Stockholm School of Economics
1351 Master's thesis in Business Management
Academic year 2024-2025

A Balancing Act: An Exploratory Case Study on Managerial Practices in Hybrid Work

Mathilda Thorslund (42560) and Måns Widlund (42543)

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic forced organizations worldwide to adopt remote work, leaving a lasting impact on how work is conducted. Several years later, many firms have changed their ways of working, with hybrid work (a flexible arrangement where employees split their time between remote and in-office work) becoming increasingly common. Managers now lead a workforce in a fundamentally altered environment that transcends the traditional office, raising important questions about implications for managerial practices. Although research acknowledges that hybrid work disrupts managerial practices, literature remains limited, especially regarding how managers respond to the tension-filled nature of this new way of working. For middle managers, who coordinate and control everyday operations, the challenges of hybrid work are particularly significant, emphasizing the need to explore how they navigate and adapt to this flexible arrangement. To address this gap, we build on hybrid work literature and duality theory to understand how middle managers adapt their managerial practices to balance tensions arising in hybrid work. To achieve this, we conduct a case study of a large Swedish organization using data from 22 interviews with middle managers and workplace observations. Using Graetz and Smith's (2008) duality framework as a theoretical lens, we find that middle managers adapt their practices to continuously balance opposing demands between structure and flexibility, and control and autonomy. Rather than resolving these tensions, managers navigate them through various practices such as fixed office days, differentiated task allocations, formalized meetings, and outcome-based evaluations, enabling integration of both sides rather than an either/or approach.

Keywords: hybrid work, managerial practices, tensions, duality theory

Supervisor: Gislene Feiten Haubrich
Date examined: 2025-05-28
Discussants: Albin Barnevik (24809) and Oscar Stålhök (42535)
Examiners: Filip Wijkström and Johan Berglund

Acknowledgment

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our supervisor, Gislene Feiten Haubrich, for your dedicated support, thoughtful guidance, and insightful reflections throughout the research process. Your ability to challenge us and offer constructive feedback has been truly invaluable.

We are also deeply thankful to our case company for granting us access to explore this timely and important topic from within the organization, and for making us feel both welcomed and appreciated. To all the participants who generously shared your time and experiences during the interviews, this study would not have been possible without your contributions.

Mathilda & Måns

Table of Contents

1. Introduction **6**
1.1 Background 6
1.2 Purpose & Expected Contribution 7
1.3 Research Question 8
1.4 Delimitations 8
2. Literature Review & Theory **10**
2.1 Flexible Work: Working Outside the Traditional Office Setting 10
2.2 Hybrid Work: Combining the Traditional Office with Remote Work 11
2.3 Managerial Practices in Hybrid Work 12
2.4 Tensions to Dualities in Hybrid Work 14
2.5 Synthesis & Research Gap 16
2.6 Theory 17
2.6.1 Graetz and Smith's Duality Framework 17
2.6.2 Theoretical Framework 19
3. Methodology **21**
3.1 Methodological Fit 21
3.2 Research Design 22
3.2.1 Research Case 22
3.2.2 Data Collection 23
3.2.2.1 Preparatory Work 23
3.2.2.2 Interview Sampling 23
3.2.2.3 Semi-structured Interviews 24
3.2.2.4 Observations 26
3.3. Data Analysis 26
3.4. Quality of the Research 28
3.4.1. Credibility 28
3.4.2. Transferability 29
3.4.3. Dependability 29
3.4.4. Conformability 29
3.4.5. Ethical Considerations 30
4. Empirical Analysis **31**
4.1 The Case Company 31
4.2 Structure-Flexibility 31
4.2.1 Scheduling Practices 32
4.2.2 Meeting Practices 33
4.2.3 Communication Practices 35
4.3 Control-Autonomy 38
4.3.1 Accountability Practices 38
4.3.2 Workflow Practices 40
5. Discussion **43**
5.1 The Duality of Structure and Flexibility: Practices to Ensure Coordination while Enabling a Flexible Way of Working 43
5.2 The Duality of Control and Autonomy: Practices to Ensure Performance and Progress while

Fostering Employee Independence....46
5.3 Synthesis: Adapting Managerial Practices to Balance Opposing Demands in Hybrid Work... 50
6. Conclusion....51
6.1 How Middle Managers Adapt Managerial Practices to Balance Tensions Arising in Hybrid Work.... 51
6.2 Developed Theoretical Framework.... 52
6.3 Theoretical Contributions....53
6.4 Practical Contributions.... 53
6.5 Limitations....54
6.6 Future Research.... 55
7. References....56
8. Appendices....62
9. AI Appendix....66

List of Figures

Figure 1. Graetz and Smith's Duality Framework (2008)....20
Figure 2. Theoretical Framework....21
Figure 3. Overview of the Research Process.... 29
Figure 4. Extract of Methodological Approach....29
Figure 5. Developed Theoretical Framework....54

Definitions

Term	*Definition*
Hybrid work	Flexible arrangement where employees split their time between remote and in-office work supported by ICTs (adapted from Bloom et al., 2024; Halford, 2005).
Tension	The prevalence of opposing ideas, principles, or actions, often accompanied by a sense of unease or discomfort (Fairhurst et al., 2002), that arise when seemingly opposing elements interact and shape managerial responses (Putnam et al., 2014).
Duality	Seemingly opposing forces interpreted through a both/and logic that emphasizes their interdependence, rather than a either/or logic (Graetz & Smith, 2008).
Middle manager	Manager positioned between top management and frontline employees, responsible for coordinating and controlling daily operations (Kirchner et al., 2021).
Autonomy	Workers' ability to influence how they conduct their work, provided with freedom to make decisions and work with minimal oversight (Mazmanian et al., 2013).
Flexibility	In this study refers to the degree to which workers have the ability to choose where they perform their work (adapted from Hill et al., 2008).

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The concept of working outside the traditional office setting has long been a subject of academic and managerial interest, driven by the ongoing transformation of work and advancements in information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Athanasiadou & Theriou, 2021). While working from home has been on the rise for the past 30 years (Global Workplace Analytics, 2021), it has historically been adopted primarily on an occasional basis or by employees in fully remote roles (Athanasiadou & Theriou, 2021; George et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for an unprecedented global shift to remote work (George et al., 2022). This large-scale transition has had a lasting impact on how work is organized, with hybrid work, where employees split their time between home and the office, increasingly becoming a standard practice among higher educational workers (Bloom et al., 2024). In 2024, approximately 100 million employees across Europe and North America had adopted hybrid work (Bloom et al., 2024), underscoring its relevance in the contemporary workplace. This shift is further reflected in office attendance (number of days per week worked in the office), which remains about 30 percent below pre-pandemic levels (Mischke et al., 2023). In Sweden, twice as many people work from home now compared to before the pandemic, with around 46 percent of employed individuals aged 20 to 64 reporting that they work from home to some extent (SCB, 2025).

Hybrid work provides a balance that accommodates both the evolving, less constrained nature of work and the legacy of traditional office attendance (Bellis et al., 2024). Many companies, for example, have adopted the 3:2 model, where employees spend three days in the office while being allowed to work remotely for two days (Thorgren, 2021). The option to work from home has increasingly become a requirement by employees, with 42 percent of Swedish workers reporting that they would consider seeking new job opportunities if required to work in the office full-time (TT, 2023). Notably, it is not only digitally native tech firms that have embraced hybrid work; this arrangement has also been widely adopted by large, established organizations in traditional sectors such as government and manufacturing (Mischke et al., 2023).

As hybrid work becomes institutionalized across all types of industries and organizations, managers find themselves managing a workforce in an altered work environment, one that

transcends the physical boundaries of the traditional office. This shift raises important questions about how hybrid work affects the managerial work itself. While the debate surrounding hybrid work has largely centered on employees, with research focused on factors such as well-being, work-life balance, and job satisfaction (Athanasiadou & Theriou, 2021), the implications for the managerial role have received comparatively less attention (Ashkenas, 2025).

A global survey reveals that only 15 percent of managers feel confident in managing hybrid or remote teams (De Smet et al., 2023). Managers report difficulties in communication and a diminished sense of oversight, factors previously taken for granted in office-based settings. These challenges indicate a deeper dilemma, as organizations are increasingly forced to reconsider fundamental work practices, such as how control is enacted in hybrid work settings (De Smet et al., 2023). Management literature suggests that managers need to adjust their practices to meet the new demands of hybrid work, including more detailed planning, closer performance monitoring, and a more structured approach to organizing work (Ashkenas, 2025). Given that humans are often seeking balance and structure, especially in the workplace, the shift to greater flexibility does not necessarily mean the abandonment of structured activities, rather, it calls for an adaptation that allows for an optimization of work (Reisinger et al., 2022).

Thus, it is understandable that managers experience difficulties in navigating hybrid work. On one hand, structure and control might be considered even more critical for managing the complexities introduced by hybrid work. On the other hand, managers are operating within a context that promotes flexibility and employee autonomy. These opposite demands give rise to tensions, as the traditional logics of the former clash with the emerging logics of the latter (Fairhurst et al., 2002). The adaptation of managerial practices to balance these tensions is the focus of this study. As hybrid work decouples work activities from a single, full-time central office, it challenges traditional organizational theory and management practices (Taskin & Edwards, 2007). In this context, developing a deeper understanding of how managerial practices are evolving is both timely and necessary.

1.2 Purpose & Expected Contribution

The purpose of this study is to investigate how middle managers adapt their practices in response to tensions that emerge in hybrid work. Although hybrid work has attracted

increasing scholarly attention, much of the existing literature has centered on employees' experiences, often overlooking the role of managers. By shifting the focus to managers, this study responds to the call from scholars such as Reimers (2024) and Taskin et al. (2024) for a more comprehensive understanding of managerial practices in hybrid work. Specifically, we explore how managers respond to tensions that arise when work is no longer confined to a single, co-located office. To do so, we adopt a dualities perspective, which provides a nuanced perspective of how seemingly contradictory forces can be managed simultaneously rather than resolved through either/or choices. This theoretical lens, while well-established in organizational studies, has been relatively underutilized in the context of hybrid work and managerial practices.

By applying duality theory to the study of managerial practices in hybrid work, we aim to make several contributions. First, we expand the understanding of the managerial role and practices in hybrid work, addressing a notable imbalance in the current research focus. Second, we contribute to the growing body of hybrid work literature by shedding light on the tension-filled nature of managing in this environment. Third, we introduce an underutilized theoretical lens to hybrid work research, offering new insights into phenomena that have thus far been insufficiently explored. Finally, by uncovering how managers actively balance tensions in practice, we provide actionable insights that may inform more sustainable and effective hybrid work practices.

1.3 Research Question

To fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research is formulated:

How do middle managers adapt their managerial practices to balance tensions arising in hybrid work?

1.4 Delimitations

To fulfill the purpose of this study, several delimitations have been made. Firstly, the study is delimited to a single case company located in Sweden. This choice was made to allow an in-depth investigation of practices within a specific organizational context. Secondly, we have chosen to focus on a large organization, as a greater pool of managers increases the likelihood of securing participation for interviews. Thirdly, the study is delimited to middle managers, as

they are more directly involved in the daily work with employees compared to senior executives. Lastly, the scope of the study is restricted to investigating existing practices rather than evaluating performance outcomes or conducting longitudinal observations.

2. Literature Review & Theory

The chapter begins with an introduction to flexible work (2.1), followed by a review of literature on hybrid work (2.2) and managerial practices within it (2.3). It then outlines the notion of tensions and dualities (2.4), identifies the research gap (2.5), and concludes with the theoretical lens (2.6).

2.1 Flexible Work: Working Outside the Traditional Office Setting

In recent years, more employees worldwide have begun to work outside a traditional office setting, all or part of the time, reflecting a broader shift away from fixed work arrangements (Sherif, 2024). Working outside the office setting is commonly referred to as flexible work, a topic of sustained academic and managerial interest due to demographic, technological, and work-life balance shifts, to name a few (Athanasiadou & Theriou, 2021). Interest resurged following the COVID-19 pandemic, as organizations were forced to rapidly adapt to working from home (Bloom et al., 2024).

In its most basic form, scholars conceptualize the term workplace flexibility as the degree to which workers have the ability to choose *where, when* and for *how* long they perform their work (Hill et al., 2008). Various terms have emerged in the literature to describe different configurations of such flexibility, particularly in relation to work location. For example, Nilles (1975) introduced the term ‘telecommuting’, referenced in Baltes et al. (1999) as a flexible work arrangement in which employees worked from regional offices rather than commuting to a central office. About a decade later, Pratt (1984) coined the term ‘telework’ to refer to work conducted outside the traditional office setting enabled by ICTs. In a similar vein, the terms ‘remote work’ and ‘virtual work’ have been used, where the former emphasizes the location aspect and the latter focuses more on digitally mediated work activities (Ng et al., 2022; Halford, 2005). The variation of these terms illustrates that, despite varying nomenclature, they all reflect a shift towards greater flexibility by allowing work to take place beyond traditional office spaces.

Nonetheless, research on flexible work has shown that its effects, positive or negative, largely depend on how these different arrangements are structured and implemented (Taskin & Bridoux, 2010; Golden & Eddleston, 2020). For instance, Taskin and Bridoux (2010) found that remote work’s impact on knowledge transfer varies with factors like in-office frequency.

Given that flexible work encompasses various options for *when, where*, and *how* work is performed (Hill et al., 2008), research should examine the distinct implications of specific flexible work arrangements, such as hybrid work. Without clear distinctions, these arrangements risk being lumped together, which can obscure important nuances in how managerial practices are applied across different forms of flexible work.

2.2 Hybrid Work: Combining the Traditional Office with Remote Work

More recently, *hybrid work*, in which employees spend part of the week working in the office and part of the week working remotely, has reached great adoption (Bloom et al., 2024; Oppong Peprah, 2024). While this definition touches on hybrid work's spatial nature, Halford (2005) focuses more explicitly on the space dimension, studying what she terms the hybrid workspace and how the different spaces, including the office, home, and online environments, are structured. Both of these definitions highlight the unique complexity with hybrid work, emphasizing how it requires the integration of multiple workspaces. Drawing on these ideas (Bloom et al., 2024; Halford, 2005), hybrid work in this thesis is defined as a *flexible arrangement where employees split their time between remote and in-office work supported by ICTs.*

Hybrid work introduces new questions that surpass traditional discussions on remote work, as it involves the simultaneous engagement with both home and office environments, requiring employees to navigate professional relationships both in digital environments and in-person contexts (Halford, 2005). Consequently, hybrid work is inherently more complex than either fully on-site or fully remote work, as it necessitates balancing elements, such as the communication mode, in several modalities (Lamovšek et al., 2025). Beno (2022) notes that dispersed teams complicate alignment, social cohesion, setting deadlines, and monitoring, posing new challenges for managers who must learn how to manage across these spaces.

Despite its complexities, research suggests that hybrid work offers organizations a way to capture the benefits of remote work while minimizing its potential drawbacks. Hybrid work can enable companies to harness the adaptability and digital readiness of a workforce that can operate from any location, without fully sacrificing the in-person collaboration, creativity, and knowledge exchange typically associated with co-located office environments (Reimers, 2024). However, as Gratton (2021) points out, achieving this balance requires managers to

carefully evaluate how changes in work location might impact jobs, tasks, projects, and workflows, continuously navigating trade-offs in hybrid work.

2.3 Managerial Practices in Hybrid Work

As hybrid work reshapes the spatial arrangement of work, organization and management (Halford, 2005), it brings several implications. Prior studies point to greater autonomy for employees (Zamani et al., 2024), increasing flexibility of where work is carried out, and alternations of social relationships among workers (Sewell & Taskin, 2015; Halford, 2005). Other studies highlight how hybrid work is accompanied by growing managerial control and intensified surveillance of employees (de Vaujany et al., 2021), suggesting that while hybrid work could empower employees it is also met with managerial efforts to reassert control, creating a contradiction between the intention of the arrangement and managerial practices. As Crouter et al. (2001) argue, flexible work arrangements does not necessarily lead to flexible work practices.

Existing literature shows that the separation of work activities from a fixed physical location, schedules, and established routines, disrupt traditional management practices (Taskin & Edwards, 2007; Tietze, 2002). Kirchner et al. (2021) found that working outside a co-located office raises concerns among managers, particularly regarding the erosion of their management ability as opportunities for direct interactions with employees decrease. These concerns are especially pronounced among middle managers, who are more directly involved in controlling and coordinating day-to-day activities than those at higher managerial levels (Kirchner et al., 2021), calling for an increased understanding of their adaptive responses in this new way of working. Similarly, other researchers have called for further insights regarding how dilemmas in hybrid work manifest and shape everyday managerial practice (Reimers, 2024; Taskin et al, 2024).

Earlier research has identified certain ways in which managers adjust their practices in response to hybrid work with many placing increased emphasis on structure, i.e. the means of coordinating work (Mintzberg, 1979). By using spatiotemporal scaling as the theoretical lens, Sewell and Taskin (2015) found that managers responded to the loss of spontaneous in-person interactions by replacing them with structured team meetings and a heightened online presence, supported by practices such as time sheets, project schedules, and regular

check-ins. Similarly Reimers (2024), in his study on managerial decisions regarding the implementation of hybrid work arrangements, also found that managers introduced practices like agenda-free meetings and scheduled social activities to encourage informal connection in an attempt to sustain social cohesion and company culture. This growing reliance on structured activities is further emphasized by Grzegorczyk et al. (2021) and Bloom (2021), who argue that clearly defined team agreements, such as limits and guidelines on remote work, are critical for addressing coordination challenges in hybrid work.

Moreover, Felstead et al.'s (2003) multiple case-study on managerial control, found that managers' ability to exercise direct control becomes limited as traditional forms of discipline that depend on employees being physically present at a set location and time become unworkable. Halford (2005) adds to this notion by explaining how control functions differently across workspaces, prompting managers to adopt new approaches to oversight. She argues that the loss of informal insights, such as those gained through observation and overhearing in the office, presents significant difficulties for managerial control. When informal oversight becomes limited, Felstead et al. (2003) observed an increasing use of practices such as schedule sharing, progress reporting, and frequent communication to retain a sense of control. This contrasts what the authors define as a widespread view on how management within flexible arrangements is most effectively achieved: fostering trust over control and promoting autonomy over standardized practices.

Reimers (2024) also found that managers have responded to the lack of visibility into employee behavior by increasing activity monitoring and refining performance measurement systems. In contrast, Taskin et al. (2024) found that managers shifted to more relationship-focused strategies to maintain influence in hybrid work, including frequent check-ins, personal messages, and maintaining emotional closeness with distant workers. While these practices initially help in building trust and connection, Taskin et al. (2024) found that it can lead to an emotional exhaustion for managers, ultimately prompting a return to more formal management practices, such as planning, coordination, and performance evaluation. These shifting managerial responses highlight a tension in hybrid work arrangements: where employees are granted greater autonomy, while being met with new forms of practices that seek to re-establish managerial control as work becomes less visible.

Navigating the tension between control and autonomy has long been a managerial concern, even prior to the rise of flexible work arrangements (de Vaujany et al., 2021). On one hand, organizations increasingly grant employees autonomy over how they conduct their work, providing them with decision-making freedom and minimal oversight (Mazmanian et al., 2013). On the other hand, organizations have traditionally implemented various forms of control practices to maintain a sense of balance as employees are given more independence (de Vaujany et al., 2021). This tension connects to the autonomy–control paradox, which highlights how hybrid work often leads to outcomes that contradict its original intention: while hybrid work is meant to enhance employee autonomy, it can, in practice, result in greater control (Wheatley et al., 2024; de Vaujany et al., 2021, Putnam et al., 2014). Putnam et al. (2014) explain that this paradox arises because control becomes unobtrusive, enforced through professional norms, social expectations, and cultural values rather than direct supervision. For instance, workers may feel pressure to overcompensate for flexible work privileges, or work overtime without extra pay, leading to stress.

2.4 Tensions to Dualities in Hybrid Work

So far, the literature on hybrid work has shown that the flexibility that comes with hybrid work—increasingly allowing employees to choose where they work—can create challenges for managers in maintaining coordination (e.g. Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). In response, managers often introduce more structure through regular check-ins, standardized guidelines, and scheduled interactions to ensure alignment (Sewell & Taskin, 2015; Grzegorczyk et al., 2021; Reimers, 2024). In a similar vein, hybrid work—giving individuals more autonomy over their time and tasks—can conflict with managerial efforts to ensure control (Reimers, 2024). Thus, tensions appear prevalent in the management of hybrid work, which arise when seemingly opposing elements interact and shape managerial responses (Putnam et al., 2014). Drawing on the definition of Fairhurst et al. (2002), tensions refer to the prevalence of opposing ideas, principles, or actions, often accompanied by a sense of unease or discomfort.

Putnam et al. (2016) argue that the way organizational actors respond to tensions influences their ability to either create necessary change, or restrict the potential for change through various constraints. While this would suggest that managers can resolve tensions, a tension-based view still implies that they have to make choices between opposites, neglecting the existence of alternatives that enable actors to live with the tensions (Lewis, 2000).

However, existing research on hybrid work often treats the managerial practices as oppositional, constraining flexibility or autonomy, rather than exploring how they might be simultaneously present and mutually enabling. For example, Sewell and Taskin (2015) conclude their study by emphasizing how it leads to a reconfiguration of control mechanisms, ultimately constraining employees' autonomy and flexibility.

Contrary, in a duality, these seemingly opposing forces, such as control and autonomy, are interpreted through a both/and logic that emphasizes their interdependence, rather than the either/or logic often found in organizational theory (Graetz & Smith, 2008). Researchers adopting a duality perspective argue that managing complex organizational realities requires embracing tensions rather than choosing one side over the other (Farjoun, 2010; Graetz & Smith, 2008; Graetz & Smith, 2009). It suggests that things like stability and change may be different but work together and shape each other over time (Farjoun, 2010). Adopting a duality perspective, hence, allows for a more nuanced analysis, where such opposing forces are seen not only in conflict but also as interdependent elements.

Through this lens, organizational life is seen as a continuous process of reconciling and equilibrating competing demands (e.g., exploitation-exploration by March, 1991), with the expression of dualities shaped by the environmental context, technologies and management (Graetz & Smith, 2008). Lewis (2000) explains it as an orientation that encourages scholars and practitioners to explore organizational phenomena as ongoing dynamics to be balanced and managed. Nonetheless, within the flexible work literature, only a handful of researchers have explored the phenomena through a duality perspective (Cousins et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2001; Hafermalz & Riemer, 2020).

Palmer et al. (2001) studied remote collaboration via ICTs in the film industry, and found that it gave rise to the co-existence of seemingly opposing elements such as freedom and constraint, and trust and control. In essence, they observed practices characteristic of both traditional organizational forms, with their emphasis on formalized procedures and systems, alongside practices more aligned with newer forms of organizing that champion fluidity and flexible roles. As a result, the authors advocate that managers should adopt strategies that effectively manage these arising dualities when dealing with organizational change. Additionally, Hafermalz and Riemer (2020) found that interpersonal connectivity, crucial in flexible, distributed work environments, was achieved when individuals balanced the

dualities of freedom/control and nearness/farness. While their findings highlight the value of a duality perspective in flexible work, the empirical focus on a highly remote context (full-time remote nurses) calls for further research on how dualities unfold in hybrid work.

More specifically focused on hybrid work, Cousins et al.'s (2007) case study found that some managers were able to integrate or accept the coexistence of conflicting elements that may appear contradictory on the surface but are reasonable within a hybrid work context, defining this as dualities. For example, these managers were able to perceive physical meetings as simultaneously serving to enable managerial control through direction *and* providing employees a platform to express themselves, thereby fostering empowerment. While Cousins et al. (2007) provide a clear explanation of dualities in navigating hybrid work tensions, they primarily focus on managers' cognitive processes, leaving further room to how tensions are managed in practice.

2.5 Synthesis & Research Gap

Drawing on previous research it becomes clear that hybrid work, unlike other flexible work arrangements, has received relatively limited scholarly attention. Although research has highlighted how hybrid work challenges traditional management practices (Taskin & Edwards, 2007; Tietze, 2002), existing studies show that managerial responses often emphasize control and structure (e.g., Sewell & Taskin, 2015; Reimers, 2024; de Vaujany et al., 2021), even in a work setting that promote flexibility and autonomy. This connects to the notion of tensions, which occur when conflicting elements interact and shape managerial responses (Putnam et al., 2014). A dualities perspective allows for an analysis of how tensions are not necessarily resolved but rather managed in parallel (Farjoun, 2010; Graetz & Smith, 2008; Graetz & Smith, 2009), providing a more nuanced understanding of the complexities with hybrid work. Despite its wide application within organizational research to examine how firms engage with competing yet interdependent forces (Graetz & Smith, 2008), duality theory still remains underexplored in the management of hybrid work.

Although some studies have examined managerial practices in hybrid work, this body of research remains limited and underdeveloped. In particular, there is a lack of research on how managerial practices evolve in response to the tensions arising in hybrid work. Addressing this gap can enhance our understanding of how managers, especially middle managers, adapt

their everyday practices, thus responding to recent calls for deeper insight into how hybrid work shapes managerial action (Reimers, 2024; Taskin et al., 2024). This focus on middle management is especially relevant, as they play a critical role in coordinating and controlling daily operations and are particularly affected by the demands of hybrid work (Kirchner et al., 2021). Gaining insight into how middle managers balance these tensions is important for advancing both theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for managing hybrid work.

2.6 Theory

To address the identified research gap, we draw on duality theory. Lewis (2000) outlines three guiding questions for engaging with dualities in organizational research: identifying the types of tensions that exist, understanding why these tensions may escalate into self-reinforcing cycles, and examining how actors manage such tensions. Graetz and Smith (2008) point out that the last question remains the least explored in the literature. This is particularly relevant to our study, which focuses on how managers in hybrid work environments adapt their practices to balance tensions with this new way of working.

2.6.1 Graetz and Smith's Duality Framework

Graetz and Smith (2008) present a conceptual framework (*Fig 1*) that outlines the key characteristics of dualities, aiming to describe their dynamics and how they enable organizations to balance tensions. Their central argument is that organizations must balance the tensions between traditional and new forms of organizing, where the controllability advantages of the former complement and support the responsiveness attributes of the latter.

This balancing act is crucial to avoid the paradox that can arise when organizations abandon essential planning, coordination, and direction-setting mechanisms associated with traditional organizing, thereby losing the stability needed during periods of uncertainty and change. The authors suggest that it is the ongoing interplay between these sets of activities that enables actors to adapt them in response to contextual shifts, such as, in this case, the introduction of hybrid work. Given that existing literature on hybrid work highlights how managers increasingly rely on practices rooted in traditional management, emphasizing control and structure, in this new way of working characterized by flexibility and autonomy, Graetz and Smith's (2008) framework provides a highly relevant lens for this study.

The first characteristic is *simultaneity*, defined as the push-pull tension of organizational dualities, meaning that an organization can and often must balance two opposite goals or demands at the same time such as efficiency-innovation, and control-freedom. These goals might seem to pull in different directions, but simultaneity is about managing both instead of choosing one over the other.

The *relational* characteristic emphasizes the inherent interdependence of organizational elements that may superficially appear to be in opposition. This characteristic underscores their potential to coexist synergistically, complementing and enabling each other in response to shifting environmental demands. Central to this view is the understanding that organizational dynamics are structured around bipolar tensions, interrelated pairs such as certainty–uncertainty or routine–non-routine, which do not operate in isolation, but rather as part of a larger, interconnected system. These tensions are not discrete challenges to be resolved individually, but complex, coexisting demands that require ongoing negotiation.

The characteristic of *minimal thresholds* is the idea about not having too much of any one thing, but just enough to keep things moving without getting stuck. As organizations deal with dualities, they need to balance these. Instead of choosing one side, they need a small amount of each. For example, too many rules and procedures might lead to constraints and loss of innovative edge, while no rules or procedures at all might lead to disorganization and loss of direction.

The *dynamism* characteristic recognizes that dualities are constantly changing and interacting. Instead of finding a perfect balance between them, organizations are always adjusting and changing between these opposites as the world around them is changing. It can be compared to riding a bike, you are always making small shifts to stay balanced and move forward. The same goes for the organization: they need to keep shifting between things like tradition and innovation, or autonomy and control.

The characteristic *improvisation* acts as the central mediator that enables the four other duality characteristics to function in practice. Without it, organizations would struggle to dynamically balance opposite goals or demands at the same time such as continuity and change. It transforms duality thinking into operational reality.

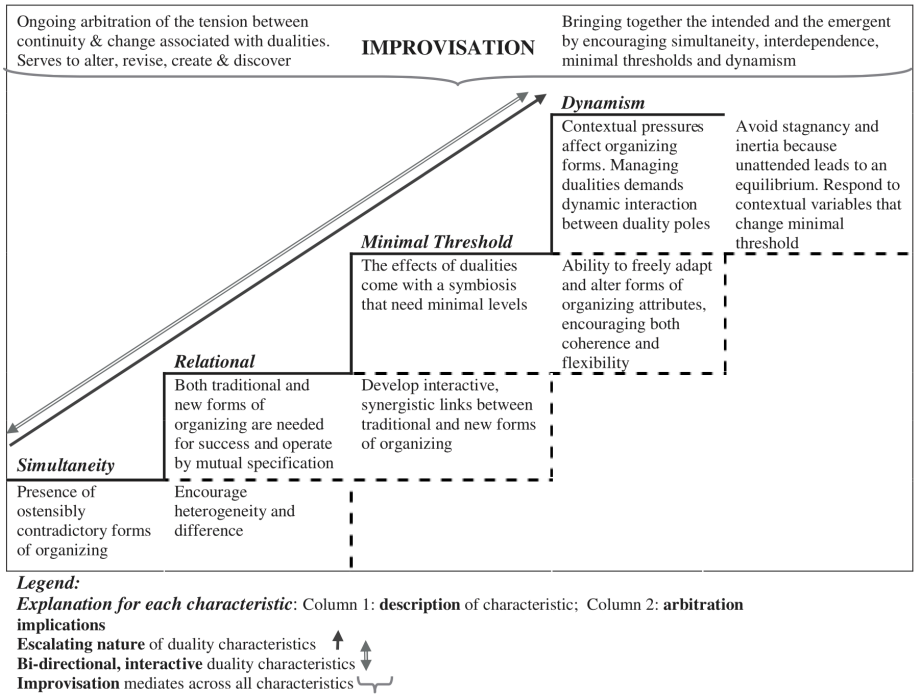


Fig 1. Graetz and Smith's Duality Framework (2008)

2.6.2 Theoretical Framework

The duality framework presented by Graetz and Smith (2008), serves as a theoretical lens for this study. Their key characteristics of dualities are applied to examine how managers, through adapted managerial practices, balance tensions that arise in hybrid work. The characteristics; simultaneity, relational, minimal threshold and dynamism, provide a lens through which we can analyze the interplay of opposing demands within observed practices. At the same time, we assume that improvisation is always present in the practices we observe. This is because improvisation is seen as the mediator that brings duality thinking into real-world action. In other words, if a practice can be observed in action, it is assumed that improvisation is present. Without this, the practice would remain theoretical and not actually take place in the organization.

Figure 2 illustrates how duality theory informs the analysis of this study's findings on managerial practices, which are further elaborated in the discussion section.

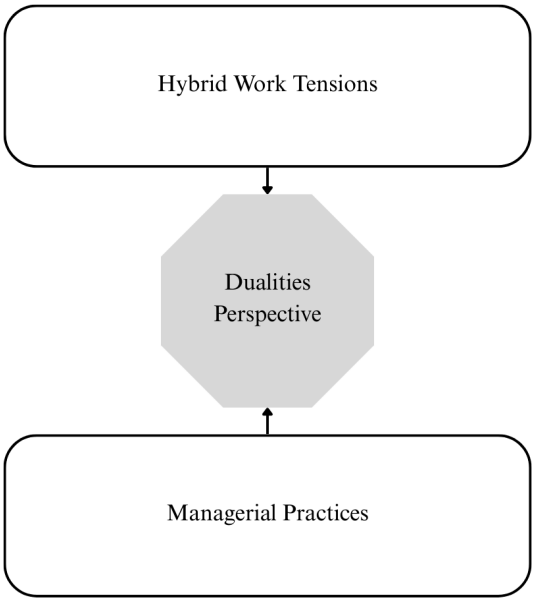


Fig 2. Theoretical Framework

3. Methodology

The following section aims to show the reader the scientific approach and process of this study by explaining the methodological fit (3.1.), research design (3.2.), data analysis (3.3.), and how the quality of the study was ensured (3.4.).

3.1 Methodological Fit

Given the novelty of hybrid work and the lack of prior studies examining managerial practices in this context, an exploratory, qualitative approach was adopted to generate new insights (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Furthermore, this study adopts a constructionist ontology, where reality is seen as socially constructed through interactions among individuals and continuously evolving (Bell et al., 2022). This view recognizes that organizational forms and their interpretations are in constant flux, especially as digital technologies disrupt traditional structures and enable new ways of working. Epistemologically, we take an interpretivist stance, aiming to understand reality through the experiences of organizational members. This allows for a nuanced exploration of how hybrid work and managerial practices are negotiated, reinterpreted, and shaped within the organizational context.

Since this study aimed to explore managerial practices in hybrid work, a topic with limited prior theoretical explanation, we adopted an abductive approach. This approach facilitated an iterative process of moving between empirical data and existing literature to develop meaningful interpretations of the findings (Bell et al., 2022). Abduction was especially appropriate because there is no established theoretical framework explaining the adaptations of managerial practices in hybrid work, and we aimed to develop new insights by combining observation and interviews with theoretical reflection. We began by reviewing research on hybrid work, which initially led us to notice patterns of bureaucratic principles in how managers navigate this new setting, such as increased control practices and formalization. As our analysis progressed, however, we observed a persistent interplay between formal and flexible practices, revealing tensions that bureaucracy theory alone could not capture. This prompted us to revisit our theoretical framing and ultimately adopt duality theory as a more suitable lens for interpreting our findings. This iterative, abductive process allowed us to stay close to the lived experiences of organizational members while developing a theoretical framework that more accurately reflects the dynamic and often tension-filled nature of hybrid work (Gioa et al., 2013).

3.2 Research Design

To explore managerial practices in hybrid work, we decided to study a single case organization. According to Yin (2013), a case study approach is suitable when studying an ongoing and context-dependent phenomenon. Hybrid work reflects this complexity, as the way it is organized varies across organizational contexts and continues to evolve in response to changing internal and external conditions. For instance, contextual differences matter: while digital firms may support working remotely, others might require on-site presence. Organizations also continue to adapt these arrangements over time, reflecting their ongoing nature. More specifically, the underexplored nature of the topic made a single case study particularly appropriate, as Ridder (2017) notes this approach "may be chosen to investigate deeply into new phenomena". Furthermore, focusing on a single organization minimizes variations caused by differing regulatory contexts, organizational structures, and industry-specific factors. For example, variations in labor laws and levels of digitalization shaping how hybrid work is applied.

3.2.1 Research Case

For the selection of the case company, we used typical case sampling. This type of purposive sampling aims to select a case that exemplifies a dimension of interest (Bell et al., 2022). In this study, the key dimensions were the company's adoption of a hybrid work arrangement and its novelty in implementing such an arrangement. Moreover, a company with substantial size was deemed important, as it would enable us to interview a larger sample of managers, an essential factor for the study.

Our search began by investigating midsize to larger organizations in Sweden, looking for news or pressroom articles related to their approach to hybrid work. During this process, we identified an organization whose website explicitly outlined its hybrid work policy. To verify the information, we reached out to a Human Resources (HR) representative from the company, who, through a preliminary interview, confirmed the implementation of hybrid work. It became clear that the company had adopted a 'three days in the office, two days from home' policy, which reflects a typical hybrid work arrangement. According to the HR representative, the shift to hybrid work was initially triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a transition to remote work. Following the pandemic, the company formally institutionalized hybrid work within the organization, highlighting that the

organization had only recently transitioned from a traditional work arrangement. With this in mind, the company was selected as the particular case being studied.

3.2.2 Data Collection

3.2.2.1 Preparatory Work

During an initial interview with a representative from HR, we got information regarding the hybrid working policy and how it was generally applied across the organization. Additionally, we received a broad overview of the organizational structure, which helped in understanding the context. In the subsequent interviews with managers, we looked up background information about the participant, such as their role and department, through the company website and social media platform LinkedIn. This preparation enabled us to ask relevant questions and tailor the conversation to the manager's specific situation, which in turn facilitated a more focused and meaningful discussion, allowing for customized follow-up questions.

3.2.2.2 Interview Sampling

For the sampling of interviewees, criterion sampling was used, a type of purposive sampling that selects individuals based on predefined characteristics (Bell et al., 2022). Since we used a priori purposive sampling, the predefined criteria were determined before the interview stage of the study began. The first selection criterion was that interviewees had to be managers with personnel responsibility. The key rationale behind this choice was that previous literature (e.g., Halford, 2005) had shown tendencies that certain phenomena of interest were only present when managers held personnel responsibility.

The second criteria was to include only middle managers, in order to capture dynamics specific to their role. This decision was based on previous research indicating that managerial challenges in hybrid work are particularly prominent at this level, as middle managers are more directly involved in the work with employees than higher-level management (Kirchner et al., 2021). Furthermore, insights from the preparatory interview with an HR representative highlighted the central role middle managers play in implementing the hybrid work policy in practice, which further reinforced our decision to focus on this group. They are responsible for making decisions about scheduling, communication, and performance monitoring in a

way that aligns with both company directives and the needs of their employees. This places them at the center of the hybrid work experience.

Furthermore, to align with the study's focus, the managers had to oversee teams that actively utilized the arrangement. Although the company had a hybrid policy, we only selected managers with at least one hybrid-working team member. This requirement ensured that all participants had direct experience managing people who split their time between home and the office. It allowed us to ask about real situations and decisions, rather than general opinions or assumptions. Since the study was not centered on departmental practices or specific workflows, it was not necessary to limit the sample to one department area. Instead, we chose to include managers from diverse areas of the organization, ranging from legal and marketing to operations, to ensure that the findings were not limited to a specific type of work.

Based on these criteria, the HR representative provided a list of potential interviewees. We then contacted candidates to schedule interviews. The time allocated for each interview varied between 30-60 minutes depending on the candidates availability. We began analyzing interviews in parallel, which allowed us to refine the interview guide to probe emerging topics or overlooked areas. Conducting the analysis in parallel with the interviews also allowed us to determine when theoretical saturation had been reached. By the 18th interview, no new theoretical insights were emerging within our developing categories (Bell et al., 2022). However, in line with the guidance of Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 212), we continued beyond the point of saturation and conducted four additional interviews. These did not yield any significant new findings, resulting in a total of 22 interviews.

3.2.2.3 Semi-structured Interviews

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with managers. An interview guide was developed, focusing on open-ended questions to ensure that the genuine perspectives of the interviewees were revealed (Bell et al., 2022). Based on previous literature (e.g., Halford, 2005; Reimers, 2024; Taskin et al., 2024), we identified a range of managerial practices that appeared particularly relevant in the context of hybrid work. These practices touched on issues such as control, structure, and coordination, which are recurring themes in management research. We developed our interview guide with a focus on these key areas, combining specific, practice-oriented questions with broader, open-ended prompts. This

approach allowed participants to reflect on their experiences while also providing space for unexpected insights to emerge beyond the initial focus areas. The full interview guide can be found in Appendix II. Follow-up questions were added as needed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of each participant's perspective (Bell et al., 2022). As the interviews progressed, the guide was revised to capture new themes and fill any gaps in the data. For example, early interviews revealed that the frequency and nature of meetings had changed significantly in the hybrid setting. In response, we adjusted our questions in later interviews to explore this aspect more deeply.

Due to the geographical location and the fact that the interviewees held managerial positions with busy schedules, all interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams. The interviews averaged a duration of 44 minutes. A common limitation of online interviews is the difficulty in building the same level of rapport that typically develops during face-to-face conversations (Curasi, 2001). Building rapport is important because it helps interviewees feel more comfortable, which can lead to greater openness and more detailed responses (Dion Larivière et al., 2023). To address this challenge, we began each interview with informal small talk, as recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2012), to help put participants at ease.

We also made efforts to personalize each interview based on the participant's background and context, adopted a friendly and approachable tone, and actively listened and responded thoughtfully throughout the conversation (Dion Larivière et al., 2023). All interviews were conducted with video for both the interviewers and interviewees, which helped maintain a sense of connection and allowed for visual cues to support communication (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). After the initial introduction, we asked for permission to record the interview and reminded participants that their responses would remain under pseudonyms (Bell et al., 2022). To ensure that participants could express themselves freely and comfortably, interviews were conducted in Swedish, their native language.

Each interview began with us briefly introducing ourselves and explaining the purpose of the study. Afterward, the interviewee was asked to introduce themselves and their role in the company. Following the introductions, general warm-up questions were asked to familiarize the interviewee with the topic. Next, we moved through questions covering each main part of the study. The interview concluded with general reflective questions to capture insights that might not have been addressed earlier, along with any additional questions noted during the

interview. Both of us were present during the interviews, allowing each person to perform a specific role: one asked the main questions, while the other took notes on important topics to revisit later. This arrangement helped minimize interruptions and enabled a responsive interviewing approach, where questions could be asked in a conversational manner (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

3.2.2.4 Observations

As part of the data collection process, non-participant observations were conducted at the case company to gain deeper insights into everyday practices, interactions, and workflows. We adopted the role of complete observers (Bell et al., 2022), while remaining open to informal conversations with employees when such opportunities naturally arose. Observations were carried out over the course of one day and focused on multiple departments and key activities relevant to the study's aims, such as participating in meetings and observing the interactions in the physical office space. To capture the events of the day, full field notes were taken when possible (Bell et al., 2022), offering rich contextual data to complement the interviews. In situations where full field note-taking might have disrupted the natural flow of activity or made participants self-conscious, the researchers relied on mental note-taking (Bell et al., 2022). These observations were promptly transferred into detailed notes at the earliest appropriate opportunity.

3.3. Data Analysis

To ensure accuracy and retain contextual richness, each interview was transcribed within 12 hours of being conducted. In total, the interviews produced 440 pages of transcribed material. The initial transcriptions, except one interview which was transcribed manually, were generated using Microsoft Teams' live transcription feature and cross-checked against our recordings to ensure accuracy. We went through the transcripts to remove irrelevant content, such as off-topic comments e.g., interruptions and other noise. All interviews were conducted and analyzed in Swedish, with only selected quotes translated into English for presentation purposes.

To analyze the interview and observation data, we adopted a grounded theory approach in line with the Gioia methodology (Gioa et al., 2013). The Gioia method enables researchers to systematically derive theory based on data collected (Bell et al., 2022). The analysis began with first-order coding, conducted individually by each researcher using Excel, working

directly with the transcribed material using informant-centric terms that captured what the managers mentioned as adaptations regarding their practices. In the second step, a subset of ten interviews were analyzed individually and then discussed in a calibration session. We compared our first-order concepts, aligned interpretations, and reflected more broadly on what participants had shared across interviews. We identified recurring themes that were not well represented in the original interview guide, and in response, we revised the guide, adding new prompts where needed and removing or rephrasing questions that repeatedly failed to generate substantive responses. This iterative process meant that data collection and analysis occurred in parallel, allowing us to make meaningful updates to the interview guide as new insights emerged.

As interviews and coding progressed, the number of first-order concepts and associated quotes grew substantially. We returned to the data for a second round of first-order coding, focusing more closely on the quotes themselves. While continuing to use informant-centric language, we began to operate within the quotes to consolidate overlapping or repetitive codes and identify early patterns. This step allowed us to reduce the number of concepts from 48 to a more focused set of 15.

In the third step, we proceeded with second-order analysis. Here, the refined first-order concepts were grouped into broader second-order themes, allowing us to merge together practices that served similar purposes in the new way of working. These were developed through a researcher-led lens and allowed us to move from description to interpretation based on earlier literature. From these themes, we identified two aggregate dimensions: Structure-Flexibility and Control-Autonomy, capturing how managerial practices addressed the tension between opposing demands in hybrid work, reflecting two overarching dualities the managers navigated. An overview of the research process is presented in Figure 3. Moreover, an extract of the data structure—showing the relationship between first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions—is presented in Figure 4, with a complete overview provided in Appendix III. To ensure traceability, all interviews were mapped to the final first-order concepts, as detailed in Appendix IV.

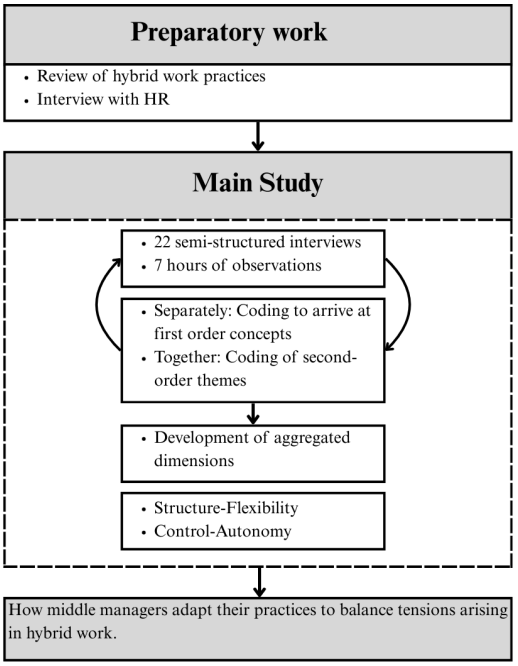


Fig 3. Overview of the Research Process

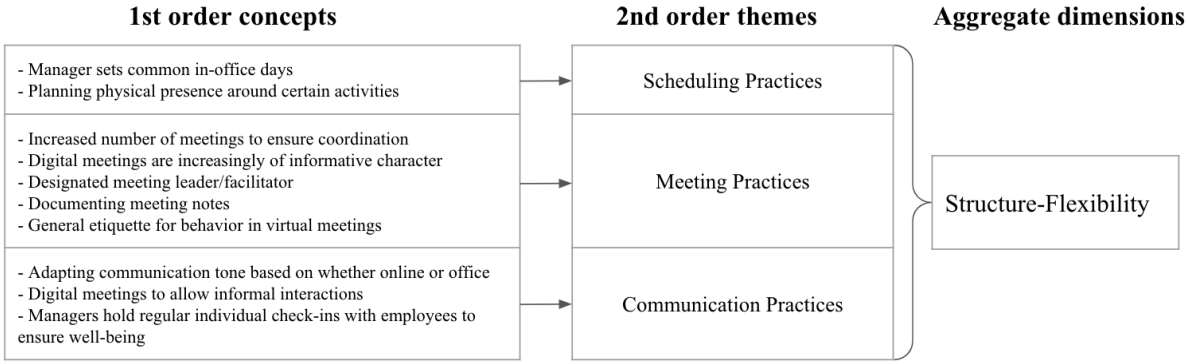


Fig 4. Extract of Methodological Approach

3.4. Quality of the Research

To ensure the trustworthiness and quality of this study we have used several methodological tools aligned with the aspects of trustworthiness presented in Lincoln and Guba (1985). They propose four alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative studies: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. The methods we used to align with these criteria, as well as ethical considerations, are discussed in the following section.

3.4.1. Credibility

The credibility of a study is concerned with how confident one could be in that the findings are the truth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance the credibility of our research, we used

triangulations of both data sources [observations & interviews] and researchers to double check interpretations and information. We also prioritized the use of open-ended questions and provided only minimal information about the study's focus in advance, thereby reducing the risk of influencing the interviewees' responses. Furthermore, credibility can be strengthened through persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given our abductive approach, we were able to identify emerging themes throughout the process and explore them in greater depth.

3.4.2. Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied beyond the specific context in which they were originally developed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given that qualitative research is typically centered on capturing the unique context and meaningful aspects of a particular social setting (Bell et al., 2022), it can be argued that such findings inherently have limited transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that it is not the researcher's role to determine transferability. Rather, researchers should provide a rich, detailed account of the research context so that readers and potential users of the findings can make informed judgments about their applicability to other settings. Following this principle, we have aimed to present a comprehensive description of the study's context. Furthermore, the use of purposeful sampling, supports the development of thick description and thereby facilitates potential transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.4.3. Dependability

Bell et al. (2022) parallel dependability to reliability which concerns the repeatability of the study. To achieve higher dependability we have aimed to thoroughly explain the research process in combination with appendices and figures. Dependability was further strengthened through the supervisor's critical feedback on the methodological approach.

3.4.4. Conformability

Conformability refers to the objectivity of the research and, as highlighted by Bell et al. (2022), complete objectivity is unattainable in business research. Even though complete objectivity is impossible we have aimed to reduce biases by staying true to the process and thoroughly grounding their findings in the collected data. To further reduce individual biases, the initial coding phase was conducted independently by each researcher, followed by a comparative analysis to identify and eliminate potential discrepancies (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). Additionally, regular discussions with peers and our supervisor regarding both the data analysis and discussion were held to challenge assumptions and minimize unconscious biases.

3.4.5. Ethical Considerations

Before commencing the study at the case company, we signed a confidentiality agreement. However, we were mindful of potential challenges arising from the considerable influence that confidentiality agreements can grant companies over research outcomes, as discussed by Bell et al. (2022). Given the study's topic, it was considered highly unlikely that the case company would influence or restrict the findings. To uphold pseudonymity, all personal identifiers, including names, were removed from interview transcripts immediately following transcription. Furthermore, we made sure to receive consent from each participant prior to their interviews regarding recording and storage of the audio data during transcription.

4. Empirical Analysis

The following section provides a brief introduction of the case company (4.1), followed by the empirical findings according to our aggregate dimensions: Structure-Flexibility (4.2) and Control-Autonomy (4.3). Each dimension is structured based on its associated second-order themes. Appendix III provides an overview of the coding structure, and Appendix IV the mapping concepts informing the second-order themes.

4.1 The Case Company

The company operates within the automotive sector and is a wholly owned subsidiary of a larger international group, with 500 employees in Sweden. Rooted in a traditional industry, the organization is characterized by a clear organizational structure with distinct business areas and multiple layers of middle management. As described by several of the interviewed managers, the company has undergone a gradual shift toward more modern ways of working, driven largely by external demands and changes in the wider business environment.

A key turning point in the company's way of working came with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Before this, remote work was rare and typically limited to regional managers whose roles required travel across different parts of the country. Day-to-day operations were based at the company's headquarters, with electronic communication primarily handled through email and phone. The pandemic, however, forced a rapid shift to remote work, accelerating the company's digitalization journey and integrating tools like Microsoft Office 365 into the everyday workflow. Today, digital tools, remote meetings, and split weeks between home and office have become embedded features of the company's working model. As part of this transformation, the company has introduced a formal hybrid work policy allowing employees to work remotely up to two days per week, in dialogue with their managers and teams. How managers have experienced and adapted their practices in light of this new way of working is covered next.

4.2 Structure-Flexibility

The data revealed that managers use several practices to navigate the tension between structure and flexibility in hybrid work, centered around three key categories: scheduling, meeting, and communication practices. These categories reflect the concrete ways in which managers respond to the demands of hybrid work: balancing the necessity of structure while

maintaining the flexibility the arrangement is intended to provide. The following subsections explore how managers adapt their practices within each area.

4.2.1 Scheduling Practices

The data collection revealed that the dispersion among team members in hybrid work presented practical challenges, including reduced spontaneous interactions, difficulties in coordination and collaboration, and a diminished sense of team spirit.

> *"If you want to build a sense of team spirit and feel the pulse of the organization, I think it's difficult to recreate that through Teams—both as a manager and as an employee. At the office, you can quickly check in with colleagues, hear what's going on, and spontaneously discuss things." — A*

In response, a common managerial practice emerged: the establishment of fixed in-office days. These designated days, set by managers within the boundaries of the organization's hybrid work policy, were intended to ensure physical co-presence among team members.

> *"We've defined which days we meet at the office, so that when we go in, we know we'll be there at the same time. That way, we can have important face-to-face discussions—and even though Teams is efficient, in-person meetings add an extra dimension." — B*

While hybrid work is meant to offer more flexibility in where to work, managers setting fixed in-office days adds a level of structure that might seem to go against that idea. This shows that, in reality, the flexibility of hybrid work is being adjusted to deal with issues like keeping the team connected and making space for informal conversations.

Furthermore, managers often described that they planned their work activities based on whether they were working from the office or from home. Even though hybrid work is usually seen as flexible and adaptable, the data shows that certain tasks are tied to specific places.

> *"You plan your days differently depending on where you work." — S*

Tasks requiring collaboration, creativity, or spontaneous exchange are largely reserved for in-office days, while focus-intensive, individual tasks are scheduled for remote days. This distinction appears to be widely institutionalized among managers, with 19 out of 22 explicitly referencing this mode of organizing work.

> *"When you know you have one or two days at the office filled with discussions and spontaneous meetings, it's nice to have days at home to focus on Excel files, PowerPoint presentations, or other tasks that require concentration." — B*

This notion was also evident in the observations. For example, within a 30-minute timeframe, 17 multi-person conversations were observed, illustrating how the office continues to support informal, spontaneous interactions. These findings suggest that rather than mixing remote and in-office work activities together, managers are organizing tasks based on where they happen. In this way, physical location plays an important role in deciding what kind of work is done and when.

4.2.2 Meeting Practices

In hybrid work, meetings appear to have become more central to managers' daily routines, particularly as teams are spread across locations. Many managers noted that digital platforms like Microsoft Teams have made it significantly easier to schedule meetings and include participants. This convenience supports coordination across space, allowing teams to stay aligned despite physical separation.

> *"You end up having tons of short meetings all the time. It's just so easy to click a button and invite someone, instead of going through the hassle of booking a meeting room." — G*

At the same time, this ease of scheduling has contributed to a rise in the number and frequency of meetings, especially short check-ins. Several managers reported that their calendars have become increasingly cluttered, leaving them to complete operational tasks outside regular hours.

> *"Because meetings take up so much time, operational tasks have to be done after working hours." — D*

The shift toward hybrid work has not only increased the number of digital meetings but also revealed a transformation in their structure and function. As managers described, digital meetings often assume a more structured, agenda-driven format that enhances informational clarity and task-focused efficiency. This emerging norm, cited by 9 of 22 interviewed managers, reflects a tilt toward order, direction, and goal alignment.

> *"Digital meetings tend to be more concrete. They stick to the topic, there are not so many side-tracks or loose discussions. This has its advantages." — O*

However, this structured efficiency appears to come at the cost of spontaneous social interaction and informal relational dynamics, typical of traditional in-person meetings. These seemingly 'inefficient' elements often foster interpersonal trust, team cohesion, and a shared organizational culture.

> *"Even if we start our digital meetings with a "what's up?", it's often quite brief - you want to get to the point. In the office, you can chat for a few minutes when you come in or meet someone in the corridor. It's more spontaneous, and you also get to know each other better." — V*

While the more structured format of digital meetings is often viewed as supporting clear and efficient communication, it also raises important questions about what aspects of interaction may be gained and what might be lost in the transition. Several managers reflected upon the challenge between maintaining effective, streamlined communication and sustaining the interpersonal dynamics that typically arise from face-to-face encounters.

Additionally, a practice noted by some managers as enhancing meeting structure was the appointment of a designated meeting leader, mentioned by 6 out of 22. This role was often taken on by the manager themselves and was described as important for maintaining efficiency and ensuring participant engagement. The meeting leader was seen as a way to guide discussions and prevent them from becoming unfocused.

> *"It is also crucial to have a clear meeting leader, someone who steers the conversation and makes sure it is held effectively. Without it, things can easily get messy." — C*

In describing their approach, some managers emphasized the importance of active involvement in the conversation, both in moderating the flow and in encouraging individual contributions.

> *"I try to actively spread the word and ask direct questions instead of general ones." — D*

The managers also mentioned a growing importance of documenting meetings and keeping written records, describing it as a helpful way to ensure continuity and follow-up between meetings so that managers can clarify next steps and track decisions over time.

> *"One important lesson learned is that I always take notes [...]. We have a clear agenda, and we start by going through the previous meeting notes." — G*

One manager noted that information sharing is less efficient in digital settings compared to when the entire team is physically present, emphasizing the importance of properly storing documents and ensuring information is accessible to everyone as a way to keep the team aligned and informed.

The transition to hybrid work has also brought about new norms in digital meetings, like raising hands before speaking, muting microphones when not talking, and following clear agendas. These practices were mentioned by 14 out of 22 managers and were also observed during a hybrid meeting we participated in. While many managers see these norms as helpful for creating a more professional, structured, and clear communication environment, they also highlight associated limitations such as a loss of informal dialogue and creative contribution.

> *"In Teams, meetings become more structured—especially when there are more participants. It's almost like you have to "raise your hand," and then people only say what's absolutely necessary. Sometimes that's a good thing, but it can also mean that important, creative ideas don't come through." — S*

4.2.3 Communication Practices

The shift to hybrid work has brought in new communication platforms like Microsoft Teams, changing the way employees and managers interact. Several managers, 11 out of 22, shared

that relying more on these channels has led them to adjust their tone of communication compared to when they are physically present with their teams.

> *"I'm significantly more formal when working from home. If I have a specific topic I want to address, I'll message or call." — M*

Communication between managers and employees is described as more intentional and focused when they are not co-located, with people typically reaching out only when they have a specific topic to discuss. To ensure employees still understand what is expected of them while working from home, managers need to communicate with even greater clarity.

> *"We've been forced to become even clearer and more direct in our communication. What I mean especially is when giving instructions—it has to be very clear to everyone what's expected of them." — K*

The managers acknowledge that the need for direct communication in hybrid work comes at the cost of less informal and spontaneous communication.

> *"Every meeting now becomes a formal invitation rather than a quick chat by the desk." — A*

In response, many have developed new strategies to maintain connection, with 13 out of 22 creating digital meetings with the specific intention to cope with the loss of casual conversations.

> *"For example, we have our daily "coffee meetings" where people can drop in and chat spontaneously, which helps us keep that social element." — C*

However, as these efforts to introduce more time for spontaneity through planned means becomes more frequent they also become more time-consuming.

> *"Something that could have taken 30 seconds at the coffee machine now becomes a 30-minute Teams meeting, because the default is to book at least half an hour. And of course, there's always something to talk about, so the time gets filled easily." — L*

Nonetheless, it appeared that some managers have begun to phase out or discontinue such activities, perceiving them as inefficient or no longer necessary.

> *"In the beginning of the pandemic, we tried digital coffee breaks and after-work hangouts, but it wasn't really my thing. It was nice to see my colleagues, but it felt forced. What we have today is a big group chat in Teams [...]. It works well and has become our digital coffee machine chat." — G*

Furthermore, it was noticed that the shift to hybrid work raised concerns regarding the managers' role in ensuring employee well-being, where several managers expressed worry about missing out on signs with fewer face-to-face encounters.

> *"As a leader, it's harder to pick up on how someone is doing when you don't meet in person. Eye contact, body language, and other signals are more difficult to read digitally. So as a leader, you need to find other ways to pick up on that." — D*

As a result, other ways to pick up on such signals have been created, with regular digital check-ins increasingly being used with the purpose of ensuring their wellbeing.

> *"Daily check-ins are important both for keeping track of the work and for maintaining connection. They're even more necessary now that we're spread out." — F*

As with scheduled attempts to recreate spontaneous interactions, one manager noted that checking in on employee well-being through planned meetings can feel forced when prompted "on demand". This illustrates how practices aimed at supporting employee well-being can shift in character when moved into scheduled formats, sometimes losing the natural ease they once held in more informal settings.

> *“I had the ambition to hold regular short check-ins, like 15–20 minutes, just to see how everyone was doing and whether any issues had come up. But I realized it was difficult to ask those kinds of questions “on demand”.” — C*

4.3 Control-Autonomy

The data further revealed that managers navigate the tension between control and autonomy through a range of practical approaches, primarily falling into two key categories: accountability and workflow practices. These categories illustrate how managers aim to support employee independence in hybrid work while still ensuring responsibility and sustained performance.

4.3.1 Accountability Practices

Several managers reported having long careers within the company, having been shaped by the traditional belief that real work happens in the office, reinforcing an “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” mindset. Now with hybrid work, however, 19 out of 22 managers stated that they prioritize a “freedom with responsibility” approach, granting employees greater freedom while also holding them more accountable for their own work.

> *“There's a lot of trust - as long as you deliver, it's fine, whether you're working at home, in the office or elsewhere.” — V*

Nonetheless, the interviews revealed that a “freedom with responsibility” approach presents certain managerial challenges. Some worry that without clear direction and shared ways of working, it can become harder to know whether everyone is staying on track.

> *“Freedom with responsibility is good, but it can be difficult for employers and leaders to ensure that everyone still has the drive and delivers as expected when they are not in place.” — I*

To handle this, managers spoke about the importance of being clear about what needs to get done and when. They described new routines to make sure work stays organized and that expectations are clear.

> *"Hybrid work gives you quite a lot of freedom to organize your day. Therefore, as a manager, it is important that you are able to structure the work clearly and communicate what you expect employees to get done each week." — L*

> *"The employees are independent and prefer to have freedom. But you still need clear plans to stay on track." — P*

Overall, while managers are adapting to greater employee independence, they are also working to maintain clear boundaries and expectations, balancing autonomy with the need to keep work on track.

The shift toward increased employee autonomy is leading managers to reconfigure how performance is assessed, with many managers having adopted a more output-oriented approach, moving away from time-based supervision, highlighted by 14 out of 22 managers.

> *"I focus on setting measurable objectives for my employees. As long as they're meeting these targets, I don't see inherent value in them sitting exactly eight hours in front of the computer." — L*

The emphasis on outcomes, rather than physical presence, has made it possible to trust employees despite seeing each other less often, even though it challenges traditional ideas of oversight. As one manager explained, even if employees are working from places like the beach, it becomes clear whether or not they are delivering.

> *"It's been a big adjustment with hybrid work, especially when it comes to trust. And although I wouldn't recommend working from the beach all day, you can still see the results. You notice how people are working." — P*

In seeking to balance the need for managerial control with employee autonomy, some managers place considerable emphasis on communicating goals. This strong focus on output, while intended to provide clarity and direction, was at times acknowledged as potentially overwhelming. One manager, for example, commented on how often goals were repeated to the employees.

> *“I often communicate our goals—sometimes so frequently it might feel repetitive.” — H*

Additionally, increasingly defined responsibilities and roles appear as essential for fostering employee independence. Clarity enables individuals to act autonomously, as they understand their duties, authority, and when to seek input from others. This emphasis on role clarity was highlighted by 14 out of 22 managers.

> *“Role clarity has become even more important now, so everyone can be as self-sufficient as possible and clearly knows who is doing what. It's also crucial to understand one's responsibilities and authorities to know when to involve another person.” — V*

During one interview it was also emphasized that clearly defined responsibilities make it easier to identify where issues arise, as clarity in roles helps pinpoint accountability.

> *“It makes it very clear what’s expected. And since this way of working has become established in the organization, most tasks go straight to the right person. It really makes hybrid work easier – people always know what to do and never sit around without assignments.” — T*

Another manager had noticed a shift where higher demand was put on the individual in hybrid work, requiring the individual to take greater responsibility over their own work.

> *“Hybrid work places greater demands on the individual. Previously, some might have thought, 'if I just leave my shoes at the office, I’ve done my job.' That time is over. Now, everyone must contribute and take responsibility for their own work.” — H*

4.3.2 Workflow Practices

Another method to ensure employee progress, mentioned by several managers, is the visibility into employee schedules and workflow. This is done through tools ranging from digital platforms, such as Microsoft Office, to more traditional analog dashboards in the physical office, and they serve various purposes, primarily, providing visibility into employees’ availability and the status of their scheduled meetings.

> *"You can see availability when scheduling meetings in Outlook, so we can tell if someone is busy." — R*

Moreover, some managers reported utilizing Microsoft's digital tools to track progress on larger work tasks and projects. This system allows managers to stay updated on employees' work even when they are physically distanced. Managers and employees can work simultaneously on shared documents, which reportedly streamlines collaboration.

> *"It allows us to write notes, comment and update material on an ongoing basis, which has simplified the work. I have access to all folders and documents and can see what is going on." — A*

Still, not all managers actively make use of the tools available. One manager explained that, over time, they have come to rely on them less, as that type of oversight no longer feels necessary.

> *"I also see a lot through email, since much of it ends up in my inbox. We also use shared mailboxes where I can see how much is still pending. I used to check them often, but now I don't feel the need to, because everything runs so smoothly." — O*

Additionally, several managers highlighted the significance of regular one-to-one meetings as a key method of tracking employee progress, with 19 out of the 22 using these kinds of quick meetings as a way to stay updated about their employees' work.

> *"Then we have almost daily check-in meetings to continuously monitor sales progress and the various actions needed to implement" — K*

The shift toward hybrid work has also increased the perceived need for these check-ins, as managers no longer experience natural day-to-day interactions in the office. One manager highlighted how the lack of spontaneous encounters has led to a greater need for structured follow-ups.

> *"But now, with increased freedom and responsibility, a whole week can pass without me speaking to a particular employee, simply because we don't naturally cross paths. Therefore,*

> *I need to schedule more check-ins, establish clear goals, and follow up in a more structured way." — I*

However, not all managers shared the same positive view of frequent check-ins. One manager was particularly critical, arguing that status meetings often serve as a way for leaders to create an illusion of control rather than adding real value.

> *"There can be value in daily stand-ups if you're a development team working on the same product, as it helps coordinate tasks. However, I often find that status meetings are used by people who lack insight and rely on the illusion of having control." — L*

Another manager similarly emphasized the importance of striking the right balance when it comes to checking in with employees. Too many meetings and follow-ups risk creating a sense of surveillance, even if the intention is to stay connected.

> *"At the same time, as a manager, you have to find a balance, because there's a risk of coming across as controlling if you schedule too many meetings and check-ins. You don't want employees to feel like they're being monitored. But you also can't let go of the line completely – it's about finding a rhythm where you cast out and reel in, a bit like fishing." — C*

5. Discussion

Our empirical analysis reveals that middle managers adapt their practices to manage two overarching tensions arising in hybrid work: structure versus flexibility, and control versus autonomy. In the following section, we use Graetz and Smith's (2008) duality framework as a theoretical lens, explaining how the practices, rather than merely solving these tensions, help managers to balance competing demands. In doing so, we address our research question, "How do middle managers adapt their practices to balance tensions arising in hybrid work?", discussing our findings in relation to previous literature on hybrid work.

5.1 The Duality of Structure and Flexibility: Practices to Ensure Coordination while Enabling a Flexible Way of Working

Our findings show that hybrid work, with increased employee dispersion, creates coordination and collaboration challenges, prompting managers to adapt scheduling practices for coherence. As noted by Interviewee B, rather than allowing employees full flexibility over work location, managers establish fixed in-office days to ensure regular physical co-presence. This supports prior research highlighting the need for clear agreements and guidelines to overcome coordination difficulties in hybrid work (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021; Bloom, 2021). However, our findings also illustrate how managers not only provide structure through fixed in-office days but also differentiate the nature of work across settings, scheduling collaborative tasks for office days and focused work to remote days. This indicates that managers recognize and evaluate the impact that work location has on jobs and tasks, which Gratton (2021) argues is critical for managing in hybrid work.

These scheduling practices can be seen as a mechanism through which managers navigate the dual demands of structure and flexibility, ensuring that the company maintains the benefits of in-person collaboration while enabling employees to work from various locations (Reimers, 2024). While the fixed in-office days provide a degree of structure necessary for team coordination, the remaining days preserve flexibility and support focus-intensive days. This approach shows the simultaneity characteristic, as managers through scheduling support both a common structure and employee flexibility at the same time, encouraging different ways of working while still keeping the team coordinated (Graetz & Smith, 2008). It can also be argued that fixed in-office days and the distinction between tasks enable managers to integrate structure and flexibility in a relational manner, as these are not necessarily in conflict but are integrated to complement one another (Graetz & Smith, 2008).

Furthermore, the decision to set common in-office days could illustrate a minimal threshold (Graetz & Smith, 2008), where a baseline level of structure is maintained to ensure coordination without tipping the balance too far and undermining flexibility. Managers do not eliminate flexibility altogether but introduce enough routine to avoid the risk of decreased collaboration and coordination. However, the scheduling practices observed by the managers in the company show limited signs of dynamism (Graetz & Smith, 2008). Instead of continuously adapting scheduling decisions, the practices appear stable with little evidence of ongoing adjustments based on continuous developments. Thus, while managers balance structure and flexibility, they do so through somewhat predefined routines.

Consistent with previous research on hybrid work, our findings indicate that meetings have become a critical practice for managers navigating this new work environment (Sewell & Taskin, 2015; Reimers, 2024). Specifically, both the overall practice of holding meetings and the specific ways meetings are conducted have been adapted. Earlier research has shown that the dispersion of employees makes alignment and social cohesion more complex (Beno, 2022). Here, our findings suggest that managers increasingly rely on and adapt meeting practices as a deliberate coordination mechanism. This illustrates how formal structures, such as an increasing reliance on meetings, are used alongside flexible work arrangements, aligning with Palmer et al.'s (2001) idea that increasing remote collaboration prompts practices that both emphasize formalized procedures and flexibility.

Furthermore, the adaptations of introducing designated meeting leaders, documentation of meeting notes, an increased informative character of meetings, and establishment of meeting norms introduce structure to meetings, necessary for them to run smoothly when participants are dispersed. Together, these meeting practices appear to enhance coordination in hybrid work, while simultaneously accommodating flexibility, as these practices support the physical dispersion of employees. Consequently, structure and flexibility can be seen as working in tandem, with traditional management elements like structure not discarded but reconfigured to support emerging work practices, aligning with the simultaneity and relational characteristics of dualities as defined by Graetz and Smith (2008). As such, this supports Cousins et al.'s (2007) insight that seemingly contradictory elements can coexist meaningfully in hybrid work, with the practice of meetings serving as a mechanism for balancing opposing demands, here extended by emphasizing structure and flexibility.

At the same time, our findings also reveal some managerial concerns about the excessive use of meetings and increasingly rigid meeting formats, as highlighted by Interviewee S, who notes that the structured nature of meetings may risk stifling creativity and overlooking valuable ideas. While structure remains essential to support coordination in hybrid work, this indicates that an overreliance on highly structured meetings may, rather than only enabling coordination, inhibit creativity and spontaneity. In this context, it could be argued that the minimal threshold for structure, as proposed by Graetz and Smith (2008), has been exceeded. This overuse of structure may reflect a lack of dynamism in adapting meeting practices to evolving needs. Given that the relationship between structure and flexibility is continuously shifting, it is crucial for managers to regularly reassess this balance. Practices that were initially appropriate during the transition to hybrid work may now impose unnecessary constraints.

Additionally, our findings show that managers adapt their communication practices when they are not physically co-located with employees, aligning with earlier literature that highlights that workers must navigate professional relationships and communication across different spaces in hybrid work (Halford, 2005; Lamovšek et al., 2025). Managers describe the need to communicate in a more direct and formal manner to ensure expectations are understood when employees are dispersed. More formal and direct communication styles can be interpreted as indicators of structure, as they establish clear expectations and facilitate coordination, described by the managers as necessary in hybrid work, particularly when providing instructions, as highlighted by Interviewee K. As these practices help clarify managerial expectations, we argue they can be seen as a way for managers to address concerns about the erosion of their managerial influence when direct interactions with employees diminish, as highlighted by Kirchner et al. (2021). Rather than solving such concerns by restricting employees' work flexibility, managers adapt their communication practices to incorporate greater structure and formality, indicating an understanding that these opposing elements can be managed concurrently, thus highlighting the simultaneity characteristic of dualities (Graetz & Smith, 2008).

Nonetheless, our findings indicate that introducing this type of communication reduces opportunities for informal and spontaneous discussions. To encourage informal connection, previous literature shows that managers introduce structured team meetings and heightened online presence (Sewell & Taskin, 2015), as well as agenda-free meetings and scheduled

social activities (Reimers, 2024). In a similar vein, our findings reveal that managers now use regular check-ins and "digital coffee meetings" to reintroduce spontaneous communication. These evolving practices help compensate for the reduced casual communication in hybrid work, allowing connection to be maintained digitally without enforcing office presence. Hence, we argue that these practices reflect the relational characteristic of dualities, as they enable workers' flexibility (Graetz & Smith, 2008). Similar to Taskin et al.'s (2024) findings, we argue that these structured yet relationship-oriented check-ins serve as a way for managers to maintain influence and foster connection in hybrid work. In contrast to the authors, however—who suggest that managers gradually abandon such practices in favor of formal practices focused mainly on planning and performance—we find that many managers use these check-ins to effectively combine both relational and formal elements. As highlighted by Interviewee F, check-ins become even more important when employees are not co-located, as they are seen as a means to both track work progress and sustain personal connection.

Although intended to enhance social connection, the addition of more scheduled interactions also increases the overall meeting load, thereby potentially constraining employees' flexibility over their work, indicating that the minimal threshold of balancing structure and flexibility risks being crossed (Graetz & Smith, 2008). Additionally, while our findings indicate a degree of dynamism in balancing structure and flexibility in communication practices (Graetz & Smith, 2008), as seen when Interviewee G recognized that certain formats felt forced and introduced Teams chats as an alternative, the continued reliance by others on formalized meetings to foster informality may also suggest a limited ability to genuinely shift communication patterns toward more spontaneous engagement.

5.2 The Duality of Control and Autonomy: Practices to Ensure Performance and Progress while Fostering Employee Independence

Our findings show that managers welcome the increased freedom that hybrid work affords, while also acknowledging the challenges it presents in terms of keeping track of employee motivation and deliverables, as highlighted by Interviewee I. In response, they have adapted their practices to emphasize accountability—by focusing on setting clear plans and task expectations, as noted by Interviewees L and P—not imposed to limit autonomy but rather to support it, enabling employees to work more independently. These findings illustrate the characteristic of simultaneity in duality theory (Graetz & Smith 2008), where autonomy and control are not treated as opposing forces but are enacted at the same time. Rather than

relinquishing control, managers adapt practices, placing greater emphasis on clear planning and task expectations, to create conditions under which they can work more autonomously. By reducing uncertainty and providing a shared understanding of what success looks like, managers allow employees to work independently while still aligning with organizational goals. This can be seen as reflecting the relational characteristic of dualities (Graetz & Smith 2008): autonomy is not simply permitted in isolation but is enabled through managerial input. The relationship between control and autonomy is thus interdependent, with each element shaping the effectiveness of the other.

In terms of accountability, our findings also indicate a shift to output-based measurements, making it possible to trust that employees maintain performance despite the lack of direct oversight. As Interviewee V emphasized, there is no need for concern as long as employees deliver. This grants employees the autonomy to work without direct supervision, without raising managerial concerns about task completion. In contrast to Reimers (2024) findings who highlight an increased use of activity monitoring, our results indicate a shift toward output monitoring. Output-based measurements become a prerequisite for managers to feel confident enough to give employees autonomy. Just as clear plans and task expectations enable autonomy by creating conditions for employees to work independently, an output-based focus fosters managerial trust that work is being completed as expected.

However, we argue that if misused, the reliance on output measurement in hybrid work may compromise the very autonomy it is intended to provide. If managers fail to set reasonable goals, employees may work longer hours and experience stress. In this sense, these accountability practices, used as an alternative in absence of direct supervision, may lead to diminished employee autonomy (Putnam et al., 2014). Moreover, output-based measurement assumes that work outputs can be clearly defined and reliably quantified, an assumption that does not hold for all teams or organizations. In contexts where outputs are intangible, complex, or collaborative, output control may be neither feasible nor appropriate. When results are ambiguous or jointly produced, “clear accountability” may become subjective, undermining the transparency it is intended to provide. Rather than enabling autonomy, it can prompt employees to overcompensate, reinforcing the autonomy–control paradox (Putnam et al., 2014). Consequently, we suggest that such practices should not be universally applied.

Additionally, control through greater role clarity and well-defined responsibilities set clear expectations while empowering employees to work independently. Our findings suggest that when employees understand what is expected and where their responsibilities lie, they are better equipped to make decisions and solve problems on their own, as explained by Interviewee V. Role clarity supports autonomy by reducing uncertainty, enabling self-sufficiency, and making it easier to identify accountability when issues arise. These practices can thus be seen as analogous to clear plans and task expectations, as both establish the conditions necessary for employees to work independently. As Interviewee H noted, hybrid work discourages passive engagement, employees can no longer assume that merely "leaving their shoes at the office" is enough. Instead, they are expected to take clear ownership of their work. While this increased accountability could be perceived to heighten control, it also strengthens autonomy by clarifying expectations and enabling employees to work more independently. Contrary to the autonomy–control paradox described by Putnam et al. (2014)—where greater autonomy leads to self-monitoring and indirect control as employees feel pressured to prove their value—we argue that these practices help mitigate such dynamics. With accountability structurally embedded and performance more transparently assessed, employees may be less compelled to constantly demonstrate their worth. From a dualities perspective, this suggests that autonomy and control are not inevitably in tension; rather, practices that integrate autonomy with clearly defined accountability can neutralize the control effects typically associated with autonomy showcasing the simultaneity characteristic (Graetz & Smith 2008).

Earlier research argues that practices such as increased task expectations ultimately constrain genuine autonomy in flexible work settings (Putnam et al., 2014). In contrast, our findings indicate that the adapted accountability practices introduced in response to hybrid work do not undermine autonomy but instead create conditions that support it, reflecting the relational characteristic of the duality framework (Graetz & Smith, 2008). However, it is important that desirable attributes are maintained at minimal levels to ensure that dualities remain enabling rather than coercive, a principle Graetz and Smith (2008) associate with the characteristic of minimal thresholds. Staying within the minimal threshold here can be challenging, as highlighted by Interviewee H, who expressed concern that placing too much emphasis on output and results may become overwhelming for employees. While managers actively reflect on the need to adjust the balance between control and autonomy over time, we have not been able to see how this intention materializes in these particular practices. Despite the

awareness, it remains unclear whether they succeed in dynamically balancing control and autonomy in practice, raising the question whether or not the dynamism characteristic of the duality is present (Graetz & Smith, 2008).

Additionally, our findings show that managers have adapted their practices to maintain a consistent workflow in hybrid settings. As employees gain greater autonomy in organizing their work, digital platforms for sharing schedules and work materials have become essential for keeping managers informed and facilitating collaboration. One-to-one meetings have also gained prominence, compensating for the decline in daily interactions by offering opportunities for follow-up and support. These workflow adaptations enable managers to stay informed despite physical distance. Similar to how output-based measurements provide managers with the assurance needed to grant autonomy, these practices help sustain trust by making work progress visible and coordination achievable. We argue, therefore, that such mechanisms do not constrain autonomy but rather enable it, as they provide managers with the confidence to allow employees to work independently. Although some of these practices, such as regular check-ins and schedule sharing (Felstead et al., 2003), are traditionally associated with control, in this context, they may function as enablers of autonomy. This dynamic illustrates that autonomy and control are not necessarily oppositional but can operate simultaneously and in a complementary fashion, thereby exemplifying the duality characteristic of simultaneity (Graetz & Smith, 2008). Furthermore, we see that these practices are not imposed to limit autonomy but to support and legitimize it. Autonomy becomes trustworthy because it is anchored in practices that managers can rely on. The two are therefore relationally linked, each enabling the other, showing the relational characteristic in Graetz and Smith's (2008) framework.

In addition, we find that not all managers view these adapted workflow practices as necessary, with some gradually phasing them out as work appears to progress smoothly without them, as mentioned by Interviewee O. This suggests a capacity to adjust the level of control over time, reflecting the dynamism in managing dualities (Graetz & Smith, 2008). Conversely, some managers observe an inability among their managerial peers to appropriately balance the degree of control in response to their teams' needs, as noted by Interviewee L. This highlights the importance of applying workflow practices with care, ensuring that control does not surpass the minimal threshold and begin to erode autonomy, thereby disrupting the balance essential to managing the control-autonomy duality effectively

(Graetz & Smith, 2008). If not carefully managed, exceeding the minimal threshold of managerial oversight can lead to excessive monitoring, which may create pressure on employees to constantly appear productive and available. This can foster a culture of self-surveillance, where individuals internalize the need to demonstrate commitment, even in the absence of direct supervision. Once again, this can potentially lead to the autonomy-control paradox as described by Putnam et al. (2014).

5.3 Synthesis: Adapting Managerial Practices to Balance Opposing Demands in Hybrid Work

To the best of our knowledge, only a limited number of studies have applied a dualities perspective in examining hybrid work. Nonetheless, consistent with these studies, our findings reveal that this way of working gives rise to the co-existence of seemingly opposing elements (Palmer et al., 2001; Cousins et al., 2007). While previously identified dualities in flexible work include freedom-constraint, trust-control, nearness-farness, control-empowerment, defined as opposing demands that are managed in tandem rather than viewed as mutually exclusive (Palmer et al., 2001; Hafermalz & Riemer, 2020; Cousins et al., 2007), the managerial practices observed in this study primarily reflect ongoing efforts to balance structure and flexibility, as well as control and autonomy.

Existing literature on hybrid work suggests that managers use structured practices in order to cope with the downsides of being increasingly dispersed from employees (e.g., Sewell & Taskin, 2015; Grzegorczyk et al., 2021; Bloom, 2021). While scholars such as Sewell and Taskin (2015) tend to frame these practices as constraining flexibility, our discussion nuance the understanding of managerial practices by arguing how middle managers can hold apparent contradictions together as part of everyday practice (Graetz & Smith, 2008). Hybrid work promotes flexibility by increasingly allowing employees to choose where they work. However, managers have also adapted various practices that impose a degree of structure to ensure effective coordination and maintain team cohesion in this flexible way of working. Additionally, in line with previous studies arguing that managers use alternative practices to reassert control in flexible work settings (e.g., Felstead et al., 2003; Reimers, 2024), we argue that the middle managers have adapted their control practices in the hybrid work setting. However, we also show how these adaptations are not solely about regaining control but about managing the dual demands of both control and autonomy, seeking integration rather than prioritizing one over the other.

6. Conclusion

This study sought to explore how middle managers adapt their managerial practices to balance tensions arising in hybrid work. In this section, the research question is answered (6.1) and our developed theoretical framework presented (6.2), followed by a discussion on the theoretical contributions of the study (6.2), as well as practical contributions (6.3). Lastly, we present the limitations of the study (6.4) and give suggestions for future research (6.5).

6.1 How Middle Managers Adapt Managerial Practices to Balance Tensions Arising in Hybrid Work

Our findings illustrate that hybrid work is inherently tension-filled, requiring managers to navigate competing demands. Specifically, we identify how managers adapt their practices to simultaneously uphold elements of both structure and flexibility, as well as control and autonomy, viewing these as dualities that underpin hybrid work.

We find that managers do not resolve tensions by favoring one pole of the duality over the other. Instead, they actively manage the tensions as persistent and interrelated forces. The structure–flexibility duality is evident in managers' implementation of fixed in-office days and differentiated task allocations, which provide necessary coordination while preserving employees' flexibility to work remotely. Similarly, meeting and communication practices reflect a balance between ensuring structured interaction and allowing space for informal, spontaneous exchanges despite physical dispersion. Yet, our findings also suggest that these practices can drift toward over-structuring, with increased reliance on scheduled meetings and formalized communication formats potentially constraining flexibility in hybrid work. This dynamic demonstrates the risk of exceeding the minimal threshold for structure, highlighting the importance of continuous reassessment and adaptation in hybrid work settings.

The control-autonomy duality is shown in practices such as regular one-to-one meetings and establishing clear individual responsibilities. Managers sought to empower employees through autonomy in task execution while maintaining oversight through means as scheduled touchpoints and outcome-focused evaluations. These practices exemplify the effort to sustain employee independence without relinquishing managerial control. However, similar to our findings on structure and flexibility, there is a delicate balance to maintain. Practices introduced to foster autonomy could potentially paradoxically constrain it when applied

excessively, for instance, when one-to-one meetings become too frequent or overwhelming for employees.

Taken together, our findings show that middle managers in hybrid work engage in ongoing efforts to enact both sides of hybrid work dualities rather than resolving them in favor of one element. The dualities perspective proves valuable in highlighting how these tensions are not problems to be solved but conditions to be managed continuously. The simultaneous and relational enactment of opposing forces, structure and flexibility, control and autonomy, provides a more nuanced understanding of how managerial practices are adapted in hybrid work. Moreover, our findings point to a notable pattern: while managers effectively establish routines to balance dualities, their practices indicate a lack of dynamism. Once certain routines are established, such as fixed office days or standardized meeting formats, there is limited evidence that these are continuously re-evaluated. This suggests that while managers can recognize and balance dualities, their ability to fine-tune these balances proves limited, potentially inhibiting the capacity to sustain them over time. Hence, managers in hybrid work may benefit from fostering greater reflexivity and responsiveness, allowing for more fluid adaptation as work arrangements and employee needs evolve.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of managerial practices in hybrid work by showing how managers actively balance tensions rather than merely resolve them. It demonstrates the relevance of the dualities perspective in capturing the complexity of hybrid work and offers practical insights for organizations aiming to support effective and sustainable management in increasingly flexible work environments.

6.2 Developed Theoretical Framework

Figure 5 presents our final framework, developed from the findings of this study and building on the initial version introduced in section 2.6.2. The framework captures the key tensions arising in hybrid work in our study, namely, between structure and flexibility, and control and autonomy. Rather than resolving these tensions, managers actively navigate and balance them through their adapted managerial practices. Our findings challenge earlier research that often interprets managerial responses to hybrid work as simply adding more control or structure. Instead, we show that managers adopt an enabling view of control and structure, using them not to restrict, but to support flexibility and autonomy.

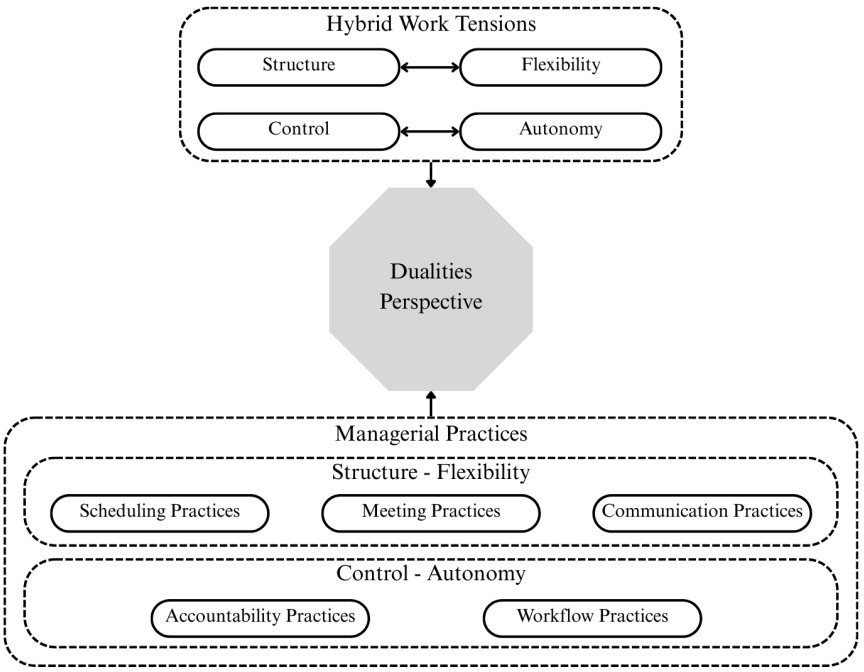


Fig 5. Developed Theoretical Framework

6.3 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the hybrid work literature in two important ways. First, it shifts the analytical focus from employees to middle managers. While existing research has primarily adopted an employee perspective, shedding light on how hybrid work affects individual workers, far less is known about how it is actually managed in practice. Second, although existing literature has acknowledged that hybrid work creates a more complex environment, marked by opposing demands, they have typically been analyzed through perspectives that emphasize trade-offs or binary choices. By integrating the hybrid work literature with duality theory, we show that tensions are not resolved through either/or choices but are actively managed through adaptive managerial practices. Contextualizing duality theory in the hybrid work setting allows us to move beyond binary oppositions, such as control versus autonomy, highlighting instead the balancing acts that managers perform to make hybrid work function within organizations.

6.4 Practical Contributions

This study offers practical insights for organizations and managers navigating the complexities of hybrid work. First, our findings highlight that tensions between structure and flexibility, as well as control and autonomy, are not issues to be resolved through one-off

decisions or rigid policies. Rather, they require ongoing, adaptive managerial practices. Recognizing this can help organizations move beyond simplistic either/or approaches and foster more nuanced, responsive strategies. Second, while structured routines, such as fixed in-office days and formalized meetings, can offer coordination and clarity in dispersed work environments, they may also risk constraining flexibility and spontaneity if overused. Practitioners could therefore benefit by critically assessing the thresholds to avoid situations such as when structure in flexible work shifts from being helpful to overly rigid and developing mechanisms to periodically reassess these practices over time. In managing control and autonomy, our study suggests that clarity, rather than rigid surveillance, is essential. Practices such as clearly defined roles, outcome-based evaluations, and explicit task expectations enable autonomy while ensuring accountability. Shifting the focus from mere activity monitoring to aligning outcomes can better support employee independence, even in the absence of physical presence. Finally, we show that even well-intended adaptations, such as regular check-ins or informal digital meetings, can unintentionally increase structure and reduce flexibility. This highlights the importance of intentional design and continuous reflection on how hybrid work practices are experienced in daily work.

6.5 Limitations

This study is based on 22 interviews and observations conducted within a single case company. While this allows for a detailed exploration of managerial practices in hybrid work, the findings may not be fully transferable to other organizational contexts. For instance, sectors with more routine or location-dependent work may face different challenges and opportunities when implementing hybrid work. This means that the managerial practices identified in this study may not fully capture the variation that could exist across different organizational contexts. Moreover, as our study focuses specifically on middle managers, it does not account for the experiences and perspectives of other employees or senior executives. While we show how certain practices, for instance, help balance control and autonomy from a managerial viewpoint, these perceptions may differ at other organizational levels.

Finally, we recognize that hybrid work is a rapidly evolving phenomenon. The managerial practices identified in this study reflect current conditions but may shift as technologies and organizational norms develop. For instance, AI could reduce the need for formal

documentation, while VR may reshape how informal social interaction is maintained. As such, some practices observed in this study may prove temporary, underlining the need for continued research in this dynamic context.

6.6 Future Research

Given that this study focused on a single case company, future research could benefit from conducting comparative case studies across multiple organizations. This would allow for a deeper understanding of how contextual factors, such as industry, organizational structure, technology adoption or culture, may influence the specific managerial practices in hybrid work. Future research should also consider longitudinal studies to examine how managerial practices in hybrid work evolve over time. This is especially relevant given that we found little support for the dynamism aspect of balancing tensions. Longitudinal research could shed light on how this balancing act unfolds and adapts in response to shifting conditions and organizational learning. Future research could also include employees in the empirical data. While our study focused exclusively on managers, incorporating employee perspectives would provide valuable insights into whether the intended effects of managerial practices, such as promoting autonomy through accountability practices, are actually experienced as such by other employees.

7. References

Ashkenas, R. (2025). *The Pandemic Proved That Remote Leadership Works*. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved March 24, 2025, from: https://hbr.org/2025/03/the-pandemic-proved-that-remote-leadership-works

Athanasiadou, C. & Theriou, G. (2021). Telework: Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda. *Heliyon*, 7(10). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e08165

Baltes, B. B., Briggs, T. E., Huff, J. W., Wright, J. A., & Neuman, G. A. (1999). Flexible and Compressed Workweek Schedules: A Meta-Analysis of Their Effects on Work-Related Criteria. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84(4), 496–913. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.84.4.496

Bellis, P., Cunial, M. & Trabucchi, D. (2024). Mastering hybrid worlds through digital leadership: The role of agility in fostering innovation. *Business Horizons*, 67(4), 369–380. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2024.04.002

Beno, M. (2022). Differences Between Managing Face-To-Display Workers and In-House Workers (Hybrid Work Model): A Qualitative Study from Austria. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 11(2), 30. https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2022-0033

Bell, E., Bryman, A. & Harley, B., 2022. *Business research methods*. Oxford University Press.

Bloom, N., Han, R. & Liang, J. (2024). Hybrid working from home improves retention without damaging performance. *Nature*, 630(8018), 920–925. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07500-2

Bloom, N. (2021). *Hybrid is the future of work.* Retrieved February 15, 2025, from: https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/hybrid-future-work

Crouter, A.C., Bumpus, M.F., Head, M.R. & McHale, S.M. (2001). Implications of Overwork and Overload for the Quality of Men's Family Relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 63(2), 404–416. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00404.x

Cousins, K.C., Robey, D. & Zigurs, I. (2007). Managing strategic contradictions in hybrid teams. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 16(4), 460–478. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ejis.3000692

Curasi, C. F. (2001). A critical exploration of face-to-face interviewing vs.computer-mediated interviewing. *International Journal of Market Research*, 43(4), 361–375. https://doi.org/10.1177/147078530104300402

Deakin, H. & Wakefield, K. (2014). Skype interviewing: reflections of two PhD researchers. *Qualitative Research*, 14(5), 603–616. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794113488126

De Smet, A., Mugayar-Baldocchi, M., Reich, A. & Schaninger, B. (2023). *How companies can improve workplace productivity*. Retrieved February 24, 2025, from: https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/some-employees-are-destroying-value-others-are-building-it-do-you-know-the-difference

de Vaujany, F.-X., Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, A., Munro, I., Nama, Y., & Holt, R. (2021). Control and Surveillance in Work Practice: Cultivating Paradox in 'New' Modes of Organizing. *Organization Studies*, 42(5), 675-695. https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406211010988

Dion Larivière, C., Crough, Q. & Eastwood, J. (2023). The Effects of Rapport Building on Information Disclosure in Virtual Interviews. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 38(2), 452–460. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-022-09535-5

Edmondson, A.C. & Mcmanus, S.E. (2007). METHODOLOGICAL FIT IN MANAGEMENT FIELD RESEARCH. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), 1155–1179. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2007.26586086

Fairhurst, G.T., Cooren, F. & Cahill, D.J. (2002). Discursiveness, Contradiction, and Unintended Consequences in Successive Downsizings. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 15(4), 501–540. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318902154001

Farjoun, M. (2010). Beyond Dualism: Stability and Change As a Duality. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(2), 202–225. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.35.2.zok202

Felstead, A., Jewson, N. & Walters, S. (2003). Managerial Control of Employees Working at Home. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 41(2), 241–264. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8543.00271

George, T.J., Atwater, L.E., Maneethai, D. & Madera, J.M. (2022). Supporting the productivity and wellbeing of remote workers. *Organizational Dynamics*, 51(2), 100869. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2021.100869

Gioia, D.A., Corley, K.G. & Hamilton, A.L. (2013). Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151

Global Workplace Analytics (2021). *Latest Work-at-Home/Telecommuting/Remote Work Statistics.* Retrieved April 10, 2025, from: https://globalworkplaceanalytics.com/telecommuting-statistics

Golden, T.D. & Eddleston, K.A. (2020). Is there a price telecommuters pay? Examining the relationship between telecommuting and objective career success. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 116, 103348. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.103348

Graetz, F. & Smith, A.C.T. (2009). Duality Theory and Organizing Forms in Change Management. *Journal of Change Management*, 9(1), 9–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/14697010902727146

Graetz, F. & Smith, A.C.T. (2008). The role of dualities in arbitrating continuity and change in forms of organizing. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 10(3), 265–280. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2007.00222.x

Gratton, L. (2021). *Four Principles to Ensure Hybrid Work Is Productive Work*. MIT Sloan Management Review, 62(2), 11A-16A. Retrieved March 25, 2025, from https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/four-principles-to-ensure-hybrid-work-is-productive-work/

Grzegorczyk, M., Mariniello, M., Nurski, L., & Schraepen, T. (2021). Blending the physical and virtual: a hybrid model for the future of work. *Bruegel*. Retrieved April 13, 2025, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep50934

Hafermalz, E. & Riemer, K. (2020). Interpersonal Connectivity Work: Being there with and for geographically distant others. *Organization Studies*, 41(12), 1627–1648. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840620973664

Halford, S. (2005). Hybrid workspace: re-spatialisations of work, organisation and management. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 20(1), 19–33. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-005X.2005.00141.x

Hill, J.E., Grzywacz, J.G., Allen, S., Blanchard., V.L. & Matz-Costa, C., Shulkin, S. and Pitt-Catsouphes, M. (2008). Defining and conceptualizing workplace flexibility. *Community, Work & Family*, 11(2), 149–163. https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800802024678

Kirchner, K., Ipsen, C. & Hansen, J.P. (2021). COVID-19 leadership challenges in knowledge work. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 19(4), 493–500. https://doi.org/10.1080/14778238.2021.1877579

Lamovšek, A., Radević, I., Mohammed S.S. & Černe, M. (2025). Beyond the office walls: Work design configurations for task performance across on-site, hybrid and remote forms of work. *Information Systems Journal*, 35(1), 279–321. https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12542

Lewis, M.W. (2000). Exploring paradox: Toward a more comprehensive guide. *Academy of Management. The Academy of Management Review*, 25(4), 760–776. https://doi.org/10.2307/259204

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

March, J.G. (1991). Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning. *Organization Science*, 2(1), 71–87. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2634940

Mazmanian, M., Orlikowski, W.J. & Yates, J. (2013). The Autonomy Paradox: The Implications of Mobile Email Devices for Knowledge Professionals. *Organization Science*, 24(5), 1337–1357. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1120.0806

Mintzberg, H. (1979). *The Structuring of Organizations*. Retrieved May 3, 2025, from https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML0907/ML090710600.pdf

Mischke, J., Luby, R., Vickery, B., Woetzel, L., White, O., Sanghvi, A., Rhee, J., Fu, A., Palter, R., Dua, A. & Smit, S. (2023). *Empty spaces and hybrid places: The pandemic's lasting impact on real estate.* Retrieved February 17, 2025 from: https://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/our-research/empty-spaces-and-hybrid-places#/

Ng, P.M.L., Lit, K.K. & Cheung, C.T.Y. (2022). Remote work as a new normal? The technology-organization-environment (TOE) context. *Technology in Society*, 70, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2022.102022

Nilles, J. (1975). Telecommunications and Organizational Decentralization. *IEEE Transactions on Communications*, 23(10), 1142–1147. https://doi.org/10.1109/TCOM.1975.1092687

Oppong Peprah, E. (2024). Hybrid workplace: current status, positives, negatives, challenges, and team learning. *The Learning Organization*, 31(1), 88-103. https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-11-2022-0150

Palmer, I., Dunford, R., Thekla, R. & Baker, E. (2001). Changing forms of organizing: dualities in using remote collaboration technologies in film production. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 14(2), 190–212. https://doi.org/10.1108/09534810110388081

Pratt, J.H. (1984). Home teleworking: A study of its pioneers. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 25(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/0040-1625(84)90076-3

Putnam, L.L., Fairhurst, G.T. & Banghart, S. (2016). Contradictions, Dialectics, and Paradoxes in Organizations: A Constitutive Approach. *Academy of Management Annals*, 10(1), 65–171. https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2016.1162421

Putnam, L.L., Myers, K.K. & Gailliard, B.M. (2014). Examining the tensions in workplace flexibility and exploring options for new directions. *Human Relations*, 67(4), 413–440. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726713495704

Reimers, C.S. (2024). How Situated Attentions Affect the Choices of Professional Service Managers in the Transition to Hybrid Work Arrangements. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science,* 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/00218863241298712

Reisinger, H., Sephton, P. & Fetterer, D. (2022). *Balancing Autonomy and Structure for Remote Employees.* Retrieved April 20, 2025, from: https://hbr.org/2022/05/balancing-autonomy-and-structure-for-remote-employees

Ridder, H.-G. (2017). The theory contribution of case study research designs. *Business Research*, 10(2), 281–305. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40685-017-0045-z

Rubin, H.J. & Rubin, I.S., (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data.* Sage.

Sewell, G. & Taskin, L. (2015). Out of Sight, Out of Mind in a New World of Work? Autonomy, Control, and Spatiotemporal Scaling in Telework. *Organization Studies*, 36(11), 1507–1529. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840615593587

Sherif, A. (2024). *Employees working primarily remotely worldwide 2015-2023*. Statista. Retrieved 17 February 2025 from: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1450450/employees-remote-work-share/

Statistikmyndigheten SCB. (2025). *Fler jobbar mer hemifrån*. Retrieved May 2, 2025, from: https://www.scb.se/pressmeddelande/fler-jobbar-mer-hemifran/

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research techniques*. Sage.

Taskin, L., Terlinden, L., Coster, S. & Ajzen, M. (2024). The Cost of Managerial Caring: Exploring Identity Work in the Hybrid Work Context. *New Technology, Work and Employment*. https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12316

Taskin, L. & Bridoux, F. (2010). Telework: a challenge to knowledge transfer in organizations. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(13), 2503–2520. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2010.516600

Taskin, L. & Edwards, P. (2007). The possibilities and limits of telework in a bureaucratic environment: lessons from the public sector. *New Technology, Work & Employment*, 22(3), 195–207. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-005X.2007.00194.x

Thorgren, L. (2021). *Hybridarbete vanligt hos storbolagen efter pandemin.* Retrieved April 10, 2025, from: https://www.tn.se/arbetsmarknad/5214/hybridarbete-vanligt-hos-storbolagen-efter-pandemin/

Tietze, S. (2002). When "Work" Comes "Home": Coping Strategies of Teleworkers and their Families. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 41(4), 385–396. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021236426657

TT (2023). *Ny undersökning avslöjar: 65% av anställda i Sverige anser att det borde vara en laglig rättighet att arbeta hemifrån.* Retrieved March 13, 2025, from: https://via.tt.se/pressmeddelande/3377590/ny-undersokning-avslojar-65-av-anstallda-i-sverige-anser-att-det-borde-vara-en-laglig-rattighet-att-arbeta-hemifran?publisherId=259167

Wheatley, D., Broome, M.R., Dobbins, T., Hopkins, B. & Powell, O. (2024). Navigating Choppy Water: Flexibility ripple effects in the COVID-19 pandemic and the future of remote and hybrid working. *Work Employment and Society*, 38(5), 1379–1402. https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170231195230

Yin, R.K., (2013). Validity and generalization in future case study evaluations. *Evaluation*, 19(3), 321-332. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389013497081

Zamani, E.D., Watson‐Manheim, M.B., Abbott, P. & Lin, A. (2024). The new wave of 'hybrid' work: An opportunity to revise assumptions and build theory. *Information Systems Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12558

8. Appendices

Appendix I. Interviews and Interviewees Information

Interviewee:	**Date:**	**Duration:**
A	12/3-2025	39:08
B	13/3-2025	46:17
C	13/3-2025	40:49
D	13/3-2025	40:39
E	14/3-2025	44:04
F	17/3-2025	49:13
G	17/3-2025	49:08
H	17/3-2025	41:34
I	18/3-2025	33:43
J	18/3-2025	46:02
K	18/3-2025	40:07
L	20/3-2025	56:17
M	21/3-2025	47:30
N	21/3-2025	42:07
O	27/3-2025	1:02:16
P	27/3-2025	53:16
Q	27/3-2025	42:24
R	28/3-2025	39:22
S	28/3-2025	41:26
T	31/3-2025	43:03
U	31/3-2025	30:57
V	31/3-2025	46:47

Appendix II. Interview Guide

Introduction

- Brief introduction of ourselves and the research topic.
- Explain the purpose of the interview and how the insights will be used.
- Ask for permission to record.

Warm-up questions

- Can you share a bit about your background, in terms of academic experience and career path so far?
- Can you describe your current role within the company?
- Could you describe your team's structure and the key responsibilities or functions within your team?
- What does hybrid work mean to you?
- Could you share some benefits you've observed with hybrid work?
- Could you share some difficulties you've encountered with hybrid work?
- How would you describe your overall experience of managing in a hybrid workplace?

Hybrid Work: Managerial Practices

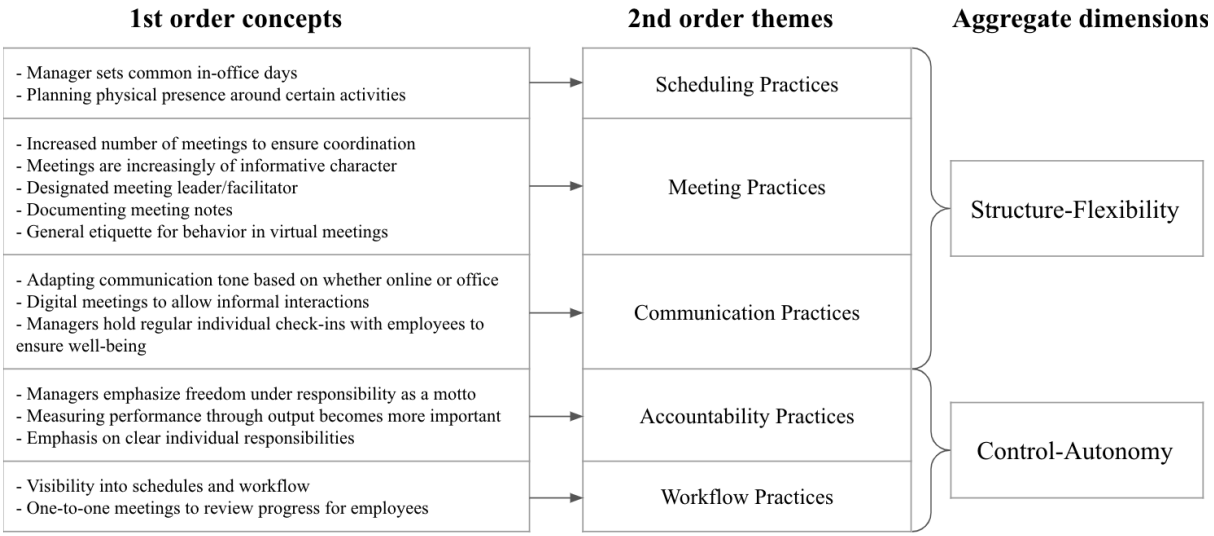
- How do you and your team decide when to work from the office versus remotely? Are there any guidelines or expectations around this?
- Have you made any adjustments to how you structure your work week in a hybrid setting? Can you give one example of such adjustment?
- How do you organize daily tasks in hybrid work?
- Where do scheduled meetings usually take place? Do you adjust the content for meetings depending on if it takes place in office or through digital means?
- Where do informal conversations and spontaneous discussions happen among colleagues if everyone is not in the same location? Have you implemented any activities to encourage these informal interactions?
- How do you keep employees who are working remotely on a given day informed and included in ongoing work and decisions?
- Do employees typically seek guidance or approval for their work? Are there any changes on how they seek such support since you've been working hybrid?
- When employees have questions, to whom do they turn and where are these questions raised? What types of questions do they turn to you for guidance?
- How do you perceive your role and responsibility as a manager when you're leading a hybrid team?
- How do you stay informed regarding who does what when working hybrid? Do you use any certain channels or platforms? Why these?

- What approaches help you stay connected with your team and keep work aligned when employees are not always in the same location?
- How do you oversee employee work progress if you and the employees are working from different locations?
- What are the differences on communicating with employees when they are working from different locations - do you change your approach from when everyone is in the office? Why? Can you give us one example?

Concluding Questions

- Based on your experience, overall what do you think works well in managing your team in a hybrid setting?
- Is there anything you would change or improve in your current approach to managing hybrid teams?
- Is there anything you want to add or believe is important that we haven't covered?

Appendix III. Coding Structure



Appendix IV. Mapping Concepts and Interviews

	Interviewee																					
1st order concepts	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H**	**I**	**J**	**K**	**L**	**M**	**N**	**O**	**P**	**Q**	**R**	**S**	**T**	**U**	**V**	
Manager sets common in-office days	x		x	x				x	x			x	x	x	x								9
Planning physical presence around certain activities	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	19
Increased number of meetings to ensure coordination	x	x	x	x		x	x			x		x	x	x			x						11
Digital meetings are increasingly of informative character			x		x	x		x				x	x		x						x	x	9
Designated meeting leader/facilitator			x	x			x			x					x				x				6
Documenting meeting notes	x						x		x			x	x					x		x			7
General etiquette for behavior in virtual meetings	x		x		x	x	x				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					14
Adapting communication tone based on whether online or office	x			x	x						x	x	x	x				x		x	x	x	11
Digital meetings to allow informal interactions	x	x	x	x		x	x			x		x		x	x			x	x	x			13
Managers hold regular individual check-ins with employees to ensure well-being		x	x	x	x	x								x		x							7
Managers emphasize freedom under responsibility as a motto		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	19
Measuring performance through output becomes more important		x	x	x	x	x		x			x	x	x	x	x	x		x				x	14
Emphasis on clear individual responsibilities			x		x	x	x	x			x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	14
Visibility into schedules and workflow	x		x		x		x						x		x		x	x					8
One-to-one meetings to review progress for employees		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	19
	8	7	13	8	10	10	9	7	5	6	7	11	11	9	10	7	7	9	7	7	5	7	
	Total																						

Total

9. AI Appendix

9.1 Generative AI Description

In the process of writing this thesis, three different AI tools were used: Chat GPT-4.0, Microsoft Teams Live Transcription, and NotebookLM. A description of how these tools were used is outlined in the following section.

ChatGPT-4.0 was primarily used as a tool to enhance the formulation and grammar of prewritten text. Importantly, it was applied exclusively to individual sentences or specific parts of the text, rather than larger sections. The tool contributed to improving the overall quality of the thesis by suggesting alternative word choices and phrasing, which helped express our ideas more clearly and accurately. However, we soon recognized the tool's limitations, as some sentences took on entirely new meanings when simply prompted for language improvement. Throughout the process, we therefore remained careful to ensure that all suggestions stayed true to the original intent. To further minimize the risk of inaccurate outputs, the tool was not used as a primary source of information. In cases where it was consulted for subject-related insights, all information was carefully verified using external, reliable sources. Additionally, the tool was used to identify academic papers relevant to this thesis. However, we realised the quality of the suggested literature varied, therefore, all recommended papers were cross-checked, and the original publications were consulted directly to ensure their credibility and relevance.

Microsoft Teams Live Transcription was used to transcribe all but one of the 22 interviews. For interviews where the tool was used, we ensured that participants gave their informed consent to its use. Furthermore, we recognized that the tool occasionally produced inaccurate transcriptions of the interviews. To ensure the accuracy of relevant content, we cross-checked the transcriptions against the original recordings and corrected any errors in the transcript. Given that our interviews generated over 440 pages of transcripts, we recognized the substantial amount of time the tool saved us compared to manually transcribing recordings or taking notes during the interviews. Additionally, it allowed us to focus entirely on the interviewee, ask relevant follow-up questions, and remain fully present during the interview. On the other hand, we recognized the need to thoroughly review the transcriptions generated by the tool, as there is still significant room for improvement, particularly with

industry-specific terminology, which was often transcribed inaccurately or replaced with unrelated words.

We used NotebookLM throughout the thesis-writing process as a tool for gaining overviews of various topics and research papers. The tool was used to quickly summarize various academic articles, helping us gain a high-level understanding of the content and subject area. This increased the quality of our thesis by allowing us to explore more papers and research areas. However, we do acknowledge the risks associated with the tool, such as the potential for generating inaccurate interpretations of the articles content or omitting important information in its summaries. To mitigate this risk, we used the tool solely for initial exploration and to gain overviews of new areas and articles. When a paper appeared relevant, we ensured to read it in full ourselves. We quickly realised the need to thoroughly read the articles ourselves, but still recognize the advantage of quickly being able to get an overview and make a well-grounded decision whether or not to put time and effort into reading up on an article or area.

9.2 Generative AI Sources

OpenAI. (2025). ChatGPT (May 12 version) [Large language model].
https://chat.openai.com/chat

Microsoft. (2025). Microsoft Teams (May 12 version) [Speech recognition technology]
https://www.microsoft.com/sv-se/microsoft-teams

Google. (2025). NotebookLM (May 12 version) [Large language model].
https://notebooklm.google/