99	Matt, SU/O 21:40
100	What about it? I mean, I think I enjoy that everybody can do what they want. Not what they want in general, right. But everybody is flexible to work in the way that he or she wants to do. [Pause] But I mean, to be honest, if I had the choice, if there would be 50 people in a company and you could find 50 people that would enjoy being in an office together every week for at least three or four days, I would pick that every time over a company where 50 People love to work from home, and it's fully remote. Right, I would definitely pick the first company. Because that's just what I personally enjoy more to have a lot of people around. But at the same time, that's not very realistic, maybe. And it's totally fine that that some people enjoy working from home, if it makes them happy, and if they stay productive, and yeah, then that's also totally fine.
101	Camilla 22:48
102	Do you think we're ever going to find a company again, where it's going to have such a like active office culture? Because I also fear that that those times are over somehow?
103	Matt, SU/O 22:58

- 104 I think it depends on the company, right? Depends on the team. I do think there's a lot of people out there that enjoy working in an office. And that will not die, right? Because there's too many things connected to that. Some of this is work related, because I do think some things are better in person. Just being creative and being in the same room feeling the vibe, the energy, exchanging ideas, it's just a different energy. So I do don't think that will be like replaced. Well, maybe if one day we have like digital rooms where it kind of feels the same. But you could do it with I don't know, whatever... maybe then, but right now I don't know. Yeah. And then the biggest thing is the personal aspect. Because if you spend 40 hours, at least of your week, with people, there is a lot of personal things going on a lot of stories, a lot of exchanges a lot of jokes. And that's also very hard to reproduce in a fully remote setting. So I do think that a lot of people want the flexibility, but still enjoy being around their colleagues and working together. For sure.
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- 105 **Camilla** 24:19
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- 106 Yeah, it's difficult for companies also to facilitate that. Because I mean, for the people like you and I who love the office and who would enjoy if everyone were in the office all the time. We still like also will work from home one day or the other, like if it's snowing outside, and we don't feel like leaving the house. And then it's difficult to facilitate everyone being able to come to the office while it's always like 50% of the chairs max that are filled. And yeah, I don't know how to how to handle that as an employer.
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- 107 **Matt, SU/O** 24:51
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- 108 Yeah, I think this space thing is... well now with the energy right and with the prices going up in most cities. Yeah, I mean our office here is pretty small, there's space for like six people. And the one in [German city] is too big. I mean, if there's like 10-15 people, but there's space for probably 30. Right? And that's, of course a challenge. So we probably need some kind of flexible way to use that space, maybe when it's empty for something else. Maybe you know, a meeting room or I don't know. I'm not too much fan of co working spaces. But that's, of course, also an option, right? That everybody just has a desk, you still are in touch somehow together, but you don't need. But in terms of pricing, it's mostly the same. So you know, you can also just get your own office. But yeah, there's definitely a challenge.
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- 109 **Camilla** 25:52
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- 110 Definitely. I mean, we already talked about a couple of challenges, but what would you say is the most or the biggest challenge for you working hybridly?
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- 111 **Matt, SU/O** 26:08
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- 112 Yeah, I would say staying in touch, right? Just having that personal connection to people. Because that does help also in business things, right? It does help if you have a good relationship with somebody, you get things done maybe quicker, or you know, more easily or you have an internal stakeholder that's with you on a certain topic. That's just the way it is right? It's never a technocracy, it's always also down to personal relationships. And yeah, so I think that's the biggest challenge to just stay in touch personally. Because if it's always fully remote, the personal thing tends to be the hard part. So it tends to be maybe more technical. The interactions are more technical, they're more guided by technology and more guided by maybe also efficiency or, and that may be good in a work way. But it does take away some things here and there, right.... some spice some things that make life also fun, and work, make work fun.
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- 113 **Camilla** 27:11
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- 114 Yeah, definitely. I have the feeling that maybe the next generation coming now like that are graduating and starting a job that have never worked in an office before maybe can't even understand what people talk about when they say office culture.
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- 115 **Matt, SU/O** 27:28
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- 116 Yeah, probably. Especially if they come out of school or university, where it's also has been a lot of like shifting towards the e-learning. Right. When I was in university, there was nothing. No e-learning, nothing, not a single course I had online, nothing. There was maybe some material online, but every single thing was in person. And that's 10 years ago. And now, they come to university. I mean, probably also, it's cool. They already know, with Corona start to do things more remotely at their computer. And yeah, it's probably a completely different generation. We also have people that do their internships, completely remotely, right... like internships!! [shocked]. The things where you're supposed to get to know things. And so you only get to know things digitally in a way. That's a bit... yeah... it's going to be weird a bit, for sure.
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- 117 **Camilla** 28:31
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- 118 I'm already feeling old when I talk to the young students, now they're starting the bachelor and talking about their life.. I'm like "Wow, we're living completely different worlds!" What I also found very interesting one, another interview partner from a different firm said, that was working remotely. She said, she loves working remotely. She's older, she knows what to do, she has lots of experience. But if she were young, it would be horrible. And she's scared of the fact that in 10, 20, 30 years, we're not going to have any more managers with soft skills. Because all the young generations only sitting in front of a screen and doesn't know how to talk to people anymore.
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- 119 **Matt, SU/O** 29:08
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- 120 Very technical. Yeah. Yeah, it could be. I mean, there's also soft skills involved in digital interactions. Right, for sure. But, yeah, different probably very much different.
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- 121 **Camilla** 29:20
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- 122 I don't know. I was thinking about that. I don't have an opinion about that yet. But I just found the thought very interesting.
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- 123 **Matt, SU/O** 29:27
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- 124 Yeah. I mean, it does already feel different. Because we do have sometimes standing meetings, like just every recurring meetings every week. And for example, when my bosses and [German city] we have it remotely. And so we have the same meeting with the same content and different settings. Right. Sometimes we sit next to each other and sometimes we're on Google meet or teams. And it's different! It's somehow different. I cannot pinpoint how the content changes or what we talked talk about, but it's certainly a different thing, although it's exactly the same meeting with the same content with the same topic with the same goal. But it's still a bit different. So, it's interesting to see that and to observe it.
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- 125 **Camilla** 30:16
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- 126 That's a good example. Because it's very difficult to pinpoint and to put into words, right, the feeling that makes it different. And I think, as you already said, it's also a personality thing, if you're an extrovert, and you get energy from people, or if it's more something that stresses you. How you perceive situations So it's something super subjective, and also, because of that very difficult to study. I think it's very interesting. Do you have anything else on your mind about the topic that you'd like to add?
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- 127 **Matt, SU/O** 30:59
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- 128 No! Well, maybe yes, maybe one thing. I would enjoy more time together, you know. Because usually you a summer party and then a Christmas party? That's usually the two big things, right. And what I think is important (and that's just my personal thing, because I like people and like, being around them) that there's a bit more effort. I mean, that's down to our company, other companies might make it differently, but it's always a challenge, because I think it's always this Christmas party, summer party thing. That there is like, I

don't know, bi-monthly or... you know, more encouragement to spend time together. Although the entire rest of of work can be remote. I think that would increase, improve some things and be very beneficial to do more regular all hands or, more on site together. Maybe other people just have the completely opposite opinion. Right? They would probably want to do the Christmas party also on Slack or something. But yeah. So I would say that would be a cool thing. But yeah,

129 **Camilla** 32:23

130 Cool. Thank you a lot. That was very insightful.

131 **Matt, SU/O** 32:28

132 You're welcome.

9.5. Transcript - Interview with Emma (MNC/Remote)

Date: Tuesday, 15.10.2022

Age: 35; **Department:** Sales; **Nationality:** Polish; **Time at company:** 14 moths

Speakers

Interviewer: Camilla

Interviewee: Emma

1 **Camilla** 0:00

2 Thank you again for taking the time, Emma. I'm excited to hear about your experiences. To start off, can you tell me a little bit about your role and your daily work?

3 **Emma, MNC/R** 0:14

4 I'm responsible for Poland, the Baltics, so Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. So of course, I'm opening new markets and delivering the best possible software for the [industry specific] lifecycle.

5 **Camilla** 0:33

6 And how do you how often do you see your colleagues since you're working completely entirely remotely?

7 **Emma, MNC/R** 0:40

8 I was thinking about that yesterday. And I think that knowing the current situation in the market, I will see most of them once per year, a few two or three times per year. My boss is the one person that I'm going to see the most time, like, three four times per year.

9 **Camilla** 1:14

10 What do you mean with current market situation? Is it getting harder to travel?

11 **Emma, MNC/R** 1:19

12 So the pandemic is over. But we are seeing the war in Ukraine, inflation and other factors change a little bit the economics, companies are being most cost sensitive. So if you don't need to travel because of the business purpose, you shouldn't. And also, I'm 35, I've got a husband and a kid. And it's great to meet my

friends from the office. But from my personal point of view, my business is here in Poland. And when I need to say goodbye to my kids for a few days, only for, you know, networking inside the organization... It's amazing, but I need to think about priorities.

13 **Camilla** 2:11

14 Yeah, I see. So it really is very remote. If you only see them, like once or twice a year. Have you ever worked remotely for a company before? Or is this the first time?

15 **Emma, MNC/R** 2:23

16 It's the first time. Of course, pandemic taught us how to do it, but I wasn't using it properly. I was always going to the office. Even now, I'm alone. But every single day, I'm in the office for my mental health and for this transition from my personal space to my business space. It's very important that I'm closing my private doors and opening my business doors.

17 **Camilla** 2:55

18 I feel that I have the same thing I need that too. So you have a shared office?

19 **Emma, MNC/R** 3:07

20 Yes, but I've got my private office, so I'm not in an open space with others.

21 **Camilla** 3:14

22 When did you start at your company?

23 **Emma, MNC/R** 3:18

24 August 1st 2021.

25 **Camilla** 3:22

26 Was the fact that you're going to be working remotely more of a benefit or more of a hurdle? How did that influence your decision process?

27 **Emma, MNC/R** 3:32

28 So to be honest, I didn't care. The biggest factor was my boss and [company] that I can open the new market. I am in charge of the business system, it was their main factor. Of course, it was a little bit challenging when I was making that decision. Because it's always difficult to, to open new market when you need to walk when you need to learn everything by yourself. Of course, we had onboarding, training and so on, but they are not with your colleagues, you cannot ask them about anything. You can call them only when you see that someone is green on teams, you need to make specific calendar meetings or requests to be sure that this is the proper time to discuss everything. And of course, from an organization's perspective, when they look at you on a personal level and think about who has more bonds with the company: people that you see every single day in your office, you know, it's a no brainer. But you know, I'm 35 I'm experienced, and I know what value I bring to the table, outside and inside, and I'm very direct with my boss and I'm focused and committed. So it doesn't bother me. But if I were younger, not experienced, it would be a huge challenge. But now I truly enjoy it.

29 **Camilla** 5:24

30 Okay, so that was actually going to also going to be the next topic how onboarding worked for you. You said it was a little more challenging, because you can't just have someone on the shoulder and ask, Hey.

31 **Emma, MNC/R** 5:35

32 So it's a more complicated subject. For the first week of training, [manager] came to Warsaw to make my onboarding more pleasant. And I am very grateful for that, especially when it was during the pandemic and summer. Then [company] provides you with an excellent onboarding plan, 90 days. You've got the dedicated person trainings, and so on. So it's excellent. However, I'm Polish, my clients are Poles. When I was doing my first online meetings with clients, my colleagues were used to having someone with them. My colleagues were used to shadowing those meetings. I didn't shadow my team, because their meetings are in German. I couldn't bring my boss to my meeting as a guidance or you know, extra help, because I was entering the market saying that I'm local, and now [company] is local. So I cannot switch into English saying that. So rather, cultural differences, and languages differences, make it harder than working remotely.

33 **Camilla** 6:58

34 Now looking at collaboration and rapport with your team, what does collaboration with your team look like? How often do you meet? How do you meet?

35 **Emma , MNC/R** 7:21

36 So we have got bi-weekly staff meetings, but only to catch up and highlight important things in the market or internally. So this is our DACH CEE meeting with [manager] and the local team. Then, of course, we have got that product teams that our entire [Industry specific] and global teams for the entire global stuff. But as I assume you are more interested in the DACH topics.

37 **Camilla** 7:52

38 No, just generally, in your experiences, working with any kind of colleagues, remotely.

39 **Emma, MNC/R** 7:59

40 So we have scheduled meetings, but it's like this formality. Of course, everyone can bring something up. But it's more like, let's sit together and speak a little bit about what is happening right now. But if I need to be honest about that, it doesn't add anything to my work life. Yes, it's great to see people face to face, online face to face, because I truly, like everyone from my team, but I'm not more attached to [company] because of those meetings. I'm not more informed about everything we're discovering because of those meetings, and I'm not more, you know, I'm not a bigger expert in the market because of that. I get that they need to be held and organized, but from my personal point of view, they don't bring me much value.

41 **Camilla** 9:06

42 Do you think that's because the meetings are so big? it's usually like lots and lots of people in every meeting, right? They're very seldomly in small groups.

43 **Emma, MNC/R** 9:18

44 I'm a very independent person. And I know what I need to do. And I don't want to brag about anything about people at [company] are very young, they are hired at the beginning of their careers. And it's amazing because they can grow without within the organization. But I'm already shaped and I already understand the market. So that's why I don't see them [meetings] as beneficial as other people might. And yes, If there is a lot of people it always makes it less personal, but you know what I mean. So, most important meetings for me are with [manager] one on one, because we have got this one catch up call every single week, of course, if something is urgent, and we move past that. So this is the first, the most important meeting for me. And second, I'm very close to [VP], she is under [manager], from hierarchy perspective. So those meetings, and those relationships connect me with the organization. Because when I truly trust in my boss, and I value

	him, and also, when I've got that [VP] person, they bind me to the company. Because from my main goal is to secure [manager's] business. This is my main objective for the business. Because when I'm doing that, he's going to secure my business. And if [manager] was different, if I didn't like him, if I didn't respect him working remotely, it would be one big pain in the ass. But he trusts me, he knows what I'm doing. So this is very partner, this is a huge, very partnership relation.
45	But I do believe that working remotely detaches you from the company. And I think that overall, when people are working remotely from home, especially the younger generation, they are not so attached to the organization. And I understand why companies want to put those employees back in the office. Because if you are not so committed, then more likely you will change the job. And company is putting effort and money for onboarding trainings and so on. And losing those employees brings a lot of cost internally, it puts morals down and so on. So I think that overall working remotely, is a great perk, as you know, 40% of your work, but normally, it doesn't bring too much benefits for the organization, because you're losing that people mark, it's hard to bond with them. And also when you're in the office with other people, I think that the creativity is bigger, and also even when you are sitting at the table and you feel that I want to work today. When you are at home, you will run laundry, you will do your dishes. But when you see that your colleague is calling and working, then you are taking that energy and you are more efficient.
46	Camilla 13:23
47	Definitely, yeah, that's very interesting everything. So you'd also say that you're the feeling when you're pretty Junior when you're kind of new to working that it's very important to actually also have that physical contact. Yeah company in order to have that identification with a company in the loyalty and trust but once you have the the experience and you're more senior the most
48	Emma, MNC/R 13:46
49	yeah because from my experience and from my beliefs when you are after college before 30, this is the time when you're working your ass off. And I know that there is this new generation. I'm from Central Eastern Europe, it would be different because of the history, the culture. We still need to prove our value and so once we have got this mentality that if you are working eight hours you are working not hard enough. I know that it's crazy and maybe for you this is shocking but you know I'm coming to the office every single day before eight no one is waiting for me here. I don't need to prove anyone anything, you know, but this is my decision to to be on track with everything to stay start my morning with focus and intention and working my ass off so I can go out bring my kid and spend quality time with my family. But when you are younger, you need this guidance you need to work in your office. This is my belief. Because if not, you will not learn good practices. Of course, only when you're working for a good company, because when they are not bringing any value to you then why waste your energy for working with one company? But yeah, definitely,
50	Camilla 15:13
51	it's kind of ironic because I also feel that way that when you're in the office, especially as a junior you just have, there's so much more going on and you get so much more information than you would when everything alone. At the same time from studies, the younger the people are, the more they say they want to work remotely, which is kind of ironic.
52	Emma, MNC/R 15:33
53	Yeah, but I've got a story for that. When I was younger, the Internet was very limited. When I needed to do some assignments for my school, I went to library, and I needed to study books and to write everything down. I have no problems with calling different people even that they don't know me. I can do 100 calls per day and book meeting after meeting saying only a few sentences to convince them that they should meet

with me in person. And you know, this market environment is very prestigious, it's not easy to book a meeting with those guys. And I do believe that it's easier for me because I'm older. I wasn't raised with Instagram with Facebook with WhatsApp. You know, I remember the times when I needed to call my friend from my home, phone to book their meeting, I didn't have a cell phone then. My first cell phone, I got when I was 13. So we were meeting under the clock in the center of the city. It's crazy when I think about that, and it's crazy for you, but that's why it's easier for me to meet in person to call those people. And now I do believe that younger generation, and that's not accusation, it's easier for you to write e-mail, to write WhatsApp, to write a message, than to call people, than to go out and to meet with them. So I know that the younger generation would like to work remotely, because it's easier. It's your comfort zone, you don't need to go outside and so on. But in longer perspective, I think that the younger generation is going to lose so much. In 10, 20 years, we will have this middle management that has no soft skills, they cannot start and maintain relationships. Yes, maybe they are qualified. But with the age, you realize that business is made when you are having lunch with people, when you are going to events, when you are hosting some parties. That's where actual business is happening when you want to go to that C-level and so on. You need to have a network around yourself... and you're not going to do that from your home.

54 **Camilla** 18:19

55 Interesting. Yeah. That could well. I see we already talked about quite a bit with very, very interesting topics. I'm going to skip a few questions. Looking a little bit at management and culture: are there instances where you feel that maybe on-site colleagues are treated differently than remote colleagues?

56 **Emma , MNC/R** 18:46

57 Maybe yes, in different organizations, but not with us. And also, maybe it isn't the best example. In Polish, we have the statement that fish gets unhealthy from the head. So it means that when your boss is stupid, then the entire team will not perform well. So [manager] is a very mature and polite manager, he sees your potential and guides you. He's not like this micromanagement type of guy. And saying that, we have got a very partnership relationship. I don't feel that I'm being seen in a different way. But this organization and the market is very, very different because before me, we didn't have a lot of quotes and a lot of business in Poland. When I came and I showed what I'm doing today, they were amazed. So, I think that it's even better for me. So they know that I'm amazing. But when I'm amazing remotely without any guidance being around without telling what you should do, it's even better, you know? So saying that, of course, it depends. Yes, it can be an issue, but here at [company] it's not. But in general, yes. I think that when you don't see anyone is someone when you don't smile to him when you don't have coffee chit chats – how is your kid? How was your holidays and so on. When I've got only 30 minutes to speak with my boss every single week - of course, I could do that more often but we don't have time for chitchat - I'm very direct, I've got always prepared to this with part, let's discuss this, this, this, this this? And you know, I'm done. I know what I should do.

58 **Camilla** 21:06

59 Yeah, it's interesting that you highlight the importance of management because I've read so many articles saying that now really is the time I mean, we've been talking about this for years now that management styles need to change but especially now with hybrid work and remote work. It's really time that management styles need to change, and that the emotional intelligence really is one of the most important traits for really good managers and especially that they give you trust that they're not micromanaging. So all the things that you said and it's hard to find it's not it's not easy to find those kinds of managers

60 **Emma, MNC/R** 21:40

61 But also it's not easy to find employees that are loyal committed and they don't need guidance because it takes a lot of responsibility to act, manage and also deliver without going to your boss asking every single

	question. And you need to understand that you are not employed here to ask too many questions that are obvious. You know, I'm not saying that you need to be brave, but you need to have this gut feeling that you are the right person and you are in control. Of course, sometimes you don't feel that you are but... fake it until you make it! Come to the office, work your ass off and treat every single day like this one small project. When you are going outside and saying okay, I did everything I got, now I can go home.
62	Camilla 22:40
63	Yeah, definitely it's a mutual path. Looking at the company from a meta-level, how would you describe your company in three words?
64	Emma, MNC/R 22:59
65	From which angle?
66	Camilla 23:01
67	From the cultural perspective - how you feel the company is it modern or more traditional?
68	Emma, MNC/R 23:15
69	I don't know if I'm the best person to interview for your studies because you know, I'm from Poland and so on. I worked for a US based company before, it was bigger company than [company]. But definitely you can tell that this is an American corporation with this global cause "Oh everything is amaaaaazing. Go get them!" So a very American culture, which to me is like... come on, let's let loose a little bit. So this is that in the broadest picture. Then you have these different teams – [UK city] team, [German city] Team - when you see the difference. So I will describe this organization as an American culture firm with internal local teams that adjust to local environments that highlight you as an individual. Because they understand that individuals make the difference, bring the value, equal money, you know. We are the business and if you're the right person, you can do whatever you want. But having in mind that it's a US-based organization, and a US-based organization looks only for excess costs and so on.
70	Camilla 24:57
71	So would you say you're committed to the [German city] office, to the manager?
72	Emma, MNC/R 25:00
73	Yeah, definitely [connected to the [German city] office[! To the higher organization - No. You know if I need to go extra mile for my team and for my boss, I will do that. For [UK city]'s team, no. For [UK city]'s boss - Yes, because I should. For US team - no. And for US CRO, of course, because he's CRO. But my biggest commitment, loyalty, trust, emotions are towards [manager]. Period, that's all.
74	Camilla 25:39
75	Very, very interesting. These were already through with the with the main questions, I have some closing questions which are super open, just if you have anything else to add? What do you enjoy most about working remotely?
76	Emma, MNC/R 25:55
77	That I can do whatever I want. Of course, I'm not using that. But if I need to, I know that it's normal, when you need to go to the doctor, it's normal that you're going to a doctor in a new other day, you then need to ask permission about that and so on. But the biggest perk, and the main objective is that you are alone . And it brings you this flexibility, that you are in charge of everything. If you don't feel like you don't want to go the extra mile today, you can just sit closely and you know focus on your strategy, on your projects, and so

on. And nobody is going to judge you that you have got a bad day and you're not making those calls. So I think that you don't need to prove every single day that you're the rock star, and you need to be hyperactive, when you don't feel like it. You know I can take my shoes off, I can put my blankets on, I can eat my chocolate, and then start thinking what I want to achieve next week, because today is not a day. Oh and also: I work in sales. So as every salesperson, I need to be open extroverted and so on. But I hate open spaces. I just hate them. I hate calling people making a presentation when someone is sitting close to me. And I'm so used to these small office that I'm a little bit worried what is going to happen with me after going somewhere else after a [company] now. Because right now, when I go to [German city] or to [UK city], and when everyone is in open space, I truly hate that. I cannot focus I cannot put my thought on, calling is a nightmare. And presentation online is even bigger nightmare. So the silence that I can focus, I think that this is the biggest perk. Oh and also, I treat my work as a very task oriented space. I'm not coming here for chit chat. Yes, of course, I love to make fun with my colleagues and so on. But I came here to work, and I need to go home because I need to pick up my kid from the kindergarten. And saying that, I'm very task and goal oriented and doing task after task. And when you go to the office, and people have different tasks, not so big regions and so on. They know clients more than you because they are in the company for years. They are younger, they have got different mentality and so on, it's distracting. And I'm not coming to work for eight hours to chitchat for two hours. And when someone is always approaching you, making jokes and so on. Yes, it's amazing. But when you see that you are wasting two hours for nothing...

78 **Camilla** 29:22

79 Definitely, definitely. And what would you say about working remotely is most challenging are also working in a hybrid team, having some people being in the office together every day and you not being there. Can you think of any challenges there?

80 **Emma, MNC/R** 29:36

81 So I think that it's very different from different fields. If you will ask the IT team that is working on specific projects together - when you need to meet, collaborate and, you know, express multitasking environment - that you need to deliver the specific project together. Then it might be challenging. But for me, when I'm single one person entity that needs to deliver revenue, then no. However, I think that I'm lacking these best practices. So you know, when I'm approaching a new account, a new industry, then I need to write emails. I need to ask people, How did you do that in the past? What worked for you and what didn't? Give me some guidance and so on. And to be honest, I did it maybe two times. Because it didn't bring me the value, it takes a lot of time, you'd never know if it's going to be worth your time. And when you are in your team, in the same office, and so on, you are just asking, hey, how did you do it with [customer]? Or what worked? Or your colleague is frustrated? Because something didn't work out? You hear that? And you can, you know, automatically get that and then, you know, take the note in your mind, okay, don't do that. So that's, that's that. But saying that, please remember that I'm in the professional field for 12 years now. So for me, it's different. But if I was super young, it would be a nightmare. Yep.

82 **Camilla** 31:30

83 Perfect, thank you! Do you have anything else you want to add?

84 **Emma, MNC/R** 31:37

85 It's a hard topic. I think as many people and also as many industries, this is the most important thing, industries and rules. Everyone has different opinions. But if you ask me, I think that hybrid and remote working, of course to some extent, will not be beneficial overall. Yes, one or two days outside the office is okay. But, in 20, 30 years, we won't have senior management that understands how to approach people outside the desk. And it will be a nightmare in my opinion.

86 **Camilla** 32:45

87 Yes, I think it's difficult. Now, after the pandemic I think there's no way of going back to the traditional office. That's why I'm doing this study and that's why I think it's so interesting to talk to people about it and why it's important for companies to learn more about it – is that we need to learn how to manage it effectively and how to train the people that are remote – especially in junior position – correctly and how to connect the to a team. And those really are challenges that are completely new – especially not only remote but also hybrid where you have one part of the company being together (especially when you're young) – and then having a remote part of the company. To manage that and to still make the remote people feel like they are part of the team while others see each other daily, is going to be something very very interesting.

88 **Emma, MNC/R** 33:48

89 Yes, and also saying that, remember that age is a main factor of how you will see that, and how you are going to peruse that. Because when you are young, you are at the beginning of everything, you know? You are still shaping you as a person, as a woman, as an individual, as your future professional. You are still in a shaping process. You will be in that process for the rest of your life. But until you are 30, this is the most powerful time for you as an individual in private life, but also in business field. And if you make the right choices, after your thirties it's going to work out so great for you. But saying that you spend the entire day with your colleagues, that they were your family, I remember that as well. When I met my best friends here in Warsaw, I met them in my second job after college. And this Saturday we have got this 10-year anniversary party of our friendships. We went to different companies, but we are still friends – the best friends ever. So the age, when you are going to ask people, please remember that the age makes a huge part of that. Because now, my main objective is to secure my business and so on, but then going home and securing my husband and my kid. Because I'm so replaceable here at [company] and in every organization. But the only place where I'm irreplaceable is my home. And as I love my job, I need to remind myself of it very often.

90 **Camilla**, 36:10

91 Very true. We are going to be cut off in a few seconds. Thank you very much for your time and insights! This was very interesting!

92 **Emma, MNC/R** 36:15

93 It was a pleasure, let me know if you have any further questions!

9.6. Transcript - Interview with Jake (MNC/Remote)

2 **Date:** Sunday, Oct 16.10.2022

5 **Age:** 32; **Department:** Sales; **Nationality:** Swiss; **Time at company:** 15 months

6 **Speakers:**
Interviewer: Camilla
Interviewee: Jake, MNC/R,

7 **Camilla** 00:00

8 Jake, thanks again for taking the time. To start off, can you tell me a bit about your role.

9	Jake, MNC/R 00:12
10	Yeah, sure. So I'm working in Switzerland, for [company], meaning that my whole headquarter is in Germany and later in [UK city] and in the US. So I'm basically working remote from Switzerland, in an [industry specific] SaaS service provider. So we are working with banks and corporates where we are selling the whole software.
11	Camilla 00:38
12	Great, and you're in Sales. Are you alone in Switzerland?
13	Jake, MNC/R 00:44
14	We are now two people. But I opened the branch in August last year by myself. And now since March, we're two people.
15	Camilla 00:53
16	So you are fully remote. Now you have one colleague, but aside from that colleague, how often do you usually see your colleagues in [German HQ city] or [UK city]?
17	01:03
18	I would say my direct manager comes maybe every six weeks to Switzerland, or maybe every two months. And I myself, I go maybe twice a year to [German HQ city], and once or twice a year to [UK city].
19	Camilla 01:18
20	So you see your manager pretty frequently, but the rest of the team pretty seldomly. Have you worked remotely for a company before? Or is this the first time?
21	Jake, MNC/R 01:28
22	Uh, I... [Pause] Good question. I have my own company where I did work by myself in home office before COVID. Besides that, no, I mean, home office started during Corona, but don't think this is considered remote working. But yeah, so I would say first time.
23	Camilla 01:51
24	What role did working remotely play in your decision process? When you knew, Okay, you're going to be the first man on the ground. Was that more of a pro or more of a challenge?
25	Jake, MNC/R 02:04
26	That was definitely a pro, I would say. Because, I mean, I come from a background where I had my own startup, I used to work by myself, put in all my creativity, and not being micromanaged. And here with this job, I still have a lot of freedom. I'm not my own boss, but I can do what I want, as long as the results are given. So I that was definitely a plus. Yes.
27	Camilla 02:30
28	You already talked about micromanagement a little bit, how empowered do you feel in your role in general, be it physical resources, but also other resources, like support for managers?
29	Jake, MNC/R 02:41
30	Let's say that, I really have everything I need. I, if I need some help from my managers, or my colleagues, I can really easily reach out to them via teams, calls and anything. So this is very well organized, I would say.

Besides that, I mean if I need resources, everything is super easy to handle. I mean, we got used to it during COVID. Not in this specific company. But I mean, in my past life, everybody was working from home. So I think the whole environment got used to working from home and reaching out to phones. What is a little bit different, like, let's say to last year, and this year is that last year, also my clients were reached by teams, by phone calls, and so on. And since this year, we can really physically meet them. And that's certainly a big difference. I think it's important to meet clients physically, but working remote when it comes to internal stuff. I think this is easy to handle.

31 **Camilla** 03:52

32 And you mean that just building that emotional connection with clients is easier when you're there physically? Or what about being there in person is a pro?

33 **Jake, MNC/R** 04:00

34 Yeah, I mean, in our business, it's all about relationship building and relationship sales. So basically, it's important to physically meet the people have a beer with them, go out and have some fun with them so that they not only read your emails or hear your voice, but that they actually connect with you. So you can really, yeah, become real time and real life friends. And not only email colleagues or something.

35 **Camilla** 04:31

36 Yeah, I can imagine. Can you actually see that in your numbers?

37 **Jake, MNC/R** 04:34

38 Yeah, definitely. Yeah. Yeah.

39 **Camilla** 04:38

40 You already said that working remotely at your company works out well. Can you tell me a little bit about what collaboration looks like? How often do you maybe meet with people in your team remotely? How do you collaborate? How do you brainstorm?

41 **Jake, MNC/R** 04:51

42 Yeah, I would say definitely once a week, one on one with my manager. This is always scheduled every let's say, Monday morning, one hour with the manager. And besides that, of course, every now and then if I have a question I call up, they're reachable. So this, I would say, maybe twice, three times a day. But not scheduled. Right, but only on demand. Besides that, I would say team wise, we have this once a week call with the whole team. Yeah, and I think that that's more or less it when it comes to scheduled. Of course, if there's something urgent coming up, they're reachable. But yeah, I think it's not so often the scheduled meetups.

43 **Camilla** 05:45

44 I see. And looking at the fact that you guys are hybrid so that you do have a central office in [German HQ city] where people meet in person and or the office all day together sometimes. How would you rate collaboration in that like hybrid framework? Is there a difference to you? Or is it as if everyone were remote?

45 **Jake, MNC/R** 06:05

46 Yeah, I mean, in [German HQ city], they really go to the office. I don't know how frequent. I guess like four days a week or something. So quite often they're in the office. While we are also often at the office, but not with everyone right? So I think that for them, it's really a daily routine for us. It's every now and then. And I

guess the difference between the two is that - you can appreciate it or waste time on it - It's really that if I go to the office, of course, there's a lot of talks about random things: What did you do yesterday? And did you see the game? Things like that, that you don't have if you work remote, because you basically just call up if there is a need for it right? You don't call up someone in order to discuss who you met yesterday or so on. Right? So it's much more focused what you're doing during these calls. And therefore, the whole work is more focused I think.

47 **Camilla** 07:10

48 And looking at the information exchange, do you feel like the remote people get the same quality and quantity of information as the people on site? Or do you have the feeling that maybe sometimes information gets stuck in the office?

49 **Jake, MNC/R** 07:22

50 I'm sure that some information gets stuck in the office. But I'm also quite sure that the important relevant stuff will be shared in time with everyone. And it's probably just the small things that are not really relevant or urgent that are missed there. Of course, there's the problem that if you have a weekly call, and then there's two, three things that you are not 100% sure about, you will not call up and confirm it. But you just think like, Yeah, I think that's what they meant. That's it. But if you're there physically, then you just walk out of the office and ask him hey, this this, how was it? Can you repeat it again? So it's of course that you're a little bit better informed when you are on site. But on the other hand, if you're remote, you focus on the essentials.

51 **Camilla** 08:17

52 You already hinted at it a little bit with the general work being more focused, but can you tell me a bit about your relationship to your colleagues and the team? How would you describe your collegial relationships?

53 **Jake, MNC/R** 08:32

54 Well, the good thing was, when I started it was summer so we were allowed to travel. And so I was in the company about one month and I was already in [German HQ city] and met everyone. So this this helped also to integrate. Also in the first week, our enablement team set up some calls with all the colleagues in [German HQ city] so that I had half an hour to talk with everyone, so that at least that I saw them I exchanged a little bit. Of course, half an hour is nothing but at least you had focus time 30 minutes of exchanging, figuring out who they are, they could figure out who you are. And then a little bit later I was also in [German HQ city] so I met the people and of course this it's always different if you have a phone call with someone than being there in person. So when I was there, then we really had our gatherings went for lunch together went out together so this of course they are you physically realize the bonding is much bigger when you actually meet and not only work remote. So this helped clearly and also every other time that you meet. I mean, I don't know we went for a weekend in March and then we met again. At the beginning you realize of course because all others work in the same office and I'm the outside, by then I was one of two that were working remotely. So it was really the two of us that were like, let's call them strangers to them. So it takes a little bit until you arrive, let's call it and you said hello to everyone and that they you hang out again with. But this really depends on the colleagues like after a half an hour, everything was normal as if I would have never been there. And then after two days or something, we we're besties. And then it's a different story, you know. And, of course, now, it has been a while again since I met the whole team. So now I'm sure it will be the same thing. You go there. And if everyone else is together, and you meet as the outsider, it will take a little bit again, and then you're in there again. But I think besides that it really depends on your colleagues. And I'm really happy with mine. I go there and they immediately feel integrated. That's for sure.

55 **Camilla** 11:05

56 So you really think that also that first month of onboarding where you kind of travelled around and saw the people in the office as well helped to create that emotional connection with your colleagues as well?

57 **Jake, MNC/R** 11:17

58 Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, you realize this with - I mean I have colleagues in the US that I have nothing to do with I. I also don't have email exchange or anything. But of course, the headquarter and everything is in US. But I have absolutely no bonding or relationship to them. Then you have the ones in [UK city], of course, there's also, we have to see that in Germany, there's maybe 20 people and in [UK city], there's maybe 200 people in the US, it's maybe 1000s, I don't know. So of course, it's easier to run with 20 people in a smaller office than to connect with everyone in the office with 200 people. But I would say that already with the people in [UK city], because you saw them once and you rarely have a discussion with them, an email or anything. So that the bonding is already a lot looser than with the ones that you bonded with at the beginning in [German HQ city]. So I clearly think to answer your question, yes, it's very important at the beginning already to settle everything. Because if you do it later, then yeah, you already established your own environment, who to go to, and how to handle things. But if at the beginning, they introduce you to the right people - I don't know if you have question X you go to this guy, Y to this guy, Z to this guy - then it's a different story. Because otherwise, if you only get to know one person, you go with all the questions to this one person. And then you of course, connect better with this specific person, but you don't connect with anyone else.

59 **Camilla** 12:53

60 Yeah, definitely. That's also an interesting point that I really witnessed when I was working remotely for companies that okay, you have your manager, and maybe one other team colleague. But when you have questions that don't pertain to exactly your topic, or your department, you never know who to go to. And then you have to ask them who is the contact person? Yeah, so a really good onboarding and managing that in a remote context is super important.

61 **Jake, MNC/R** 13:18

62 Yeah, definitely. I have to say, onboarding is super important, especially if you're remote.

63 **Camilla** 13:24

64 Was the onboarding a good experience at [company] for you?

65 **Jake, MNC/R** 13:26

66 Yeah, absolutely. I was I was amazed, by the way that they did it. It's not only the connecting to the people, right? It's also the whole how you are learning about the product. I mean, I, for example, I didn't have an [industry specific] background. And now I know quite a lot, I know about the software and everything. And I didn't meet the people during this training, right? Because they provided all these videos, interactive programs, they had some workshops around it. So it's really as if I would have been in an office and every colleague is next to me, right? So this is super important. It was running for three months, the whole program, and you had like weekly plans. So you had the list. Okay, this isn't this are the points that you need to know by the end of the week. And then you had the programs. You just went through the videos to the slides through everything. And then after a week, you had a call again with the enablement team. And then they went through everything - did you get, is there open questions, and so on? Okay, fine. This week, there's this and this and this task. So they went to every task. And then you had this one week to prepare everything and go through everything. And the week later, you had the same follow up and they watch out for next week, and so on. And then you had after one month so after 30 days you had an exam after 60 days

you had an exam and after 90 days you had an exam in order to be sure that you got what you learned and and that you're ready to go out to the market. So it's really highly professional I've never seen anything like it.

67 **Camilla** 15:05

68 That you have a dedicated enablement team is great. Interesting. And do you feel there has ever been an instance or that there are instances where onsite colleagues are treated differently than remote colleagues?

69 **Jake, MNC/R** 15:22

70 I have no idea. I saw them too rarely that I can compare honestly. No,

71 **Camilla** 15:34

72 How relevant is trust for you in your work context? And do you feel that you guys have a lot of trust within your team?

73 **Jake, MNC/R** 15:41

74 Well, as you can guess, working remote, it's all about trust, right? I mean, you need to be able to do your stuff by yourself. So of course, I mean, in the end, they give you goals, right. You have to deliver. You have your units, you have your sales targets, and they trust you that you reach it, and they help you if you're in trouble, or if you don't reach numbers. So I think there's a lot of trust in there. Because yeah, I mean, they're far away. Worst case they can fly over, they're here in one hour or two. But the problem is that, why would you want to do that? And trust is super essential in remote working, but I think that we are being trusted very nicely in Switzerland. But of course, it's a two way system, right? I mean, we deliver, they see the numbers, they see that we are going out and meeting the clients and get the deals. So therefore. I mean, we also earned our trust. Let's call it that way.

75 **Camilla** 16:51

76 And looking at the management, you feel that that works really well as well. That there is mutual trust. No micromanagement.

77 **Jake, MNC/R** 17:01

78 Absolutely. I think it's a two way game. Exactly. They trust us because numbers are okay, but on the other way, as well, I really trust them. Because if I really have some issues, I call them and problems are solved immediately. Or at least solutions will be found. Yeah.

79 **Camilla** 17:22

80 Nice. Going to a meta level question now. How would you describe your company culture in three words?

81 **Jake, MNC/R** 17:30

82 In three words... focused. [Pause] Innovative [Pause]. And what is this third one? Let me see. Fast growing.

83 **Camilla** 18:05

84 Can you remember an instance where you felt particularly proud to be part of your organization?

85 **Jake, MNC/R** 18:18

86	There's a few! [Pause] Proud of being part of the organization... I mean, yeah, of course. One as an example is, there's a company in [country] called [company name], it's small retailer, and they were bought by a [country] retailer. And it was all dealt by [company name]. And it's just like, it was the biggest deal of the year in Switzerland. And it was made through our company, and it's many deals that are made through our company that I think like Wow, sheesh, that's us, right? I think the one thing that I saw in there really brag with my colleagues or my friends, was when [company] was bought by [company], because there was like a 14 billion deal. And I just said, like, yeah, guys, that's us!
87	Camilla 19:20
88	Not bad! Do you feel like you have a strong sense of identification towards your company?
89	Jake, MNC/R 19:31
90	Yeah, I walk around with my [company] backpack every time everywhere. So yeah, definitely. Everybody recognizes me. I was in Geneva at an appointment with a client and I was crossing a bridge to the restaurant and I thought to myself: hmmm timewise I'm pretty much on time. So chances are that the guy is going to walk behind me anytime. Now all of a sudden, I don't know, like 30 seconds after I had this thought, he just came over and said, Jake, MNC/R, how are you? He recognized me because of the [company] backpack!
91	Camilla 20:12
92	That's pretty cool! It's a nice touch with the backpack. How difficult would it be for you to leave your company at this point in time?
93	Jake, MNC/R 20:27
94	Well, I mean, I got used to it now. And it's, I mean, I would say I'm a person of habit. Meaning that once I got really used to, to a job, I am actually I can identify myself with the company. So I have no meaning of leaving, because I feel happy with everything I have. Absolutely.
95	Camilla 20:55
96	Cool, when did you start at [company]?
97	Jake, MNC/R 20:58
98	August 2021? A bit more than one year.
99	Camilla 21:03
100	Okay. If you were to leave, what would you miss most?
101	Jake, MNC/R 21:10
102	What would I miss most? I guess, certainly, somehow the freedom of choosing - I mean, I can really choose who I want to meet. Which client I want to meet which specific person in this company. And if I'm interested in a specific company, I could just reach out to the CFO, or to anyone in the [industry specific] team and just tell them guys, we need to meet and they will most probably answer and say like, okay, let's meet. So this, I don't know, let's call it power, of being able to invite everyone is really cool. Yeah.
103	Camilla 21:49
104	Very interesting. We're already done with the catalogue. I just have like a couple of closing questions, broad ones. What about working remotely do you enjoy most?
105	Jake, MNC/R 22:04

- 106 Yeah, I guess the freedom. Yeah, so clearly the freedom because I mean, it's a nine to five job, but it's not really a nine to five job. Of course, we have to pick up calls also if they call us at 11 in the night, we need to pick it up. But then again, if at nine o'clock, I have some I don't know, let's say a hairdressing meeting or something like that, then I can go there and do my stuff, one hour later. So I'm very free when it comes to do what I want what I need to. Of course, urgent things have to be done immediately. But besides that, I'm quite free.
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- 107 **Camilla** 22:39
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- 108 And what do you think about being a remote employee, especially in a hybrid company, is most challenging?
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- 109 **Jake, MNC/R** 22:49
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- 110 Well, I guess it would be somehow Let me see. [Pause] Yeah, maybe somehow integration, on the other hand, also, getting these little details, right. If I have some urgent things, I need to reach out to someone. And if they don't immediately pick up then I lose time. Right? I think that's the most challenging thing. Because there's things that they just think like, Okay, I need to do this, it's totally easy I just type it in and then one minutes, it's done. But then you realize, oh, shit, here, I need something. And then you try to call on teams, but they realize, oh, they're in a meeting, and then you'd have to wait half an hour. And then the thing that was so easy to do, still takes half an hour.
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- 111 **Camilla** 23:38
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- 112 Is there anything else on your mind about the topic remote work, hybrid work that you'd like to share?
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- 113 **Jake, MNC/R** 24:11
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- 114 Yeah, I was. I think one of the points is like, I think it's the future and because it gives you more freedom. Of course, it's not possible in every job. But I think - as seeing companies here in Switzerland, I don't know like pharmaceutical companies that all the bosses said, Never, ever will someone have the permission to work outside of home. And they basically shut down the offices and everybody's working from home still today. So, and the people really appreciate it. Because the management realized that actually, the people are delivering, and it doesn't really matter and people are happier. So I think that if you have once or twice a week, office day, that that will be enough and even this, you can say like, Okay, once a month or something, nobody really has to be there.
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- 115 **Camilla** 25:06
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- 116 I mean, you guys have an office in Switzerland? Is it a shared office with other people as well? Or is it just you two
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- 117 **Jake, MNC/R** 25:12
-
- 118 Well it's in a co working space, but we have our own office,
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- 119 **Camilla** 25:15
-
- 120 okay? So because that may be also gives you a little bit of that physical contact with people that you might be missing if you're in the home office, right? That's a nice compromise.
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- 121 **Jake, MNC/R** 25:27
-
- 122 Absolutely, we have a common kitchen and people are there and if my colleague is not around, then I still have the others. So it's not that you feel so lonely or anything. But somehow one hand it's good, on the other hand, it's a bit weird, because your, let's call them colleagues are not working in the same environment, they
-

have totally different problems or issues. And then you come in there and it gives you the chance of like, getting away from your topics and really get other mindsets. But on the other hand, exactly, if there is something that you think like, hey, this client yesterday was complete idiot, or did you see this project? Then the other people would of course not have a clue either or on the other hand, you are not even allowed to talk about it. So.

123 **Camilla** 26:23

124 Yeah, lot's of NDAs. Great. Well, thank you a lot for your time, Jake!

125 **Jake, MNC/R** 26:28

126 Sure, anytime!

9.7. Transcript – Interview with Audrey (MNC/Office)

Date: Friday, 23.09.2022

Age: 32; **Department:** Sales; **Nationality:** German; **Time at company:** 23 months

Speakers:

Interviewer: Camilla

Interviewee: Audrey

5 **Camilla** 0:00

6 To start off, can you tell me a little bit about your role in your company? What your daily job looks like?

7 **Audrey, MNC/O** 0:20

8 Yes, I am in sales means I'm responsible for new business and expanding existing business and establishing client relationships. Yeah, that's my daily job.

9 **Camilla** 0:31

10 Does it involve a lot of collaboration with with colleagues or more individual work?

11 **Audrey, MNC/O** 0:44

12 Oh, absolutely. I rely on my team, especially for service related questions. I hand that over to them, and they solve the problems for me. And yes, we do collaborate a lot. However, there's also a big part of individual work, of course, because I am, as I said, responsible for new business and new clients. Finding new clients. A mixture I would say.

13 **Camilla** 1:07

14 So [company] works hybridly. Is this your first time working in a hybrid company? Or have you done that before?

15 **Audrey, MNC/O** 1:18

16 I have done that before.

17	Camilla 1:20
18	In which contexts, you don't have to name the company
19	Audrey, MNC/O 1:25
20	I worked for a Canadian company who did not have a physical office in Germany. So it was purely remote. That was the previous company. And I'm very glad that I can continue working from home with [company] too.
21	Camilla 1:39
22	Okay, interesting. So you have both the experience of being the remote employee and a hybrid team as well as being on site. Perfect. How empowered do you feel in your job? And in your job role in general? Do you have all the resources to fulfil your role as well? Physically, supportive managers, and so on?
23	Audrey, MNC/O 2:00
24	Oh yeah, I do have everything, except for a printer. Unfortunately, one thing that I am missing at home, all the rest is super fine. I have all the resources, I have all the tools that I need. I know who to reach out if I have a question. That's super great.
25	Camilla 2:14
26	Okay, cool. How often would you say are you in the office?
27	Audrey, MNC/O 2:23
28	Definitely not every week, maybe every second third week.
29	Camilla 2:26
30	Okay. All right. Could you tell me a little bit about your experience with hybrid work in general working with colleagues? What does collaboration look like? How often do you have to go on calls with people that are not necessarily in [German city], but maybe spread around Europe?
31	Audrey, MNC/O 2:48
32	Okay, so the first part is, in terms of collaboration, I find it very easy to collaborate borderlessly, or without borders, let's say. Because, you know, what, what do you need? You need information from people? Do you need to see them in front of you? Sometimes, yes, that could be helpful. Otherwise, if you already know each other, why not just picking up the phone? And that's pretty easy for me. As I said, I know how to reach out and I'm definitely not shy and I would definitely reach out to people. Even if these people are based in the US, for example. I just had a call with us based call yesterday. That's perfectly fine for me.
33	Camilla 3:32
34	Okay, so as you already said, information exchange is super important. What do you feel is the most important information channel for you guys working
35	Audrey, MNC/O 3:42

- 36 Oh Salesforce! Salesforce and Sales Navigator, I'm going to say. I use them every day. Without them I would die.
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- 37 **Camilla** 3:51
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- 38 And those are also the places where you go for like centralized information, so that you don't have those siloed communication information asymmetries with people in the office or remote, you'd say everyone really has all their information, everything anyone else needs to know, in Salesforce.
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- 39 **Audrey, MNC/O** 4:08
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- 40 I only can speak for myself, I would say I have. Whenever there is a question I first check Salesforce and LinkedIn or Sales Navigator. And [industry specific tool] is also a tool that I rely on. Other tools we should not use and we are also we were asked not to save data on our desktop, we should put it in the OneDrive. So that is synchronized with internal platforms on staff and I do that and that's totally fine.
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- 41 **Camilla** 4:41
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- 42 That's good. Yeah. Out of personal experience: I have worked in companies where that was not the case. And that made even working in an office very difficult. Looking at meetings in general. Are there meetings where there are people that are physically in the office while others join remotely? Or is it all completely remote usually?
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- 43 **Audrey, MNC/O** 5:04
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- 44 Of 10 meetings, I would say nine are mixed. People joining remotely, others are in the office. There are very few occasions where we should be in the office if possible. But that's communicated. So if this is necessary, it will be distributed to us. And then of course, I join physically.
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- 45 **Camilla** 5:25
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- 46 What's your experience with hybrid meetings? Where some people are really in the office talking physically? Does it still work? Is it easy for you as a remote participant maybe to engage in the discussions?
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- 47 **Audrey, MNC/O** 5:39
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- 48 I find it okay, I find it good. Sometimes there is a problem with the connection, you have some noises. Or people just lower their voice for some reason, so that it's a bit difficult to simply hear them. But other than that, easy.
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- 49 **Camilla** 5:55
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- 50 Can you think of something that is particularly challenging in hybrid work having some people that are together in [German city] and others that are dispersed and maybe alone?
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- 51 **Audrey, MNC/O** 6:12
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- 52 The only thing that that kind of a challenge, and he is the gossip, I'm a bit cut off. For example, I have a colleague, he is married, and he has a child. I guess the girls one and a half, two years old. And I didn't know that his wife was pregnant again. And then he became father again, two months ago or something.
-

You know, the baby was already there, when I heard that he became a father again, and I was like... Oh, I didn't even know that his wife was pregnant. Ah, interesting, congratulations! That's the only thing that I'm missing sometimes, you know, what is underneath the usual communication. Other than that, I feel pretty well informed because this company is distributing information very well and quickly. Because we have so many people spread around the world, even you know, people we need every day. So they are very communicative and they share their most relevant information with us. So that is fine. But as I said, you know, the personal stuff is a bit less.

53 **Camilla** 7:17

54 And what would you say you enjoy most about hybrid collaboration? What is like the perk of having an organization that is so well organized and actually facilitating hybrid work?

55 **Audrey, MNC/O** 7:34

56 I enjoy the most that it's so borderless. It sounds a bit strange, because yeah, borderless, what does that mean? It is, it's nice for me to work with people from different locations, because they have different backgrounds, they have different experiences, they have their own opinion. And it's just fun, because they like people from other countries, for example, I find that interesting and inspiring. And bringing together people with so many different experiences across the globe without borders without even thinking about time zones and stuff. That's cool. I like it.

57 **Camilla** 8:09

58 Yeah. True. It's really cool. Um, can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with colleagues and the team? Do you have instances where you felt particularly connected or disconnected with colleagues?

59 **Audrey, MNC/O** 8:24

60 Of course, I feel more connected with them when I see them physically. I'm a human being they are human beings and we need the physical exchange. We're not cut off like, you know, here [gesture of being cut off from the waste down]. We also have legs for example. Yeah. And it's nice to get to see them sometimes in physical presence. And some colleagues already asked me: Hey, when should we go to the office together. When they see me in the office, and it's a big "hello, and oh, you're still there. Nice. Nice." So it's a joke. You know, they of course, they know that, that I'm there. It's just yeah, we're making fun of it. Yes, I feel it's a very nice team, and we have a good relationship with, you know, do some jokes.

61 **Camilla** 9:10

62 And would you say you're closer to your team in [German city], than remote colleagues?

63 **Audrey, MNC/O** 9:19

64 I would say yes, but that's because we have more instances where we check with each other we have internal meetings and stuff other people from let's say, [UK city] or friends, I do not see even remotely you do not see them so often. Of course, I get emails from them, hey, this is nothing here and there. Some people I even haven't met because of COVID. You know, it was not possible, or I was sick, or it was cancelled or whatever. I only know them online. But still I know that people I know what they're

	responsible for. And whenever I have a question, I reach out to them, they reach out to me as well. So that's, okay.
65	Camilla 10:03
66	It's so weird seeing people that you only know virtually for the first time in real life, it's like, Oh, you're very tall.
67	Audrey, MNC/O 10:10
68	I had this experience this year, during the kickoff in Austria. And I met our senior senior manager for the first time. He was one person I had an interview with when I applied for this job. It was that was the first, after more than a year, after one and a half years, we meet for the first time physically. That was really interesting. He came to the office to [German city] when I was on vacation. So chance missed, but we catch up during that kick-off, that was cool.
69	Camilla 10:50
70	Can you think of any instances when maybe onsite employees were treated differently than remote employees?
71	Audrey, MNC/O 11:06
72	[Pause] That's a good question. [Pause] Not spontaneously. Maybe after work stuff, like it's go for drinks spontaneously to the bar next to the office or something. But other than that, I mean, I don't drink any alcohol anyway, I will join just for joining. But other than that, no.
73	Camilla 11:34
74	Okay. So promotions are decided and also communicated transparently. It doesn't have anything to do with how often you were in the office?
75	Audrey, MNC/O 11:44
76	That's something I don't know, I must say. I'm not sure if that has an impact. But I mean, when you're in sales is transparent anyway, either you make your numbers or not. It's also good if you have a too often in the office, because that could also mean that you're alone with the clients can that's what is expected and intended
77	Camilla 12:10
78	How relevant would you say is trust for you in your work context?
79	Audrey, MNC/O 12:19
80	Trust is definitely very important. Because of course, our managers and also colleagues, they trust me, and I trust the others, that we're a team that we're not working against each other. And that we just get our jobs done, that I provide the necessary information about clients or project what is going on, and that they also share their experience with me. Or they are what they see. Or if some, for example, sometimes a client who from one company to the other. And I share this information if I see that and they share it with me too. So trust is really a big, big thing.

81	Camilla 12:59
82	And how would you say your company really managed to implement that trust and to establish the trust, especially also looking at people that you maybe never saw physically?
83	Audrey, MNC/O 13:09
84	Well, we established a series of regular calls in EMEA, but also worldwide. Sometimes the senior managers fly over to the offices. We also have a kickoffs, or other locations. And what else? Yeah, a lot of emails going on back and forth with information updates here, commenting on that. For example, when I have a prospect in that and that area, this deal is planned. You say, Hey dear EMEA sales colleagues, do you have any experience with that scenario. Did we have any, any other deals we won that I could share with my prospect, and then you get a bunch of emails, also the senior senior managers involved. „You can share this deal, here’s the Salesforce link and stuff. So that is super quick. I mean we share information a lot, even though it’s a big team in EMEA, that’s super cool. It’s really open and transparent. I like that.
85	Camilla 14:15
86	Nice. It really seems that the company managed to set up such a really well functioning way to, to communicate that, it doesn’t matter where you are, right?
87	Audrey, MNC/O 14:27
88	Absolutely. And I really like and appreciate it. I know it’s not normal, other companies might be different. Also from my experience, but here it’s really, really open. And it’s been a very helpful, and friendly, and kind. And I was surprised to see that because I know it can be different.
89	Camilla 14:44
90	Was that different to your previous role?
91	Audrey, MNC/O 14:52
92	With the Canadians? Oh no, no, that’s another story. But there are other companies, companies I worked for... let’s just put it like this.
93	Camilla 14:58
94	Now we’re going to go more into the meta level: how would you describe your company in three words?
95	Audrey, MNC/O 15:21
96	So three words shall be a noun or can it be a word? Oh it’s a trusted... hmmm. What do I always write my customers? It works, our services work. We have a premium support. And the reputation of our company it great. I always tell my customers they should really talk to other people in the industry, with people that are in a similar area. Because I can tell them a lot about the product – I love what we do. But it’s also nice when the customer can make their own picture.
97	Camilla 16:20
98	Can you remember any instances where you felt especially proud to be part of [company]?

99 **Audrey, MNC/O** 16:27

100 Well, we received a lot of awards for our trusted and proven technology, for the great platforms we offer. There are very modern and professional. Rating companies recognize that and we also receive a lot of awards for our really, really great support team. They are amazing and whenever I see the advertisement for this, the the announcements, I was like, oh, okay, we want another prize. Okay, I need another shelf for all the trophies we received for that. That's pretty cool. I really like that. Whenever we receive great feedback from clients and ratings from companies, this is really warms my heart.

101 **Camilla** 17:09

102 Would you say you really identify with your company?

103 **Audrey, MNC/O** 17:13

104 Yeah, I do [identify with the company]. Especially because I worked for a competitor in the past. And I see the differences and so many bigger things and also details. It was a very wise decision to come to this company almost two years ago. And even though I didn't want to go back to this area to this industry again. But they were really very transparent, very kind and open communication. Even though everything was remote. It was during COVID. So I did not meet any person physically. And so that was one of the key factors why I decided to join this company.

105 **Camilla** 17:51

106 Okay, yeah, crazy. So I expect it would be pretty difficult for you to leave your company at this point in time, right? What would you miss most?

107 **Audrey, MNC/O** 18:06

108 I would miss most the great technology. Really, really forward-thinking technology. My kind colleagues, especially those in [German city], of course. And it's just a nice package. It's also like I was saying, my clients are very nice. They remember we even from my previous company where I work for the competitor, they still remember me. And if I would change the industry now, I would not work with those clients anymore, I would miss them too.

109 **Camilla** 18:34

110 Okay, cool. That's very nice. Oh, we were actually already done with the with the main questions. I just have some closing questions, open questions, if anything else comes to mind. What do you think change most? Or what is the biggest difference between working hybridly compared to working into either entirely remote or entirely on site, having that mixture.

111 **Audrey, MNC/O** 19:00

112 So the big difference, the big differentiator for me is might sound stupid, but it's really preparing in the morning to leave home and go to the office. It's the **commuting time travel time**, so to speak, even though it's only 30 minutes for me. And public transportation works really smoothly from one door to the other. But that's the thing. I find it a **waste of time** to sit in the underground or to stand in the underground and just go from A to B. That's, in my opinion, unnecessary and a waste of time. And that's the biggest

differentiator that's the **main reason why I love working from home**. Also preparing meals for lunch. [Laughing] I don't know how I did this in the past, but I spoke to my neighbor she's in the exact same situation like I am. And we sometimes discuss how to do this. It's just so stressful to prepare a meal, because you have to wake up an hour earlier or something, dress up and stuff. And then you sit on the ground and cannot do anything. You cannot take a call or anything because it's so noisy and people are listening to what you're saying... and this is confidential what we're doing.

113 **Camilla** 20:18

114 It's really nice being able to say, Okay, I'm not going to come to the office now I just don't have the time and the energy but still be able to when you feel like it', see the people around, right?

115 **Audrey, MNC/O**, 20:20 Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

116 **Camilla** 20:21

117 Because working entirely remotely. I did that also, for two years, I felt very disconnected from the team somehow, especially because I worked on site before. And that changed from on site to remote made me feel like I was missing out on a lot. And now I also have a new job where we have an office in Vienna, and I'm very happy to have the opportunity to be able to go to the office, but also have the flexibility to stay home because yeah, as you said, it's just so time consuming. It's incredible.

118 **Audrey, MNC/O** 21:07

119 And let's be honest, the colleagues are a big **distracting** factor. They distract you because they're chitchatting here and having a coffee here and then some people you look out for having a cigarette together. That's cool for mingling and feeling the connection. However, it's also noisy when you have a presentation in front of the client via telephone or teams or whatever. It's just noisy the murmuring and the mumbling.

120 **Camilla** 21:35

121 Do you feel like that connection that you mentioned that gets established by those things in the office is diminishing or do you feel like companies are able to somehow compensate that?

122 **Audrey, MNC/O** 22:07

123 Hmmm [Pause]. Good questions. [Pause]. I don't really know, I've never thought about that to be honest. What's your experience?

124 **Camilla**, 22:20

125 [irrelevant personal experience from interviewer]

126 **Audrey, MNC/O** 22:54

127 Well yeah, I guess we were trained to weaken importance of social contact through COVID. At the same time, we do have a basketball hoop in our office and believe me, if that were to be taken down, the male colleagues would freak out. They are constantly there and [gesture of shooting hoops]. And I mean that's fine, they can go for it. But I mean my desk is pretty close to the basketball hoop. And when they're playing

there and battling each other, while I'm taking a call, it bothers me a lot. I can't understand the customer, the customer can of course hear it as well. So that's difficult. I myself don't play basketball, it really isn't too important to me. We also have a foosball table, but that luckily isn't used before 6pm.

128 **Camilla** 23:35

129 Yeah, really interesting. And that's why I find it so interesting to talk to people about this topic. Because hybrid work really is here to stay and it's important to see which adjustments can be made to make this model work. And especially how companies keep their best talent and can maintain this connection to and identification with the company.

130 **Audrey, MNC/O** 24:13

131 Yes, definitely. That's a huge factor. And that is also precisely the reason why I do go into the office sometimes. Because I often want to and because it really is nice to sometimes talk to people in real life, and not just via phone or teams.

132 [private chatting]

133 **Camilla** 27:01

134 Thank you a lot for your time, Audrey.

9.8. Transcript – Interview with Simon (MNC/Office)

2 **Date:** Monday, 16.10.2022

6 **Age:** 29; **Department:** Product Management; **Nationality:** German; **Time at company:** 18 months
Speakers
Interviewer: Camilla
Interviewee: Simon

7 **Camilla** 00:00

8 So thank you for taking the time. To start off. Could you tell me a little bit about your role at [company]?

9 **Simon, MNC/O** 00:30

10 Sure, yeah. So I joined one and a half years ago, joined [company], as part of the sales engineering team. And we're a team that is basically across the whole of Europe. So there's me in [German HQ city], we have a few people in [UK city], in the UK, and then also some in Paris. So we're supporting our sales team, when it comes to product demonstrations. And we're more or less somewhere in between sales and our product team.

11 **Camilla** 01:04

12 That sounds like a really interesting job. You are based in [German HQ city]. How often are you in the office?

13 **Simon, MNC/O** 01:15

14	Yes, I'm based in [German HQ city]. I'm in the office more or less every day. So I do have the option to also work from home. But I just prefer being in the office.
15	Camilla 01:25
16	Are you in the office right now?
17	Simon, MNC/O 01:26
18	I am. Yeah.
19	Camilla 01:28
20	How many people are you there that come to the office regularly?
21	Simon, MNC/O 01:33
22	It changes a lot since then a lot of on conferences and client meetings. So it's something between, I would say five and 12 people.
23	Camilla 01:44
24	Okay. Looking at what resources you have social resources, but also physical resources. How confident do you feel in your role?
25	Simon, MNC/O 01:59
26	What do you mean, with software resources in?
27	Camilla 02:01
28	Do you feel confident that you have everything you need to fulfil your job correctly? Do you have the support for managers? Do you have the physical resources?
29	Simon, MNC/O 02:13
30	Yeah, I think so. I mean, in general, having the manager somewhere else, I think, is always slightly more challenging. So my boss is in [UK city]. So everything is virtually. Which is fine. But yeah, it's slightly more challenging. So of course, you need to set up like weekly calls to exchange information. And a lot of the casual conversation, of course, while having a coffee or something like that is of course, missing. It's across multiple offices.
31	Camilla 02:48
32	Okay. I didn't know your manager was in [UK city]. Okay. Yeah, that makes it more remote. How would you say was your onboarding when you started one and a half years ago?
33	Simon, MNC/O 03:00
34	Yeah, I think, onboarding in general, here is quite good. So since sales engineering is part of the sales organization, here are [company]. So basically, you had the same onboarding as sales in general, and it's quite good. So we have the three months program, completely focused, of course, on products, but also learning about the organization learning about [industry specific], for example. So it was really good. I would say. I think after one or two or three months, you're really ready for a job, I would say.
35	Camilla 03:32

36	Yeah, interesting that you have the same onboarding as sales, because you are much deeper in product right as well.
37	Simon, MNC/O 03:40
38	Yeah. I mean, it's not completely the same, but the foundation is the same. And then we have like, a few different things. Yeah.
39	Camilla 03:48
40	Alright. You already hinted at it. But can you tell me a bit more about what collaboration with your colleagues looks like? You said, your manager is in [UK city], so that's remote. Do you ever maybe collaborate on site with the colleagues as well? Or what does that typically look like?
41	Simon, MNC/O 04:05
42	Yeah, so I guess, colleagues, only team members or do you mean like colleagues in general?
43	Camilla 04:11
44	Anyone you work within the team?
45	Simon, MNC/O 04:14
46	So I mean, in my team, everything is like, almost everything is virtually. So a lot of happens during team calls, for example, of course, just chat messages, emails. And then with people in the office in [German HQ city], of course, just normal casual conversations, but again, those people in [German HQ city] are sales and service so they're not part of my team, but they of course, still very, very important for my day to day job.
47	Camilla 04:42
48	Okay. In the terms that you hear, how maybe a demo went for them, and you get feedback from what customers want, or how do you feel that that's enriching?
49	Simon, MNC/O 04:58
50	Yeah, I mean, just speaking about experiences, the calls you had. It's, I think less about feedback more about, in general, what happens in the market? What happens with clients? So I think feedback is challenging, but hearing about what's happening, things going on is working quite well, I think.
51	Camilla 05:25
52	Okay, cool. Looking at information exchange in your company, because you guys are hybrid. And as you said, you might talk with the people in the office, but work with the people more virtually and remote. How would you rate your information exchange? Does that work well? Is there something that gets stuck anywhere along the way?
53	Simon, MNC/O 05:46
54	Um, yeah, let me think. [Pause] In general, I would say it's quite Good. Yeah, I mean, I'm, I'm satisfied I would say.
55	Camilla 06:08
56	Which channels do you guys use for information exchange?
57	Simon, MNC/O 06:12

- 58 So a lot happens, like I said, in teams, so just small chat messages. And whenever there's like, a bigger topic, we are writing about a bigger thing that we're working on, this usually happens in email, which of course gives you more time to work on your reply. And also, of course, is sometimes across multiple days, right? So teams is usually just smaller things in an email would be for both things that tend to be like a little bit bigger. And then sometimes, if there's something we set up dedicated calls, for example, so let's say for example, we have a new product or a new update for product, then we usually set up a call, speak about it, share information experiences, and learn and exchange information like that.
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- 59 **Camilla** 06:57
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- 60 Okay. Do you guys ever have meetings where some of the people are joined together in the office, while others join virtually? Or is everyone always in front of their own screen?
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- 61 **Simon, MNC/O** 07:09
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- 62 So my team, everything is monitored virtually again. So we have a few people in [UK city], and they quite often meet in the conference room. And then the colleague in Paris, and I usually just connect via teams again virtually, but sometimes in office. So if it's not my team, we sometimes do have like, face to face meetings. But that's rarely the case, to be honest.
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- 63 **Camilla** 07:32
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- 64 Okay. And how do you feel as a virtual participant in physical meetings? Does that work out well, for you?
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- 65 **Simon, MNC/O** 07:40
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- 66 Yeah, I would say so. It's completely normal. I don't really see a huge issue a huge problem. So our team is quite small. So let me just so we have one in Paris, it's been [German HQ city], and then we have four people in [UK city], including the manager. So six people in total, which is I think, quite small. And I think the virtual calls or teams meetings work quite well, if the call is smaller. If they're getting bigger, 10 or more people, it's sometimes a bit hard to exchange information, think,
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- 67 **Camilla** 08:21
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- 68 okay. Can you tell me a bit about your relationship to colleagues, maybe also looking at the people that you're within the office everyday, but don't really work with versus the people that you work with virtually?
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- 69 **Simon, MNC/O** 08:33
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- 70 Yeah, sure. I would say like the people in [German HQ city], are cool so I enjoy being in the office. So maybe a little background: So my previous job, I also had a remote working job. So I was always working from home. And there was definitely something missing for me. So I think social interactions, just speaking with people having a laugh, I don't know, drinking coffee together is super important for me. And that's why I'm more or less every day in the office. So yeah, colleagues in [German HQ city] are great. And it's super important for me. So I guess a lot of the social interaction happens not necessarily with my team, but with different colleagues in [German HQ city].
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- 71 **Camilla** 09:18
-
- 72 And would you say your connection is closer to your team that you work with or the colleagues in the office?
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- 73 **Simon, MNC/O** 09:27
-

- 74 I would still say with my team. Since we of course are working on the same things with the same problems and same experiences I think. So I would say I'm closer to them, even though it's virtual. Yeah, I would say so.
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- 75 **Camilla** 09:49
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- 76 How did you manage to build such a close connection to the people that are completely remote all the time? Is it just because you work together regularly and communicate regularly or are there other things?
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- 77 **Simon, MNC/O** 10:04
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- 78 I think so. I think it's just of course, really important that there's a good fit within the team. So everyone is I think so more or less the same age, and I think it's just overall a good team, I think and people you can also hang out with. So it's not only work related, but it's also just in general good people, and people, you can also enjoy having a laugh with, for example.
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- 79 **Camilla** 10:38
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- 80 So imagine you guys have a lot of trust in within your team as well, if collaboration works so well.
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- 81 **Simon, MNC/O** 10:45
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- 82 Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And again, so in my previous job, it was different. So there was a huge age gap and it was different. I mean, everyone was super nice and really supportive. But it's just not socially, it's not the same, I would say.
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- 83 **Camilla** 11:04
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- 84 Yeah, and even in those remote settings, you still notice, like the age difference, or you notice within your team, now that you can maybe do those jokes on the side and talk at the same level of talking. So that social part really is something that you still feel although you're remote.
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- 85 **Simon, MNC/O** 11:24
-
- 86 Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.
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- 87 **Camilla** 11:29
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- 88 Can you tell me a bit about your office life? Like when you guys are there, is it really like everyone sits at a desk and works? Or do you maybe have a beer after work? Or play foosball or something?
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- 89 **Simon, MNC/O** 11:44
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- 90 Yeah, um, I'd say it's quite casual. So it's one big office. So it's more or less just only one room. And then we have a few smaller conference rooms. So you really see everyone. And if you want to talk to someone, you can just walk over to the desk, speak with them. And every now and then, we have a basketball hoop, so we just throw a few basketballs, we have a table kicker, so that's something we're doing every now and then. Then also after work, sometimes we have a few drinks.
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- 91 **Camilla** 12:20
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- 92 Okay. And generally, you could focus well on the office as well, because within many interviews with remote employees, I hear that they choose to work remotely because they're distracted in the office, do you have that problem as well or not at all?
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- 93 **Simon, MNC/O** 12:36
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94	It can be an issue. So sometimes it's quite noisy. And I just brought noise cancelling headphones. So sometimes it's very noisy, just put them on turns music, and then it's all good. And I've been, for example, to [UK city], and it's the same concept. So more or less just one room, but even more people and it's super, super noisy. And that was way too much for me. So, yes, there's definitely limit. And I think the way it is at the moment, so somewhere around 10 people maybe it's still slow. Okay, like so if it's too noisy, I can just put on some headphones, and it's fine.
95	Camilla 13:12
96	Okay. Cool. I mean, this is kind of a difficult question for you because you are on site, but you're also remote within your team. But have you maybe also with other teams experienced that on site workers are treated differently than remote workers?
97	Simon, MNC/O 13:31
98	Um, I mean I guess it's different. I don't really feel neglected or anything like that. I mean, I'm sure it's different. But I can't really point out anything like... [Pause] no, I can't think of anything. I'm sure it is, but nothing comes to mind.
99	Camilla 14:01
100	That's a good indicator, though. Okay, one kind of funky question. How would you describe your company culture in three words?
101	Simon, MNC/O 14:15
102	Um, it's very fast paced. [Pause] Very... I don't know it's very fast paced would be the first one. "Zielstrebig". And there's a difference I would say the [German HQ city] team is quite supportive and also my team supportive. But it's not always the case. So you know, some of the other teams and other offices are sometimes I would say maybe tend to be a bit toxic, I would say.
103	Camilla 15:03
104	Okay. Yeah, I mean, in such a huge organization, it's going to be really dependent on your direct manager and your group of people that you work with. Right?
105	Simon, MNC/O 15:15
106	Yeah. And it's really good for me, but I know it can be different as well for different people, or for other people.
107	Camilla 15:21
108	How connected would you say do you feel to [company]? Or how much sense of identification with a company do you have?
109	Simon, MNC/O 15:30
110	Um, quite a bit, I think. Since I really do enjoy my job. I think way more than I did in my previous job. A lot of people of course, hate going to work and think "Oh it's Monday again, so all over again", which is not the case for me. So I really do enjoy my work. And it's super interesting, speaking with clients, quite often, of course, also about quite prominent clients of like big corporates or big advisors, and which, again, are involved in bigger projects. So it's quite cool to be involved, I think. So just the exposure, you have to different things is super interesting. So.
111	Camilla 16:15

112	Imagine, can you remember an instance where you felt particularly proud to be part of [company]?
113	Simon, MNC/O 16:22
114	Particular proud? I would say, of course, so I'm still part of the sales organizations. For me, it was really winning the first clients over. So it wasn't really necessarily something big, but it was just winning the first project or the first client, I think that was more or less the proudest moment, I think, for me, but it's also very fast paced again. So it's a lot of small things. Similar again, if I compare it with my previous job, we had like, a few projects, very, very big ones, but only two or three a year. And of course, winning something like that was like really cool. And here [company], it's a lot of small ones. So we're speaking about, I don't know, 50-100 projects a year. So it's smaller, smaller wins, but it's still quite good. It's quite good. I mean, sometimes hard to motivate oneself to keep working on something for one goal that is like in a few months out. And having smaller goals, of course, is super helpful.
115	Camilla 17:45
116	Yeah. True. How difficult would it be for you to leave your company at this point in time?
117	Simon, MNC/O 17:58
118	I would say so [pretty difficult]. I think the biggest thing for me is just the people I work with, so I really do you enjoy working with them. And I wouldn't like going somewhere else maybe earning a little bit more, but having colleagues that I don't get along with as good as here. So it's definitely yeah, wouldn't be wouldn't be easy for me, I think.
119	Camilla 18:38
120	Yeah. Okay. I have a couple of closing questions. Looking at the fact that you guys are hybrids are really this mixture of office and remote in different locations. What about working in the hybrid team? Do you enjoy the most?
121	Simon, MNC/O 18:58
122	Um, I think I don't really enjoy working in a hybrid team. You have different advantages. So I do, of course, I do enjoy working with people from different countries, I think. So it's interesting, you're well connected to different people. So that's interesting. I mean, it's interesting, working with people from different countries, and having, again, exposure to different things outside of your own small bubble. Otherwise, I would say hybrid teams are more or less always a disadvantage I think.
123	Camilla 19:37
124	In what ways do you think?
125	Simon, MNC/O 19:39
126	I mean, it's hard of course to work on a team if it's across multiple offices. It does sound bad. Now, as I like I said, I do enjoy working with my team, but I think it's always more challenging working in a hybrid team.
127	Camilla 19:54
128	The communication of the collaboration, you mean?
129	Simon, MNC/O 19:56
130	Yeah.
131	Camilla 19:57

- 132 So if if it were possible you'd prefer 100% on site.
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- 133 **Simon, MNC/O** 20:12
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- 134 Yeah, I would say so. I mean, at least for now. Things are changing. Definitely at the moment. Yeah. One big thing for me in my case, for me it's only a 30 minute walk. So it's just very convenient. And I can really understand people, of course that have like, a 90 minute commute. So it really depends, of course, on your whole life situation.
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- 135 **Camilla** 20:39
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- 136 I mean, you already named a couple of disadvantages. What would you say is the biggest disadvantage of hybrid work? Or challenge?
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- 137 **Simon, MNC/O** 21:43
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- 138 Oh, yeah. Social interaction, I think. So when I started I went to [UK city] for a week, met around that was very important for me. Met again a few months ago. It's just meeting I think every once in a while. Face to face is very, very important. Otherwise, the whole social aspect I think, is quite, quite hard,
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- 139 **Camilla** 22:18
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- 140 Yeah, that's actually it from the plan questions. Okay. Is there anything else on your mind regarding the topic of hybrid work that you'd like to share?
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- 141 **Simon, MNC/O** 22:35
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- 142 I mean, one of my answers, I think sounded quite bad. So it's always quite challenging working in a hybrid team. But I also like really enjoy being in a hybrid team. Especially, like I said, working with people from different countries. It's something I think, also, I wouldn't want to miss in the near future.
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- 143 **Camilla** 22:53
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- 144 Yeah. Which is difficult in 100% office.
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- 145 **Simon, MNC/O** 22:58
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- 146 Yep. So yeah that's something, you have to live with. So it's always a bit more challenging, but also very rewarding, I think that's a good summary.
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- 147 **Camilla** 23:09
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- 148 I think [company] really managed to create this framework where hybrid work works, where it's really well set up. And that's also interesting to see how they managed to do that you guys have a lot of asynchronous communication as well, right.
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- 149 **Simon, MNC/O** 23:29
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- 150 Yeah, it's true. And it's of course, also depends a bit on, on the role you have, I think, in the organization, if you're in sales, your main your targets to hit and then you have different ways how you can manage to to, to hit your goals, basically. So you don't need to calibrate every day and every hour. It's not we can decide for yourself, I think,
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- 151 **Camilla** 23:54
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- 152 yeah, more autonomous. Cool. That's it already. Thank you a lot for your time and your thoughts!

