

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH PAPER

**Employee Engagement and Organizational Socialization in Remote and
Hybrid Work Environments**

**Munkavállalói elkötelezettség és szervezeti szocializáció táv és hibrid
munkakörnyezetben**

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Introduction

Organizing work and employee engagement have been a recurring challenge for companies in recent years. Many organizations were faced with a sudden shift from office work to teleworking during the pandemic. Since then, the COVID crisis is no longer so present in everyday life, but many companies have decided not to return to the present or only partially return to the present and take advantage of the benefits of online working. As a recruiter, I have noticed that in many cases jobseekers are also requesting the option of working from home in large numbers, which can be an advantage for them. For example, they can save time, avoid travel costs, have more flexibility in their working hours at home, or perhaps concentrate better. This is a major challenge for managers and HR professionals because, while it is very attractive to have a workplace where colleagues can work from home most of the week, personal relationships between employees and the values and goals of the company are key to employee engagement, building and maintaining a network of workplace relationships, knowledge sharing, building, and maintaining a corporate culture and retaining employees.

This study aims to examine the relationship between engagement and the home office and to understand how this affects organizational connectedness. I aim to gain a deeper understanding of the organizational and social psychological mechanisms behind engagement models. The practical aim of this research is to explore hybrid and distant practices and strategies that contribute to increasing employee engagement through organizational socialization.

In this research, I seek to answer which key factors play a role in increasing and maintaining engagement, how focus points change in atypical employment, and how organizational socialization and connectedness can be promoted in hybrid and remote work settings.

To get a better understanding of employee engagement, I think it's important to use basic theories and models that look at the idea and factors of engagement in a critical and all-encompassing way. These include Kahn's model of employee engagement (1990), Schaufeli et al.'s (2006, 2011) method for measuring engagement, and the Job Demands-Resources Model (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007) (and the role of personal resources). According to these models and theories, organizational socialization and interpersonal relationships within a group are key components of employee engagement. Therefore, it is also important to look at the Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) and its organizational aspects. Nevertheless, based on the complexity of the research topic, I find it important to compare the existing engagement models and theories with the nature and dynamics of telework (Chen, 2023). The

conceptual framework will emphasize the interplay between organizational culture, employee engagement, and remote and hybrid work arrangement dynamics.

This study uses a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the relationship between engagement and working from home and its impact on organizational commitment. Within the quantitative methodology, I used an abbreviated version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli et al., 2006a) to measure engagement and the 4-dimensional Connectedness Scale to examine the level of organizational commitment (4-DCS; Huynh et al., 2012). In addition, I used the Organizational Citizen Behavior Individual Scale (OCBI; Williams & Anderson, 1991). As part of the qualitative methodology, I conducted semi-structured interviews with managers and HR professionals to understand the challenges organizations face when working hybrid or telecommuting and the practices they use to overcome them. In my data analysis, I used quantitative statistical methods, including correlation analysis and regression modelling.

Although quantitative methodology suggests that there is no significant relationship between the number of days spent in the home office and engagement and other organizational indicators, qualitative research has shown that it is worth exploring this issue in a more complex way, as there are several factors at play in employee engagement in both telework and hybrid work environments. These factors include internal organizational communication, the quality of the relationship between supervisors and employees, the quality and frequency of feedback, and the collaborative framework of telework and hybrid assignments.

Overall, it can be concluded that the relationship between the home office and an individual's engagement in the workplace can be complex and influenced by several factors. Future research should examine the impact of different organizational practices and communication strategies and use a broader and more representative sample to draw more accurate conclusions about these complex relationships.

I. Literature review

I.1. Employee engagement

I.1.1. Definitions of employee engagement

Over the past decades, there have been many definitions of employee engagement, but despite the overlaps, there is still no universal, well-defined definition. Numerous perspectives, from both the individual and the organizational point of view, allow for the exploration and research of this highly complex field. Many factors influence engagement, and its consequences have a positive impact.

According to Kahn (1990), engagement refers to the cognitive, emotional, and physical presence in an individual's professional life. It encompasses all an individual believes about the organization, the managers, the working conditions, their feelings about these three factors, and the physical energy they expend to achieve their job-related goals. This relates to Loehr and Schwarz's (2006) theory, according to which engaged employees experience physical energy, emotional connection, mental focus, and alignment with organizational goals. Truss and colleagues (2008) describe engagement as a passion for work and as an emotional and intellectual commitment. This is very much in line with an earlier formulation presented by Maslach et al. (2001), but they considered engagement to be a state of motivation, persistence, and efficiency in which the employee can achieve fulfillment, and which is characterized by high levels of activity and pleasure. From another perspective, engagement is not a matter of attitude but rather of the level of attention an individual pays to their work and the extent to which they can immerse themselves in their tasks to perform well (Saks, 2006). Schaufeli and colleagues (2006b) described engagement as a motivated psychosocial state with three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Several models and theories have developed over the years to understand the concept of employee engagement, its dimensions, and its factors, in addition to the definition of engagement itself. Similarly to the number of definitions, these theories and models also differ from each other in content, focus points, dimensions, and factors; however, they describe similar things but from alternative viewpoints.

I.1.2. Models and theories of employee engagement

Kahn's model of employee engagement

According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement means being present psychologically and physically in one's role. Personal engagement in a role encompasses three aspects. (1) Cognitive aspect means the employee's beliefs about the organization, the leaders, and the conditions provided; (2) emotional aspect means the employee's feelings about the organization, the leaders, and the conditions; and (3) physical aspect means the physical energies an individual could exert to accomplish their role.

Kahn (1990) argued that people have different dimensions of themselves, which they prefer to use based on given conditions to fulfill their roles. These psychological conditions are meaningfulness, safety, and availability. These conditions together shape the connection between the individual and their role. Meaningfulness is "the sense of return on investments of self in role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 705) when the individual can feel valued and can

invest in their work and others to receive from them. Establishing incentives for self-investment can influence this.

Meaningfulness can be influenced by the characteristics of the tasks (variety, challenges, autonomy, clarity) and the role (attractiveness, role-person fit, influence, status), and by the work interactions, which might be interpersonal interactions or the inclusion of professional and personal elements. *Safety* means the ability to show their true selves without fear of negative consequences. Components of safety are a secure, predictable environment, clarified policies, protocols, consequences, and trustworthy situations. The condition of safety can be influenced by social systems that are predictable and consistent, such as interpersonal relationships that offer support, help, trust, openness, and flexibility; group and intergroup dynamics, where an individual can express themselves without threat; management style and process, which provide support, trust, consistency, and competence from the leader; and the organizational norms about the commonly accepted formal and informal rules, behaviors, and emotions of the members.

Availability means that an individual has the resources (physical, emotional, and psychological) to invest themselves in their roles, which can be influenced by the physical and emotional energies, the level of insecurity and confidence, and the outside life, such as personal, not work-related issues in one's life (Kahn, 1990).

Gallup's hierarchy of engagement dimensions

Gallup (2009) developed the hierarchical engagement model, which, similarly to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), has four dimensions that build on each other. (1) According to this model, the first level of engagement is when the work and role requirements are clear and the physical resources to fulfill these requirements are given as fundamental needs. (2) The second dimension defines the management's role and support in individual engagement, which means one's development is encouraged, one's well-being is important, and one gets recognized for the effort and energy one invests in their work. (3) Gallup's third dimension is about belongingness and in-organization connectedness. It contributes to the engagement level when individuals can connect to the organization's goals, share the same values, have positive interpersonal relationships with their colleagues, and have equal commitment. (4) The fourth level of engagement is growth, where individuals have challenges and opportunities to show progress, develop themselves at a higher level, and are happy to learn more and more in their work.

The job demands-resources model

According to the job demands-resources model (JD-R), job characteristics have two

categories: job demands and resources, meaning the psychological, physical, and organizational aspects of a job that cost something to the employee or help the employee fulfill their jobs and achieve their goals. Such demands are, for instance, the workload, the limited time one has to finish a task or project, and the interpersonal conflicts one has in their work. These resources can be learning and development opportunities that support one's personal growth, support from other colleagues, information, and safety a manager or supervisor can provide to succeed (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007).

JD-R is a framework that helps us understand how job characteristics are connected to well-being and job performance and how they indirectly influence organizational outcomes. The model suggests that job demands and job resources have different effects. If job demands are high, there might be a high stress level, a high probability of burnout, and increased risks of health problems. Stress and fatigue can lead to a decrease in job performance, while job resources help to increase job satisfaction, well-being, and employee engagement. When the needed support is provided, they can increase job performance and foster personal growth and development. The model also proposes that these job characteristics — demands and resources — interact with each other, so when a project requires more effort (mental, physical, emotional, etc.) and sufficient resources are provided (such as information, equipment, knowledge, training, support from colleagues and managers, trust from supervisors), demands may be less detrimental. It also works in the opposite direction: if there is a lack of resources, job demands might seem more critical than usual.

Aon Hewitt's model of engagement

Aon Hewitt's engagement model focuses on the work experience through six drivers, which have two categories: foundation and differentiators. The category of foundation has drivers that are critical for employees to feel safe, well-informed, and involved. These foundation drivers are the following:

- Organizational practices: internal and external communication, diversity and inclusion, appropriate infrastructure, talent, and staffing
- The basics: work environment, work-life balance and well-being, benefits, physical and psychological safety
- The work: collaboration and opportunity to socialize, empowerment and autonomy, tasks (and resources to fulfill them)

Differentiators are drivers that can create a commitment, and enhance engagement, but only after the basic needs are fulfilled. These drivers are:

- **Brand:** the company's or organization's reputation, whether an employee can be proud to work there or can recommend it to someone else to join, and corporate responsibility belongs here, too.
- **Leadership:** leadership has a critical role in this model of employee engagement because supervisors, leaders, and top management are responsible for being role models to employees, empowering them, giving them autonomy (and all the resources needed to succeed), and building trust in the organization.
- **Performance:** this driver contains elements such as career opportunities, development and growth opportunities, rewards and recognition, so people may feel appreciation for the effort they make to contribute to the organization's success, and performance management, which gives employees new challenges from time to time to engage with new goals and to support their personal growth by providing the necessary resources and framework for that.

When organizations focus on these drivers, according to this model, there might be engagement outcomes and, therefore, business outcomes. Engagement outcomes are "say," "stay," and "strive", which means when an employee thinks positively about their workplace and speaks positively about the organization and the other employees, they feel the desire to stay at their workplace due to a sense of belongingness, and they also strive to put more effort into their work to contribute and help reach the organization's (business) goals (Hinzmann et al., 2019).

I.1.3. The key drivers of employee engagement

After reviewing the key theories and models of employee engagement, we can identify the key factors that might help enhance it, and by focusing on these key drivers, organizations could maintain a motivating, engaging work environment where employees feel safe and can be committed to the common values and goals, and that can lead to performance improvement and success. Hinzmann et al. (2019) have conducted research where they have identified and categorized these key factors that play a big part in enhancing employee engagement in organizations. In the main engagement models, these factors are present; however, the different researchers have several different approaches and aspects. In this paragraph, I intend to summarize and synthesize the key components of employee engagement based on the work of Hinzmann et al. (2019).

- *Leadership:* Leadership plays a key role in engaging colleagues and creating a supportive, transparent environment where trust is a key value, managers regularly give

feedback to their employees, and there is an openness to employee needs. Supervisors and managers, including the top management, can empower colleagues and give them autonomy with all the resources needed to succeed in a role.

- *Communication:* Openness, transparency, and being well-informed and involved are important in organizations. Internal and external communication can create an environment where employees perceive certainty and predictability, which makes them feel secure. Communication may also contain regular feedback from a supervisor or a colleague, which helps employees develop and feel valued and important to the organization. This type of attention from someone might provide employees with resources for their work, such as emotional and professional support.
- *Recognition and rewards:* As already mentioned in the role of leadership, employees' recognition and rewards are crucial to make them feel appreciated, motivated, and recognized by their colleagues and managers. Recognition could be financial or non-financial as well; however, it is important to pay attention to the hierarchy and priorities of personal needs.
- *Personal growth and development:* In terms of employee engagement, new challenges, and continuous development are important to get employees committed to their work, and based on the Job Demands-Resources model, employers should provide the resources needed to fulfill a job or successfully manage a project. Opportunities, such as training, career models, or mentorship programs, help employees gain more knowledge and skills that provide them with the necessary resources to succeed.
- *Well-being and work-life balance:* Well-being and work-life balance are important factors in employee engagement. It is necessary to provide a work environment for employees that is flexible enough to support their personal lives and is physically and psychologically safe enough to keep employees' work-related anxiety and stress levels low to decrease the risks of burnout and health issues. When an organization pays attention to people's well-being, it can lead to higher job satisfaction, the feeling of being valued, and being an important part of the organization's life.
- *Alignment with values and goals:* Knowing what people are working for is critical to keeping them focused and providing directions. Organizational-level goals and values can and should be in line with individual values to keep them engaged and committed.
- *Empowerment and autonomy:* By giving more autonomy to employees might make them feel responsibility and ownership towards their work, therefore they become more

committed, however, these challenges and responsibilities may undermine their engagement if the demands are higher, and the appropriate resources are not provided.

- *Organizational culture:* Organizational culture and climate is crucial when we talk about engagement. The different engagement models showed that inclusivity, support, and motivation are important factors in an organization, which are all connected to the quality of culture, which is maintained and formed by the people.

I.2. Socialization and connectedness in the organizations

After reviewing the main theories and models of employee engagement, we can say that in each of these models, how the individual is positioned in the organization, the relationships they build, and the quality and form of the social network within the organization can support them to feel psychologically and physically secure, which will help them to achieve their goals and fulfill their potential, play a key role. This kind of connection and sense of belonging does not happen by itself; the organization and the direct team must maintain a coherent organizational culture that allows newcomers to adapt easily, relate to organizational values, and adopt organizational habits and behaviors. Organizational connection refers to the feeling of belonging, affiliation, and commitment that employees have toward their organization.

I.2.1. Social identity

Social identity theory (SIT) was introduced by Tajfel (1978) argues that people tend to identify themselves as group members rather than individuals. Social identification is a psychological process with three stages: (1) social categorization, (2) social comparison, and (3) social identification. Social categorization is when we cluster individuals based on social categories. Comparison is when we distinguish between “good groups” and “bad groups” based on values and other characteristics. We talk about social identification when we can explicitly explain why a group differs from others.

Despite the above, these groups are fluid, and several identity management strategies change the categorization. In society, people may seek to escape from a group when they no longer intend to be part of it. A young person's eagerness to break the pattern and learn something new, or their desire to study at a higher level, may have a connection to education. This strategy is called *individual mobility*. Another strategy is called *social competition* when the members of a group engage in different forms of conflict to change the status quo. An example of social competition is when a trade union represents a group of employees and takes action to get them a pay raise. The third identity management strategy Ellemers and Haslam (2012) mentioned is social creativity, which means the intergroup comparison is redefined and other characteristics

get more attention, for instance, friendliness instead of wealth.

I.2.2. Organizational socialization and organizational identity

Following Tajfel's theory, several other research and theories have been developed, that present the organizational aspects of social identity theory. Ashforth and Mael (1989) introduced the concept of SIT into organizational studies as a sense of unity and belonging, then Dutton et al (1994) elaborated on previous theories and embedded Organizational Identity within management. The fact that the concept of organizational socialization, the notion of involvement and belonging, had already been addressed earlier, played a major role in the development of the organizational perspective. Brown presented four aspects of involvement: attraction to a group or an organization, consistency of goals (organizational and individual), loyalty, and reference of self to organizational membership (Brown, 1969), while Lee discussed the need for belongingness is a critical point in individual commitment, such as sharing goals with other members of the organization, showing loyalty towards an organization, and the similarity of individual characteristics and values (Lee, 1971). It is in line with Patchen's (1970) and Rousseau's (1998) arguments, that organizational identification is the perception of shared characteristics, the sense of belongingness, the feeling of solidarity, and the support an individual receives from other internal stakeholders, and that individuals perceive themselves as part of a whole.

In connection with social identity and organizational identity theories, Roy F. Baumeister (2012) explained the so-called need-to-belong theory which argues that people have a natural need to belong and maintain social relationships with others. He refers to Maslow's hierarchy of needs model, where basic needs, like safety, are fundamental, and belongingness must wait until these basic needs are met. In organizations, it is quite the same. People need to belong to a group of people and do not like being outsiders. Therefore, the sense of being part of a team or an organization contributes to their commitment and engagement levels.

In addition to the need for belongingness, people seek certainty and safety. To reach this state, people need to be well-informed about their jobs, roles, and work environment. According to Jones (1986), when we are talking about the induction of newcomers, it is important to provide them with information about their roles, tasks, work environment, the organization, etc., that helps to reduce stress, uncertainty, and anxiety in the early stage of employment. Different socialization tactics can serve as channels of information-sharing and interaction between the members of a group, such as collective and individual, formal and informal, sequential and random, fixed and variable, serial and disjunctive, and investiture and

divestiture. Building on these tactics, Falcione and Wilson (1988) have introduced the uncertainty reduction theory, which argues that people seek predictable, understandable, ultimately controllable situations at work, and the uncertainty can be reduced by information, which might lead to the remaining of the employee.

Saks and Ashforth (1997) developed the multi-level process of organizational socialization which defines the organizational level, group level, and individual level social factors that contribute to organizational socialization, and that are dependent on each other. These factors contain the socialization tactics that provide information to reduce uncertainty and increase the feeling of safety and predictability. Among the outcomes (proximal and distal), some factors and elements have a positive effect that can be applicable at the organization level, group level, and individual level. Organizational level outcomes are a stronger culture, more stable membership, higher effectiveness, and better reputation, while the group level outcomes besides stronger subculture are stronger cohesion among team members, for individuals, this process can result in lower stress levels, higher job satisfaction, higher organizational commitment and engagement, reduction of absenteeism and turnover intention, role conformity.

I.2.4. Organizational citizenship behavior

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) refers to the discretionary, off-duty behavior of employees that contributes to the effective functioning of the organization. Organizational citizenship (OCB) was first defined by Dennis Organ in 1988 as discretionary individual behavior, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988). OCB encompasses a range of behaviors, including supporting co-workers, voluntarily taking on tasks that go beyond job requirements, participating in organizational activities, and demonstrating a positive attitude toward the organization and its members.

Researchers have identified several dimensions of OCB, including altruism (helping behavior), conscientiousness (extra effort), sportsmanship (positive attitude), courtesy (positive interactions), and civic virtue (loyalty and involvement in the organization) (Podsakoff et al., 2000). These dimensions capture various aspects of discretionary behaviors that contribute to organizational effectiveness and performance.

Various individual, situational, and organizational factors influence employee participation in OCB. Individual characteristics such as personality traits (e.g. agreeableness, conscientiousness), job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceived fairness contribute to employees' willingness to participate in OCB (Organ & Ryan, 1995; Organ, 1997).

Situational factors such as leadership style, organizational culture, and perceived organizational support also play an important role in shaping OCB (Podsakoff et al., 2000).

Research has consistently demonstrated the positive impact of OCB on organizational performance, employee satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness. Employees who participate in OCB have higher job satisfaction, greater organizational commitment, and lower turnover (Organ & Konovsky, 1989; Podsakoff et al., 2000). OCB also contributes to greater teamwork, collaboration, and organizational commitment, which in turn promotes a positive work environment and improves overall organizational outcomes (Williams & Anderson, 1991). OCB is a valuable resource for organizations looking to improve performance, promote employee engagement, and create a positive organizational culture. By understanding the dimensions, antecedents, and outcomes of OCB, organizations can implement strategies that encourage and reward employee discretionary behaviors, fostering a climate of mutual support, collaboration, and organizational commitment.

I.3. Remote work

Remote working, also known as telecommuting or teleworking, is becoming more and more common in today's working world. In recent years, especially during COVID-19, home office and telecommuting options have become essential for employees, and since then, the freedom and flexibility that telecommuting offers have become a sought-after option for job seekers. As a body of research shows, telecommuting has its advantages and disadvantages, but other aspects of the new way of working require different management strategies, and technical resources, creating a sense of belonging, and fostering organizational socialization (Sproull et al., 1991).

Kossek et al.'s (Kossek et al., 2006) boundary theory argues that telecommuting undermines the clear separation between work and personal life, leading to concerns about maintaining a healthy work-life balance and effective boundary management. According to social exchange theory, telework arrangements involve a reciprocal relationship between employers and employees that emphasizes trust, communication, and mutual benefit (Blau, 2017). Researchers have examined several elements that influence the acceptance and success of telecommuting, including organizational culture, management style, technological infrastructure, and individual preferences (Kirkland & Bailey, 1999).

There has been ambiguous empirical research on the effects of telecommuting on productivity, employee satisfaction, and organizational success. Although several studies have found that teleworkers are just as productive as those working in an office environment (Bloom et al., 2015), other studies have pointed to difficulties in communication, collaboration, and

team unity in telework situations (2022). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of telework globally and caused organizations to rethink their approaches to adopting and supporting telework (Bartik et al., 2020). Baruch and Nicholson (1997) emphasize the importance of an effective home working environment for teleworkers. In their study, they identify key requirements such as an appropriate workspace and technological support to increase the effectiveness of teleworking. Building on this, Manochehri and Pinkerton (Manochehri & Pinkerton, 2003) examine the management aspects of teleworking and highlight the opportunities and challenges for organizations in managing teleworkers effectively.

Companies can realize benefits such as cost savings, talent retention, and workforce diversity if they view teleworking as a long-term strategic opportunity rather than a short-term necessity (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Baruch (2000) examines these benefits from the perspective of professionals and managers and identifies benefits such as greater flexibility, reduced commuting stress, and better work-life balance. In addition, Gibson and colleagues (2002) propose a leadership model tailored to telecommuting and emphasize the need for an adaptable leadership style to promote cohesion and productivity in remote work teams.

Practitioners and policymakers can use the researchers' findings to develop and implement effective telework policies and practices. Important factors include equipping workers with the resources and training they need to excel in a telework environment, fostering a climate of trust and accountability, and promoting a healthy work-life balance through flexible scheduling and effective boundary management. An important aspect of telecommuting is its impact on boundary management, work, and family efficiency. Kossek and colleagues (2006) investigated the relationship between telework, control, and boundary management strategies. Their findings show that telecommuting can improve control over the workplace and work-family balance when accompanied by effective boundary management practices.

However, teleworking is not without its problems. Khalifa and Davison (2000) present the paradox of telework, stating that while telework offers flexibility, it can also lead to feelings of isolation and lower job satisfaction as there is less interaction with colleagues. Golden (2006) also highlights the importance of relationships for telework satisfaction and emphasizes the importance of maintaining strong interpersonal relationships despite physical distance. Despite its potential benefits, telecommuting brings challenges in terms of communication and organizational identification. Scott and Timmerman (1999) examine the use of communication technologies by teleworkers and their impact on workplace identity. Their study suggests that virtual communication tools can facilitate multiple identifications in the workplace, but that the degree of virtuality can affect teleworkers' sense of belonging and commitment.

Ultimately, telecommuting represents a fundamental shift in the way we think about work and the structuring of physical workspaces. By examining the principles, realities, and practical drivers of telework, both organizations and individuals can effectively address the benefits and challenges of telework and new forms of work.

I.3.1 Factors influencing the effectiveness of teleworking

The technological infrastructure is the set of tools and resources required for successful teleworking. This includes reliable technologies such as high-speed Internet, communication tools such as video conferencing and instant messaging, and collaboration platforms. These resources are key to enabling telecommuters to perform their tasks effectively (Golden & Veiga, 2008). A flexible technological infrastructure allows workers to complete their tasks efficiently and communicate seamlessly with colleagues and clients.

Setting clear expectations and goals for telecommuting allows employees to understand their tasks, time constraints, and performance criteria (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). Managers should communicate their expectations regarding employee availability, frequency of contact, and expected outcomes. Having everyone on the same page and holding them accountable for their tasks is crucial.

Communication is essential for remote teams to collaborate effectively, coordinate work, and maintain team cohesion (Kock & Lynn, 2012). Frequent assessments, online conferencing, and open communication platforms encourage information sharing, problem-solving, and relationship-building between remote team members.

Trust and autonomy are essential in remote work situations. Managers need to trust that their employees can act freely and responsibly (Golden & Veiga, 2008; Raghuram et al., 2019). Giving their employees autonomy and decision-making power allows them to successfully manage their workload and working hours.

Teleworking can blur the distinction between work and personal life, which can lead to burnout and stress. Setting boundaries, taking breaks, and prioritizing self-care among employees can promote work-life balance and well-being in telecommuting environments (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kossek & Lautsch, 2012).

Providing training and support helps employees adapt to telework and acquire the necessary skills and competencies. Training and knowledge sharing on telecommunication technologies, time management strategies, and cybersecurity best practices enable workers to be successful in a telecommuting environment (Golden & Raghuram, 2010).

Leadership and management techniques play a critical role in leading telecommuting teams,

fostering collaboration, and maintaining motivation and engagement (Golden & Raghuram, 2010). Managers need to consistently provide feedback, recognition, and support to teleworkers and lead by example through flexibility and adaptability.

Organizational culture has a significant impact on the success of telecommuting. An atmosphere that promotes trust, effective communication, and a healthy work-life balance contributes to employee engagement and satisfaction while telecommuting (Golden, 2006).

II. Methods

II.1. Purpose and research questions

The research aimed to explore which factors play a key role in increasing and maintaining employee engagement in hybrid and remote working environments. From an intellectual perspective, the research sought to understand how the factors influencing employee engagement change with the emergence of hybrid and remote working. From a practical perspective, the research aimed to explore the strategies and practices adopted by some organizations to build and maintain engagement and deeper connections and bonds through hybrid and remote working. From a personal perspective, the research aimed to better understand the current labor market mechanisms around engagement and the potential of teleworking and home office.

In this study, the following research questions and hypotheses were formed:

- RQ: Which factors play a key role in increasing and maintaining employee engagement in hybrid and teleworking environments?
 - How do the focus points change in hybrid and remote work settings?
 - How can we foster organizational connectedness and engagement in remote and hybrid work environments?
- H1: There is a significant and positive relationship between work engagement, organizational connectedness, and organizational citizenship behavior.
- H2: There is a significant and negative relationship between the average number of days spent in home office per week and the work-related variables (engagement level, organizational connectedness, and organizational citizenship behavior).

These hypotheses aimed to unravel the relationships and effects that might change employee engagement and behavior in the context of atypical work settings.

Mixed methodology was used in this research, which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. This has the advantage of allowing different methods of data collection and analysis to complement each other, leading to richer, more nuanced, and more

reliable results. In addition, a mixed methodology provides a more complete picture of the research topic, as it can explore more aspects and dimensions. Combined results can help to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and to explore the interrelationships. It also makes it easier to control variables by comparing two or more methods.

However, mixed methodology can be time-consuming and complex. Combining different methods may take more time and the research process may become more complex. In addition, the cost of the methodology may be higher as it requires more tools and resources. Standardization in the application can also be a challenge, as harmonization of different methods is not always easy.

II.2. Methods of data collection

Quantitative – Questionnaire design

As the quantitative part of the research, a questionnaire was developed to understand the relationship between employee engagement and organizational connectedness. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and it was a criterion that every respondent should be at least eighteen years old and have at least part-time employment. It was not a requirement for the respondents to have a home office or remote work experience, because it was considered interesting to investigate whether there is a relationship between those, who work any day per week from home, and those, who do not have home office opportunities. As a measurement, three different instruments were used in the questionnaire: the shortened, 9-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli et al., 2011), the modified version of the Four-Dimension Connectedness Scale (Huynh et al., 2012), and the 7-item altruism subscale of the Organizational Citizenship Behavior scale (Smith et al., 1983). In addition to the measurement scales, the questionnaire contained sixteen more questions, which were related to the respondent's work life and work environments, and other demographic items were used. At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents were reassured that by filling in the survey, no personal identification would be recorded. The items of the questionnaire are in the Annex 2.

The 9-Item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

For this study, the Hungarian version of the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) was used to measure the respondents' engagement levels (Salamon et al., 2021), which has three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. For each dimension, three statements are provided for the respondent to rate in terms of job identification, job challenges, and job satisfaction. The UWES has high reliability and is widely used to measure employee engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2006b).

The Four-Dimension Connectedness Scale

The 4-Dimension Connectedness Scale is a scale developed to measure employees' connectedness to the organization. It originally contains 15 items, however, in the workplace application, items 12-15 can be omitted at the authors' suggestion as they are specifically related to volunteer work. The scale measures four dimensions: emotional attachment, professional identity, organizational affiliation, and commitment to organizational goals. High scores on the scale indicate that employees have a strong attachment to their organization (Huynh et al., 2012).

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

The Organizational Citizenship Behavior Individual Scale (OCBI) which measures an individual's willingness to engage in altruistic behaviors for the organization. OCB refers to voluntary behaviors that are not included in the job description but contribute to the effectiveness and well-being of the organization. The altruism subscale assesses how willing respondents are to help others in the work environment and how willing they are to sacrifice for the organization. The higher the score on the OCB scale, the greater the individual's willingness to engage in altruistic behavior for the organization (Williams & Anderson, 1991).

These standardized scales not only help to measure the extent of employee commitment and organizational connectedness but also provide a more detailed insight into individuals' workplace behaviors and attitudes. The use of scales in the quantitative research process allows for a reliable and comparable analysis of results.

Qualitative – Semi-structured interviews

As the qualitative part of the study, I have conducted 8 semi-structured interviews with HR professionals and managers. The interview method aimed to get a deeper understanding of organizational connectedness in hybrid and remote work scenarios, and to investigate what are the challenges organizations face, and what are the practices they use when we talk about creating opportunities to connect. I have designed the interview structure based on the literature and the research goals and intended to touch on five main topics. The advantage of semi-structured interviews is the ability to be compared, however, there are some drawbacks, too, as I couldn't go deeper into a topic the interviewee mentioned, because of the given timeframe.

II.3. Methods of data analysis

In the data analysis, I processed the qualitative and quantitative data separately but in a coordinated way. For the analysis of the qualitative data, I used thematic coding on the interview transcripts to help identify key themes, patterns, and contexts. The nVivo software enabled the

efficient implementation of thematic coding and structured analysis of the data.

During the qualitative methodology, not all interviewees contributed to the audio recording, and some did not allow the transcripts to be published in the thesis. This factor may reduce the reliability of the data and its generalizability. In addition, the lack of transcripts may make it difficult to analyze and interpret the content of the interviews more accurately, as our memory does not always retain what was said accurately.

I used statistical methods to analyze the quantitative data using SPSS software. First, I examined demographic data and scale scores using descriptive statistics, including means, variances, and correlations. I then conducted relationship analyses and regression analyses to explore the relationships between engagement, organizational connectedness, and organizational citizenship behavior scores.

In quantitative methodology, low item counts, and non-representative samples may bias the results. As the research sample may not necessarily reflect the entire target population, the generalizability of associations and conclusions may be limited. In addition, a low number of items may also reduce the statistical reliability and overall validity of the results.

II.4. Sample

II.4.1. Quantitative

The questionnaire was pilot-tested beforehand. This involved sending the questionnaire to 7 people and asking them to read the questions carefully and then to give feedback on the clarity, comprehensibility, possible spelling mistakes, and structure of the questionnaire. Based on the feedback from the pilot test, I refined and finalized the survey. The online questionnaire was distributed on different platforms, and an online advertising package was also purchased. The advertising package aimed to reach a more diverse target group.

The demographic characteristics of the participants were examined to gain insight into the composition of the sample. Of the 116 participants, 41 (35.3%) were men and 75 (64.7%) were women. In terms of primary residence, 48 (41.4%) of the participants lived in the capital city, 23 (19.8%) in the county capital, 22 (19.0%) in towns with 10,000 or more inhabitants, and 23 (19.8%) in smaller towns or villages with less than 10,000 inhabitants.

The marital status of the participants varied: 29 (25.0 %) were single, 43 (37.1 %) were married or in a partnership, 10 (8.6 %) were divorced, 3 (2.6 %) were widowed and 31 (26.7 %) were in a relationship. In terms of educational attainment, 2 (1.7%) of participants had completed primary school at most, 40 (34.5%) had completed secondary school and 74 (63.8%) had completed tertiary education.

Participants worked in a variety of industries, including information and communications (15.5%), finance and insurance (16.4%), business, scientific and technical activities (5.2%), administrative and support services (12.1%), education (6.0%), arts, entertainment, and recreation (4.3%) and other services (13.8%). The size of participants' employers varied: 42 (36.2%) worked for companies with 49 or fewer employees, 40 (34.5%) worked for companies with 50 to 249 employees, and 34 (29.3%) worked for companies with 250 or more employees.

II.4.2. Qualitative method

I interviewed HR professionals and managers who are active in people management in their own organizations. I contacted a total of 10 potential interviewees, of which 7 were able to make an appointment. The interviews were conducted in person. From a research point of view, it was a disadvantage that 2 interviewees did not agree to allow me to make an audio recording of the interview, and 1 other indicated at the end of the interview that they had shared information during the interview which made them not agree to allow me to attach the transcripts to my thesis. The average length of the interviews was 66 minutes. A summary of the interviewees is presented in Table 2.

The interviews were conducted based on a prepared set of questions (Annex 2), which were formulated based on the literature reviewed and the research question. During the interviews, I endeavored to touch on all topics that I had previously considered useful for my research. However, I tried to be flexible depending on the time available and to take the chance to address additional topics that arose during the discussions and that might be relevant to my thesis. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, and the content was analyzed according to thematic coding based on theoretical models and the research questions. The thematic coding contained elements such as the challenges organizations have been facing before, during, and after the pandemic, including home office policies and work settings; and factors influencing engagement and promoting connectivity in remote and hybrid work settings.

III. Results

III.1. Quantitative measures

III.1.1. Descriptives

Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to analyze the characteristics of the data set. The sample consisted of persons aged between 20 and 67 years. The mean age of participants was 36.38 years, with a standard deviation of 1.31, indicating a relatively diverse age distribution within the sample. The age distribution was moderately skewed, with a skewness value of 14.10, indicating a positive skewness of the data. In addition, a kurtosis value of 0.57 indicates

a slightly peaked distribution.

As for the scores of the standardized tests, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) ranged from 3.00 to 20.33, with a mean of 13.22 and a standard deviation of 3.46. This indicates a medium level of work engagement among participants, as reflected in the average UWES score. The distribution of UWES-9 scores appeared to be slightly negatively skewed but relatively normal in shape.

The scores on the 4-Dimensional Connectedness Scale (4-DCS) ranged from 11.00 to 77.00, with a mean of 54.94 and a standard deviation of 12.54. The distribution of the 4-DCS scores showed a negative skewness, indicating that the majority of participants reported relatively high levels of organizational connectedness. However, the distribution was moderately peaked, indicating fluctuations in the participants' level of connectedness.

Participants' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCBI) scores ranged from 7.00 to 35.00, with a mean of 29.52 and a standard deviation of 3.84591. The distribution of the OCBI scores was highly negatively skewed, indicating that most participants demonstrated high levels of citizenship behavior. The distribution, however, showed a leptokurtic shape, suggesting that the level of OCBI varied across participants.

The variable indicating the average number of days participants worked from home in the last six months ranged from 0 to 5. The average number of days spent in the home office was 1.97 with a standard deviation of 1.75. The distribution of days spent in the home office was positively skewed, indicating that most participants worked fewer days than average from home, but the distribution also showed a slightly peaked shape.

III.1.2. Correlation analysis

The purpose of the correlation analysis was to examine the relationships between the UWES-9, the 4-DCS, the OCBI scores, and the average number of days worked from home per week in the past six months.

The UWES shows a strong positive correlation with 4-DCS (Pearson: $r = 0.716$, $p < 0.001$) and a moderate positive correlation with OCBI (Pearson: $r = 0.499$, $p < 0.001$). However, there is only a weak negative correlation with the average number of days worked away from home per week (Pearson: $r = -0.149$, $p = 0.110$), which is not statistically significant.

The 4-DCS shows a moderate positive correlation with the OCBI (Pearson: $r = 0.475$, $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, there is only a weak negative correlation with the average number of days worked from home per week (Pearson: $r = -0.055$, $p = 0.556$), and this correlation is not statistically significant. As with the other variables, there is a slight negative correlation between the OCBI scores and the average number of days worked from home per week

(Pearson: $r = -0.126$, $p = 0.177$), but this is not statistically significant.

Overall, the correlation analysis shows that work engagement, organizational connectedness, and organizational citizenship behavior are positively correlated. However, there is no significant correlation between these variables and the average number of days worked from home per week. This suggests that teleworking arrangements do not have a significant effect on these psychological and behavioral outcomes among employees in the context studied. Further research may be warranted to investigate additional factors influencing these relationships and to understand the implications for telework policies and practices.

III.1.3. Regression analysis

Regression analysis between UWES-9 and the number of days worked from home showed a negative correlation, albeit with low explanation power ($R^2 = 0.081$). This indicates that an increase in the number of days worked from home is associated with lower work engagement. However, the effect size of this relationship was relatively small.

Regarding the regression analysis between the number of home office days and 4-DCS, the results showed no significant relationship between the different models. The R-squared values remained low (0.021-0.030), indicating that the number of home office days was not a significant predictor of the level of organizational connectedness. In addition, none of the predictor variables had statistically significant coefficients.

The regression analysis between the number of home office days and OCBI also showed no significant results. In several models, R-squared values remained low, indicating a lack of predictive power. None of the variables had statistically significant coefficients, suggesting that the number of days in the home office is not strongly related to the behavior of employees within the organization.

Regression analysis between UWES-9 and OCBI showed a moderately strong positive relationship. OCBI significantly predicted the UWES score, with OCBI explaining about 24.9% of the variance in UWES. This suggests that higher levels of organizational citizenship are associated with higher levels of work engagement.

Finally, regression analysis between 4-DCS and OCBI also showed a moderately strong positive relationship. OCBI significantly predicted the 4-DCS score, with OCBI explaining about 22.6% of the variance in 4-DCS. This suggests that higher levels of organizational citizenship are associated with higher levels of employee engagement.

The results of the correlation and regression analyses provide valuable insights into the relationships between job commitment, organizational connectedness, organizational

citizenship, and the number of home office days. First, the strong positive correlations between UWES-9 and 4-DCS and between UWES-9 and OCBI suggest that individuals with higher levels of job commitment tend to report higher job satisfaction and greater organizational commitment.

Contrary to expectations, the number of home office days was not a significant factor for either job satisfaction or organizational commitment. This suggests that teleworking does not necessarily have a direct impact on the attitudes and behavior of the employees studied here. However, it is important to consider other possible factors, such as job autonomy, workload, and organizational culture, which may influence these relationships.

In addition, the significant predictive power of OCB for both UWES-9 and 4-DCS emphasizes the importance of promoting a culture of organizational citizenship in organizations. Encouraging employees to go beyond their formal duties can lead to higher levels of engagement and job satisfaction, ultimately benefiting both the individual and the organization.

While the results provide valuable insights into the relationships between key variables, further research is needed to investigate additional factors that influence workplace engagement, organizational connectedness, and organizational citizenship behavior. In addition, longitudinal studies can help to establish causal relationships and identify possible moderators or mediators of these relationships. Such findings would be of great value to HR professionals and managers in organizations seeking to improve the well-being and performance of employees.

III.2. Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis was conducted with thematic coding. The codebook was structured based on the relevant theoretical framework and the interview questions. To evaluate the results of the interviews, a synthesized version of the engagement models was created (Figure 5.). In addition to the elements of the different engagement models, the previous and current challenges were added to the codebook.

III.2.1. Current challenges

The interviews covered how the organization operated before, during, and after the pandemic, as well as the challenges they currently face in terms of office presence and home office. The representatives of the companies with whom I conducted interviews all reported that they had home office opportunities before COVID-19, which meant 1-2 days a week. One company said that they had an unlimited home office before the pandemic, but that they were

very keen to have colleagues come in and that they did not usually use it.

"We already had unlimited home office, but somehow as an unwritten rule, no one made use of it. You could think of it as Fridays when everyone was at home, and the other days only when the mechanic came or something." - Katalin, Mood Manager

"Before Covid, we all showed up. There was the big office, the roof terrace, and we used to stay in a lot after work, play board games, and socialize upstairs together after work." - Márta, HR Coordinator

However, the pandemic forced a change in the pre-Covid routine, and from one day to the next, managers decided to order a home office without risking the health of their staff. Some made it compulsory and strongly advised colleagues not to go into the office, others did not restrict access, but allowed everyone to decide at their own risk. The rapid and forced changeover was not always smooth. Interviewees also reported that they were not infrastructurally prepared to continue working online from the next day, and some also found it challenging to teach their colleagues, especially older ones, how to use the different software.

"As soon as the emergency was declared in March 2020, we knew we wouldn't get over it anytime soon. Within a few days, we switched from being present to operating online, without having a home office policy in place. We didn't even know what we were doing. It was a challenge technologically and everything." - Anikó, HR Manager

"It was very different how everyone reacted to this whole situation. I remember that especially for older colleagues, it was difficult to give them training on how to use a software or application when the training was already online. It was very new for them." - Lilla, People Partner Lead

"We really liked coming into the office, but it didn't shock us that we would now have to switch. Colleagues were even happy that they weren't disturbing each other with phone calls, which is common in our office, to say the least." - Ferenc, Chief Executive Officer

The move to online operations offered many advantages, but it also had its drawbacks. During the interviews, it was mentioned that although recruitment had been extended to a national level during the pandemic, resulting in greater immersion, returning to normal operations had revealed some dilemmas. The current situation was reported by interviewees as being difficult to find the right colleague in this era, as job seekers are concerned about how much home office a company offers.

"As a Budapest company, we have opened up recruitment to everyone. Some people we hired from Pécs, saying that everyone is online anyway. We didn't think about the fact that even though we have a higher pool, and we might be able to recruit colleagues from the countryside

with lower salary demands, after the pandemic, when we return to the office and have a new home office policy, how we will treat them so that it is fair and equitable to the other colleagues." - Márta, HR Coordinator

"Now companies are competing for staff with the right skills and experience, and in many cases, we have found that it doesn't matter if we promise more, if there is no home office, or if they promise more home office elsewhere, candidates will choose that alternative. It's a benefit in terms of travel costs, convenience, peace of mind, and work-life balance, but it also means people give up a lot of things that they only experience when they come in and work and are part of what happens here, not in their living room at home." - Zsuzsanna, Organizational Development Specialist

"There was such a conversation between the owner and a colleague, in which it was said that XY would buy a country house, but only if [owner's name] promises that he will never again be obliged to be present in the office." - Márta, HR Coordinator

In addition to recruitment and selection of new staff, it was also reported that there is a demand from colleagues to be present in the office, but the evidence does not show that they come to work more often and that staff only come to the office to work when they really have to.

"I did a survey asking them what their preference was, and how many days a week they would come in so that we could calculate capacity. The experience and the facts show that the survey is not the reality. So there is a demand to be there, but somehow, when it comes to the fact that they should come in, they choose to stay at home." - Katalin, Mood Manager

"What is most difficult in this area is the training and education. We organize the training for our colleagues, they sign up, we organize the date, the location, and the topic according to their preferences, and we always have a preliminary survey to assess the needs. And then on the day of the training or the day before, they tell us that it's not good for them because they won't be able to come in and whether they can participate online." - Gábor, Chief People Officer

As the organizational challenges described above show, in the post-covid period, when people may not want to give up the benefits and convenience of the home office, companies need to adapt to the changing labor market and employee needs and to introduce initiatives and actions that can be taken in an online environment to replace the currently missing face-to-face contacts and interactions. For this purpose, the next section will review the solutions and interventions in the organizations I have studied to make the most of hybrid or remote operations to engage employees and to develop and maintain personal connections.

III.2.2. Factors to maintain engagement and create connectedness

In most of the organizations studied, the return to the office post-COVID was gradual, and guidelines for the level of office presence were set at an organizational level, which small teams were able to implement in a tailored way. Almost everywhere it was considered important to have fixed days at team level when all team members were present in the office in person. In other places, the phasing was not done, and employees were called back immediately after the pandemic to continue their mostly present work for 1-2 home office days per week before the COVID.

"Our policy is to have a face-to-face meeting for all teams at least once a month, which is mandatory for everyone. Most teams do this once a week, once a week anyway, because there is a need to meet, to be together, so that work can progress." – Lilla, People Partner Lead

"Twice a week [working in the office] is mandatory for us. One is Monday, the other is a free choice. It's always been a point to have a day together in the office." – Zsuzsanna, Organizational Development Specialist

"What I think we did well was that we came right back, there was no graduality, we ripped the band-aid off. I'm really happy about that because now we can really see how important it is to be here for each other, and to be present." - Márta, HR Coordinator

In addition to the benefits of a hybrid and remote working environment, issues such as *trust* within the organization were also raised by interviewees. During the interviews, I heard several examples of where there is a high level of trust in employees by the organization and management, and therefore employees have a lot of *freedom and the opportunity to work flexibly*. Conversely, there were also examples during interviews where this trust was abused and, as a result, the policies and rules had to be tightened.

"It is okay and accepted that I have personal training on Wednesday mornings, and I start working only afternoon. Everyone knows that I will work longer that day. It's okay because we are transparent with each other." – Lilla, People Partner Lead

"There have been occasions when someone has abused this boundless trust, but it's very rare, and we get rid of them then. Managers have noticed that someone is just riding on the backs of others. We are a relatively small community. A team of 7 people will push someone out who has to be constantly worked for." – Ferenc, Chief Executive Officer

"As a consultant, I have come across a situation where the company has made a provision where they have banned employees from being in a home office immediately before or after their leave because the experience was that they were abusing the trust of colleagues and managers and using that home office day to extend their holiday." – Zsuzsanna, Organizational

Development Specialist

The development and maintenance of a trusting environment and *organizational culture* involve all members of the organization, but the values that make up the culture are also based on management role models. In addition to the issue of trust, the importance of the direct presence and support of managers in hybrid and remote work was also discussed during the interviews. In many cases, interviewees pointed out that, although managerial support and manager-employee interaction and feedback are very important in a traditional working environment, they need to be given special attention in remote work settings. In teleworking, the employee cannot meet his/her manager every day, so the interaction between them is reduced, and the possibility of finding out about the problems and difficulties the employee is experiencing at a given time is reduced. The representatives of the mostly remote companies all reported that they had introduced weekly one-on-one meetings at the group level to provide a framework for *regular feedback* and to facilitate *interaction* between manager and employee.

"In our company, team leaders have one-on-one meetings with colleagues every week, where they can talk through the current challenges, and get feedback from each other. This is very important, and it is part of our culture." – Anikó, HR Manager

"It is very useful that we don't only have informal feedback and evaluation, but we have a regular session with our supervisor. It's not micromanaging. We hardly see each other in person. There must be some regularity in this [giving regular feedback] so that I, as an employee, can improve, or as a manager, I know where my colleague is at in their work, what I can help them to do to achieve their goals." – Márta, HR Coordinator

In addition to regular managerial feedback and support, regular and organized *interaction with the direct colleagues* was also very important. For example, what is part of everyday life in traditional settings requires more attention and organization in atypical employment, such as *knowledge sharing* and *information flow* within the team. During the interviews, it was reported that organized joint meetings weekly are crucial at the level of small teams, as they have the opportunity to discuss problems and difficulties related to a task or case and either work out a solution together or learn from each other's cases.

"We have a big role in knowledge sharing. The fact that we don't meet every day, but say twice a week at the most, makes it difficult to develop this kind of peer learning. We have, for example, introduced a block in our regular team meetings to discuss together the challenges of the past period, both to learn lessons and because these problems can happen to anyone, and it's good to have the knowledge and the recipe for each one." – Gábor, Chief People Officer

Being around colleagues and having the opportunity to socialize and talk to them to some

extent is also essential from several viewpoints. It is important to create an atmosphere and culture at work where people might feel psychologically safe enough to experience their feelings and honestly talk about them to someone or to their team.

"For me, during COVID it was very difficult emotionally. There were frustrating, stressful periods and because I wasn't meeting anyone, we usually talked via email, no one at the company knew. I wouldn't start boring someone with something like that. I really missed being in the office in the sense that we could see each other there, we could see each other if something was wrong, and then we knew somebody was having a bad day. Through a screen, that doesn't come across. It's hard to connect, to empathize." – Lilla, People Partner Lead

"I have a colleague who just resonates with everyone's feelings and can empathize with them immediately. Even if I do not share my thoughts or feelings with anyone, she will recognize it, and she has a real superpower to make you feel better. She helped me through a lot when it was a bit harder for me to cope with stressful stuff." – Zsuzsanna, Organizational Development Specialist

Psychological safety is not only about talking about feelings and understanding each other's difficulties and happiness but also about having the opportunity to speak up, bring up ideas, and make employees feel that they matter. In the interviews, the subjects brought up several examples of how to get people involved, and how to create a safe environment for them. They mentioned that the availability of the management, especially the top management is essential when creating connectedness. They mentioned that their experience was that when employees find the top managers available or closer to them, the whole atmosphere and the culture of the organization are much lighter. It is even more important in a remote work environment, where these people are less available to the operative colleagues due to physical constraints.

"The fact that [owner's name] is so people-oriented helps a lot, I think. He comes in, walks around the office, has a kind word or two for everyone, goes up to congratulate someone who just got married, and at the same time creates an atmosphere where anyone is welcome to come into his office if they need information directly from him. I think that's very important for us, to have such an open and accessible senior management." – Katalin, Mood Manager

"Part of working is making mistakes. I don't think anyone's head has ever been taken off for that, yet often colleagues can overthink them. We have events where specifically senior managers and leaders talk about the blunders they have made in their careers. I think this is important because if they can see that a successful CEO started in the same place, it can boost their confidence and make them see managers as less unattainable and intimidating." – Gábor, Chief People Officer

The interviewees stated that fostering this kind of culture starts with the newcomers' onboarding and induction. They say it is crucial that especially in a remote environment, the new joiner feels welcomed and has a connection to new faces, and to someone who he or she can turn to whenever he or she has any questions or difficulties. For this, they usually rely on their detailed and well-established onboarding process, which is essential in terms of employee retention, and sustaining the organizational culture.

"We have a buddy program for new entrants. It's completely voluntary. The buddy is a dedicated person, not necessarily from HR, who guides the new colleague through the entire onboarding process, helps them settle in, and they are expected to meet once a week or two to discuss any problems or issues that may arise, they have a checklist to go over together. Our experience is that it's a win-win thing. The newcomer has appropriate support to settle in their new role, and the buddy can engage in a voluntary role, which helps them connect." Márta, HR Coordinator

"We organize an induction day for new colleagues. Here they meet HR, we organize coffee with the management where they can ask questions, get to know each other." – Katalin, Mood Manager

The integration of new colleagues is important for the whole organization, not only to ensure that the new colleague gets up to speed and starts working as soon as possible but also to make him or her feel valued as a member of the team from the very first moment. This is even more important when working remotely, as the first moments for a new entrant can define the overall Employee Experience and establish the employee's commitment to the organization and its people. In addition to the onboarding process, interviewees also raised themes of how their organizations support employee-to-employee relationship building and personal bonding through self-organized, all-volunteer action groups working towards some common organizational goal beyond their job description.

"We have these self-organized, entirely voluntary committees that focus on a specific focus area. These committees aim to get the employees who join them to participate in the decision-making process and to contribute to making sensible, thoughtful decisions that meet their needs." – Lilla, People Partner Lead

"We've set up self-organizing committees to collect workers' needs and come up with some kind of solution, such as corporate social responsibility projects, the onboarding team, and many more. It's very important to make colleagues feel that their problems are being listened to and addressed, and then there's a stronger sense of trust and security. With this, I have the opportunity to meet other people outside my own department." – Márta, HR Coordinator

"When it comes to the annual team builder, we recruit members of the organizing team. They're very keen to get involved, some have had to say no because we've had so many people."
– Katalin, Mood Manager

Summarizing the results of the interviews, several elements and factors of the engagement models emerged from the research. The interviews highlighted that in hybrid and remote working environments, these factors should be considered from a different perspective and some elements should be treated with much more care. Through the interviews, I identified that it is the development of personal connections and bonds that presents the greatest challenge for organizations, which can be critical from an employee engagement perspective (beginning from the point of entry). While there is no single concrete guideline for how to approach the issue of employee engagement and organizational connectedness in each organization, it can be said that personal relationships and organizational trust play a key role in these cases.

The results of the interviews can be explained by the models and theories reviewed in this study. The need for personal connections is mentioned in the social identity theory, which states that people have a natural need to belong in society and organizations as well, which indicates organizational socialization on an organizational, group, and individual level (SIT; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In this case, the onboarding program, the self-organized committees and “buddy programs”, and the coffee breaks with managers are part of the organizational-level process. The knowledge-sharing solutions, fixed team meetings, and regular feedback between employees and supervisors are part of the group-level process. The individual-level process contains proactive strategies and movements, such as being voluntarily part of a team outside of the professional role in the organization, providing personal support, and showing reciprocity. These kinds of behavior are in connection with organizational citizenship behavior, which contains actions and behaviors that are not part of the individual’s job in an organization and are voluntary. In an organization playing a role model helps to set the social norms and might lead to conformity among employees, especially at the early stage of employment. This might also be connected to the engagement models, where the management’s role and the sense of belonging and connectedness are also discussed (Gallup, 1976; Hinzmann et al., 2019; Huynh et al., 2013; Kahn, 1990).

IV. Discussion

In this study, the aim was to explore the relationship between time spent in the home office and individuals' work engagement and to analyze how this is influenced by organizational connectedness and socialization. In the beginning of the study, I have formed the following

research questions and hypotheses:

- RQ: Which factors play a key role in increasing and maintaining employee engagement in hybrid and teleworking environments?
 - How do the focus points change in hybrid and remote work settings?
 - How can we foster organizational connectedness and engagement in remote and hybrid work environments?
- H1: There is a significant and positive relationship between work engagement, organizational connectedness, and organizational citizenship behavior.
- H2: There is a significant and negative relationship between the average number of days spent in home office per week and the work-related variables (engagement level, organizational connectedness, and organizational citizenship behavior).

It is important to note that the research did not find a significant relationship between home office days and engagement. One possible explanation for the research findings may be the limitations of the sample. The sample studied was not sufficiently broad and representative, making it difficult to detect significant relationships. This points to the need for future research to rely on larger samples and more diverse groups to draw more accurate conclusions.

The results of the interviews show that organizations have different approaches to engagement in hybrid and remote work settings. It can be concluded that in work environments where employees spend more time working outside of the office, more emphasis is needed to be put on transparent communication, the frequency of one-on-one meetings, and feedback, and it is also important to find a way people can socialize, for example through self-organized projects where the purpose is a common, group or organization level goals. It was observed that individuals are willing to go beyond their job duties and responsibilities to take on extra tasks for community goals. This is a manifestation of what is known as organizational citizenship behavior, which can strengthen commitment and organizational connectedness.

The importance of regular one-on-one conversations and scheduled mandatory team meetings was mentioned in the interviews to ensure continuous feedback and to develop a well-functioning collegial relationship. This suggests that the designation of appropriate communication platforms and practices is key in hybrid and remote workplaces, due the informal communication channels are not the same online as they are in cases of typical employment.

Overall, it can be concluded that the links between home office and individuals' engagement in the workplace can be complex and influenced by several factors, however, it is important to consider focusing on formal and informal ways of socialization to create a sense of belonging.

Further research should include examining the impact of different organizational practices and communication strategies, as well as the use of larger and representative samples to draw more accurate conclusions.

V. Limitations and further research opportunities

During the research, I encountered several limitations that affected the generalizability and evaluation of the study. The small sample size and non-representative sampling may bias the results and make it difficult to conclude. In addition, the lack of audio recordings from the interviewees posed an additional challenge for content analysis. Due to the time and resource constraints of the research, I was unable to select interviewees from the same industries, which may have also affected the generalizability of the study. Nevertheless, the diverse sample and insights provided by the interviews were important in understanding the relationship between individual engagement and organizational practices.

Further research directions provide an opportunity to fill in gaps and lack of focus. It would be important to conduct research on work patterns and to explore the engagement and preferences of individuals with families. In future research, it would be worthwhile to complement the qualitative results with quantitative methods to better understand the specific characteristics of specific organizations and the preferences and behavior of employees. Comparing firm-specific data can help to gain an even deeper understanding of the relationship between engagement and working patterns.

VI. Summary

The study aimed to explore the relationship between workplace engagement and time spent in home office and to understand what is the role of organizational connectedness, and how organizational socialization might connect to the engagement level in hybrid and remote work environments. A mixed methodology was used for data collection. For the quantitative research, a questionnaire was developed, using the shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, the Four-Dimensional Connectedness Scale, and the Organizational Citizenship Behavior scale were used, while for the qualitative analysis, conductive interviews were conducted with managers and HR professionals. Quantitative statistical methods, including correlation analysis and regression modeling, were used for data analysis, while qualitative data was processed by thematical coding.

The main results of the study show that there is no significant correlation between the number of days spent in the home office and individual work engagement. However, the qualitative analysis revealed that several factors play a role in employee engagement in

telework and hybrid work environments, including internal communication, supervisor-employee relationships, the quality and frequency of feedback, and the collaborative framework of the telework and hybrid work environment.

The research findings suggest that the relationship between the home office and individual engagement at work is complex and influenced by several factors. Based on the literature review and research findings, we conclude that effective internal communication, supervisor support, and regular feedback are paramount to maintaining and increasing workplace engagement, particularly in telecommuting and hybrid work environments.

It is important to point out that the research has several limitations. The sample studied was not sufficiently large and representative, so the generalizability of the conclusions may be limited. In addition, further research is needed to better understand the dynamics and impact of telecommuting and hybrid work environments on employee engagement.

Future research is recommended to further explore the effects of different organizational practices and to expand and make the samples more representative to draw more precise conclusions about these complex relationships. It is also worth examining how these indicators evolve in different organizations and comparing them with the practices adopted by the firm in question. During the present research, it was suggested that it would also be worthwhile to look at the issue of engagement along the lines of individual preferences and needs for the home office.

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