'(Dis)connecting' - Interpersonal communication for young professionals during enforced home-based telework (HBTW)

A qualitative study

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Master's Thesis

June 2021

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ABSTRACT

Home-based teleworking (HBTW) has been intensively growing in the Netherlands, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously, teleworkers have been primarily researched in comparison to face-to-face workers. However, this body of research leaves many gaps, such as the state of enforced remote work, different fields of occupation in this setting of enforced remote work and different age groups. The involuntary nature of HBTW in this research is key to understanding the experience of teleworking young professionals. The current thesis aims to explore how young professionals in the Netherlands experience HBTW, with a specific focus on interpersonal communication, relationships, and boundary work through the following research question: How do Dutch young professionals experience interpersonal communication in an enforced remote workplace? To answer the research question, 12 in-depth interviews were conducted with a variety of young knowledge workers, in the fields of marketing, accounting, consultancy and HR. This data was analyzed through a constructivist grounded theory approach and resulted into three selective codes. These three selective codes are: *implications of formal virtuality,* which entails the implications of formal virtual communication, but also the increased formality of communication in the workplace. The second selective code is *relationships and social deprivation,* which stress the importance of relationships, informal communication, trust and social facilitation for a positive work environment. Lastly *increased boundary negotiations* explain how the lines between professional and personal lines are being blurred, how young professionals are responding to this and the opportunity they see. The present study contributes to the growing body of literature on HBTW in various ways. Firstly, it expands the knowledge on how the digital natives of contemporary society experience implications of HBTW. Moreover, it fills in a gap in research on boundary work regarding the factor of non-voluntary adoption of remote work environments. Societal and managerial implications are suggested to insist future decisionmakers to invest in young professionals, the workforce of the future. These explorations pave the way for future research to expand on. Suggestions for future research entail more research on enforced remote work in other demographics, but also on ways in which the benefits of social facilitation could be fostered through virtual offices.

KEYWORDS: *HBTW, interpersonal communication, virtual teams, enforced remote work, boundary work*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of 2020, companies were forced to experiment with new ways of working as a result of COVID-19: the first pandemic of the digital age (Fenwick et al., 2020). Home-based telework (HBTW) is considered an important long-lasting solution in developed countries as it allows the continuance of knowledge work while keeping the social distance (Bonacini et al., 2021). Working from home is an option mainly reserved for telecommutable jobs that revolve around for instance, administrative or managerial tasks that can be formed behind a desk with reliable internet access (Sanchez et al., 2021). These workers can also be referred to as knowledge workers, these employees create intangible value-adding assets and take this knowledge with them when they change employer (Sutherland & Jordaan, 2004). Historically, remote working has had highly positive effects on business environments and even in contemporary times, the need to work from home enhanced digitalization and innovation. Due to this, initiatives were created, leading a big group of Dutch knowledge workers to enjoy a full range of possibilities caused by digitalization. Certain benefits that emerged out of HBTW were the increased flexibility in workhours and the ability for people with care responsibilities to equally benefit from the flexibility HBTW seems to offer (Ciolfi et al., 2020). These benefits however, seem to be challenged when the contemporary factor of *enforced* remote work is added to the situation. Kaduk et al. (2019) found that when flexible work is compared based on its voluntary versus involuntary nature, involuntary work activities, including schedule and location, are associated with greater stress, turnover intentions, and lower job satisfaction.

Towards the end of 2020, almost half of Dutch workers were working from home, making remote working the most taken measure of the COVID-19 pandemic (TNO, 2021). Uncertainty about the duration of the pandemic led companies to view this way of working as the 'new-normal' (Bonacini et al., 2021). Working from home entailed substantive adjustments for many companies. In a survey conducted in fall 2020, for instance, 45% of the HBTW-ers expressed the need for additional resources for a good home working situation (TNO, 2020). Providing these resources proved rather challenging due to various aspects. One example is the space needed to allow for adding office furniture and equipment to the home office to provide an adequate work space. Especially young professionals, who tend to have smaller living spaces, do not always have sufficient room to place or store office equipment. Worldwide, employees shared pictures on their social media that showed they did not even have a desk (Sanders et al., 2020). Especially when starting a career, the effects of working remotely can be large as it becomes increasingly difficult to connect with colleagues and learn from them. When it comes to the onboarding process, HBTW has complex effects on understanding team dynamics (Rodeghero et al., 2021). As a result of the beforementioned reasons, this thesis focuses on the effects remote working has on young professionals.

In addition to the implications of bringing work to home and creating this so called home office, workers are now communicating primarily through ICTs. Virtual workplaces, existing of

communication and collaboration tools, give employees the opportunity to work at any moment they want, from any place they would want (Stich, 2020). In times of COVID-19, the virtual office is tied to the spatiality of the home. Accordingly, communication with teams, managers and clients happens from this place. Therefore this research aims to understand how young professionals in the Netherlands experience HBTW, with a specific focus on interpersonal communication and the negotiation of boundaries.

1.1. Scientific and societal relevance

This study's focus on remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic adds to a growing body of research about remote working and virtual collaboration (Kniffin et al., 2021). Pre-COVID-19 studies on remote work have suffered from a selection bias, because before the pandemic most employees who worked remotely did so voluntarily. Furthermore, the outcomes of these studies on virtual work lack contextual relevance to be applicable to the COVID-19 situation, specifically the factor of *enforced* remote work. This might have resulted in outcomes that are over-positive towards the attitude around remote work (Wang et al., 2020). Distinction between voluntary and involuntary HBTW is of extreme importance for scholarly and policy discussions (Kaduk et al., 2019). Moreover, following the suggestions of Waizenegger et al. (2020), this thesis answers the need to focus on communication effectiveness and social relationships in a post-COVID-19 era. It is of importance to take this context into account to adequately understand how the current remote working situation is experienced by employees. Accordingly, enforced remote work provides a unique opportunity to address this potential bias in academic research, to verify earlier findings and to expand the theory in the field and create insights for other scholars to build on. Interestingly, the remote working culture as has emerged during the pandemic has created great opportunities for research on working remotely because of the large sample size. Lastly, existing research about HBTW focused on comparing communication strategies of physical versus remote workers (e.g. Beuer et al., 2019) and on different types of virtual workers (such as Merriman et al., 2007). Exploring how different societal groups experience HBTW has been left underrepresented in contemporary literature, especially when it comes to young workers. A recent study by Bonacini et al. (2021) showed that HBTW favors older, higher paid employees. This finding indicated both a scientific and societal relevance for this study, as it displays an opening to explore the experiences of younger employees in order for scholars and decisionmakers to understand what makes their experiences less beneficial.

Further societal relevance of this paper relate to the current state of the future of work. As remote work is becoming the new normal and companies are unlikely to completely switch back to the old normal, it is important to understand the effect this type of work has on employees and businesses (PWC, n.d.). Building frameworks that enhance the internal communication of a team is especially important in the context of a virtual workplace (Ferrel & Kelsey, 2012). Understanding the factors that

suggest improvement or dissatisfaction in interpersonal communication in virtual teams could assist in understanding the influence of remote work on employees. Thus, this research provides an exploratory base for understanding interpersonal communication during HBTW and its impact in a societal context. Additionally, a specific focus on young professionals allows this research to explore an important group, with presumably unique experience.

1.2. Research questions

This research focuses on the effect of remote working on young professionals, a group that is especially interesting because it includes digital natives who are used to digital communication tools, yet are also at the start of developing their professional life and identity. This research aims to answer the following research question: *How do Dutch young professionals experience interpersonal communication in an enforced remote workplace?* In order to cohesively answer the research question, multiple sub research questions were developed to understand the experiences of young professionals. The first aims to understand how they experience home-based communication. Secondly, collaboration and team communication were important to explore to fully understand the implications of remote communication. The third sub question focuses on boundary theory, a concept that helps to comprehend the physical and emotional implications of communication in a HBTW-ing environment (Nippert-Eng, 1996). The sub questions are as follows:

Sub-RQ1: What constitutes interpersonal communication in a remote workplace?

Sub-RQ2: How is collaboration in virtual teams experienced for enforced remote workers?

Sub-RQ3: How are young professionals incorporating boundary work in their home-based work environment and what are the implications?

In order to answer these research questions, in-depth interviews were conducted, analyzed, and reported on in the following chapters of this paper. Prior to these results, the existing literature on this topic are reviewed and the method of the study is illustrated. Following the results, the conclusion summarizes the finding of the study and suggests implications, limitations and ideas for future research. This research is exploratory in nature, which allows the study to be flexible while in-depth, in order to add an academic contribution to the field of interpersonal communication and remote work.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To explore how young professionals experience enforced HBTW, it is important to understand key concepts related to remote working. This theoretical framework draws from academic literature to highlight and explain the three main themes: HBTW, interpersonal communication, and boundary work. As indicated in the introduction, these three themes inform the sub questions of this study.

2.1. Home-based telework (HBTW)

This section elaborates on key research about HBTW starting with the history of remote work to deeply understand its relationship to interpersonal communication. As indicated in the introduction of this study, the global pandemic has had large implications for research on remote working. Accordingly, the research emerging from COVID-19 contexts will be discussed to understand contemporary HBTW.

2.1.1. History of remote work

The first spatial evolution of the workplace is a phenomenon that aligns with the development of the open space offices in the 1950s (Aroles et al., 2019). In this setting, employees no longer had a fixed desk. Accordingly, they benefitted from the flexibility of this new spatial configuration. Two decades later in the 1970s, the monetary cost of commuting and awareness of its environmental effects were rising. As a result, remote working was introduced in the United States (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015). This kind of remote working allowed employees to conduct parts of their work from a distance, and reporting on this and communicating with colleagues after returning to the office. The emergence of new technologies, such as phones, the internet in the 1980s, and wireless connections in the 1990s created new ways of work (Aroles et al., 2019). During these times, workers were not only able to do their work remotely but they were also able to connect with their coworkers from a location outside the office. Naturally, ICTs have played an important role in the further development of spatiality as it allows to maintain a sense of perceived proximity, meaning "a person's perceptions of how far or close another person is" (Wilson et al., 2008, p. 983). In the past decades, ICTs have been continuously developing to optimize the remote experience. New innovations such as mobile phones, chat applications and video calling enabled the current way of work that many young knowledge workers in the Netherlands experience today: home-based telework.

2.1.2. Telework and business as usual during the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2020, as a result of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, many people have been enforced to work from home. These employees working from a location remote to the regular work site, while

using technological connections can we called teleworkers (Ciolfi, 2020, Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015). In short, telework is remote work that involves ICTs (Wheatley, 2015). Working from home is, as mentioned before, an option mainly reserved for white-collar office workers. These workers are also often referred to as knowledge workers (Sutherland & Jordaan, 2004). This study focuses on remote work that is practiced from the home of the workers, therefore referred to as HBTW. Traditionally, HBTW was framed as a benefit and privilege for workers, which causes positive effects. From a business perspective, remote working was praised by companies for its contribution to reducing organizational costs and fostering organizational agility (Aroles et al., 2019). Furthermore, HBTW had shown to improve worker's productivity (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015; Eddleston & Mulki, 2017), improve their autonomy, and establish fewer distractions (Wheatley, 2012).

However, even in times where HBTW and remote work was seen as a privilege with mainly positive effects, a growing body of researchers started to critically look at the long term effects of HBTW. On the long term, members of geographically dispersed teams started to feel increasingly isolated from their colleagues (Schinoff, 2020). Furthermore, they experienced that the boundaries between their personal and professional life seemed to fade (Ciolfi et al., 2020). These initial concerns, more on this in section 2.3, are even more prevalent when workers are enforced to work from home, rather than voluntarily making the decision to do so. It is important to note in these observations that the pros and cons are co-existing. One can experience productivity benefits from HBTW while simultaneously feeling more pressure. A worker can feel independent and their colleague isolated depending on their personal context, which in result decrease their team participation (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020) . Home-based working transforms from a privilege to an essential organizational operation in times of crises. This was already concluded by Donnely & Proctor Thompson in 2015 when researching the effect of remote working after a natural disaster. This effect was indeed observed when in March 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic hit the Netherlands and induced a way of working where knowledge workers were enforced to work from their homes.

Whereas, HBTW provides spatial and temporal flexibility that is necessary in times where social distance is the norm, many organizations were not prepared. In 2020, overnight, companies had to adapt their operational strategy from physical to remote. Organizations were unprepared and had to start experimenting with a new way of work (Wang et al., 2020). When the infrastructure and systems are adequately put in place, the possibilities and advantages of remote work are visible (e.g. Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). For instance, to captivate the full range of benefits that remote work offers such as increased productivity, employees need certain environmental requirements such as reduced distraction. According to Palvalin (2017) for knowledge workers, a good and productive work space should be made to optimally facilitate: "job activities, communication and concentration, informal and formal meetings and different moods such as being calm and relaxed or being stressed or excited" (p. 424). However, when moving employee tasks from the same way they were conducted to a home

office, the bench mark requirements for effective remote working are more difficult to attain. For this reason, remote work in a business as usual context is perceived as problematic. An additional concern arises when household members have to share their private space to pursue their private, educational and professional activities which was already found before the COVID-19 pandemic (Waizenegger et al., 2020). These factors make it harder to enjoy the benefits HBTW has to offer. It is clear that many of the initial reasons and influences to move to remote work voluntarily are not applicable when moving to remote work overnight. Instead of it being a worker privilege, HBTW became an essential part of organizations' operation during this recent time of crisis. Therefore, it is important to understand what benefits workers experience but also what they struggle with. Accordingly, this study will investigate HBTW in today's context.

2.2. Virtual interpersonal communication characteristics and challenges

This section of the theoretical framework provides a better understanding on how interpersonal communication plays a role in HBTW. Firstly, interpersonal communication will be defined and explored in a virtual context. Accordingly, virtual teamwork will be explored and is followed by a review on trust and remote work relationships in the contemporary literature.

2.2.1. Characteristics of virtual interpersonal communication

Interpersonal communication has been an essential part of relationship building throughout human history and is affected by a person's ability to express themselves (Kick et al., 2015). High quality interpersonal communication will allow smooth processes when it comes to knowledge exchange or collaboration. However, interpersonal communication is not always extremely easy and certain problems such as lack of listening can cause trouble (Kick et al., 2015). On top of that, virtuality has another complex effect on communication. Marlow et al. (2017) created a framework for communication in virtual teams in order to contextualize virtual communication as a team process. Figure 1 presents an adaption of Marlow's (2017) framework, relevant to this study. This adapted framework shows that three factors, to be precise communication frequency, communication quality and communication content, are key indicators when it comes to measuring virtual teams' communication practices which result in the outputs as shown in the framework. Team diversity stands for individual differences amongst team members and is used as the input, these differences can include the age of the young professionals, but also the skillset or years of employment. Trust and team cognition arise in the framework as emergent states, meaning critical phenomena in these teams. A solid basis of trust is necessary for teams to function and virtuality has proven to be a risk when it comes to building trust (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013). Team cognition refers to "information shared by all team members relating to the team and task" (Marlow et al., 2017, p. 582). Knowledge sharing is a highly important asset of an organization and is therefore incredibly useful to include when

measuring the communication processes. It is important to understand these concepts as important factors when exploring communication in virtual teams. (Notably, moderators team task and characteristics have been left out of this model).
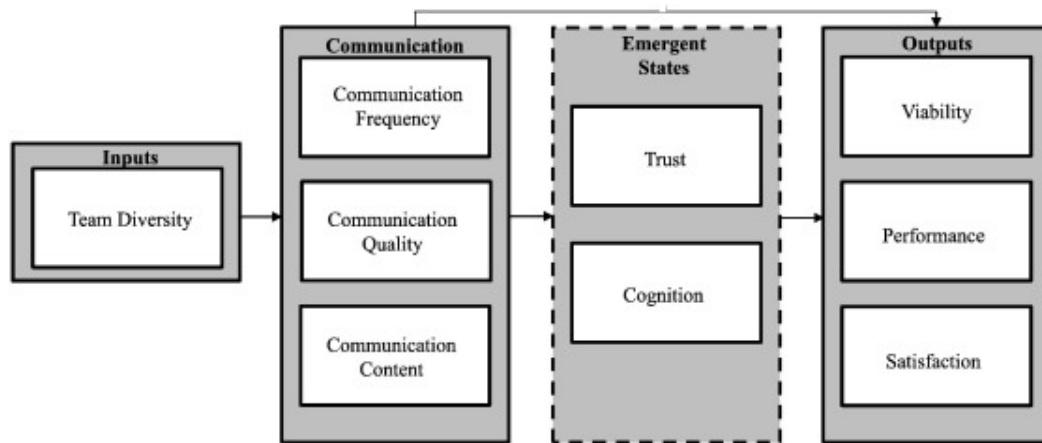

Figure 1. Communication Process Framework in Virtual Teams (Adapted from Marlow et al., 2017)

2.2.2. Challenges of virtual communication

Scholars are investigating virtual communication processes more and more, but for a long time, digital communication was largely underestimated as part of a worker's social interactions (Larson & Makarius, 2018). Research on digital communication consistently hints that certain skills are necessary to virtually communicate in an efficient manner (e.g. Gilson et al. 2015). Virtual communication requires certain skills because people only have access to a fraction of the nonverbal cues prevalent in face-to-face communication. Nonverbal communication entails communicating in a form of transmitting and receiving messages without words. It relies on culturally dependent cues as well as globally recognized cues (McIntosh et al., 2008). Some nonverbal cues are therefore more widely recognized, while others are harder to spot. Non verbal communication is key in meaning making and the importance of communicating face-to-face is especially highlighted as people simply cannot not communicate appropriately without social cues (Rich, 1998).

Especially during virtual communications it is hard to notice nonverbal communication, but also voice volume, as the external factors might interfere with the communication quality. Nevertheless, the sender is not the only key character that experiences disruptions in virtual meetings. This idea was identified by Jarvenpaa and Keeting (2021) and it stresses the extreme importance of the 'hearer' in a conversation. What this means is that the feedback and information from the hearer is reduced in virtual places, therefore not only is the receiver struggling with receiving the full message, their responses are just as hard to read. Organizations are trying their best to provide a variety of tools for teleworkers to collaborate in. All these digital technologies allow workers to communicate with each other in almost any kind of form, encouraging them to feel closer and more connected. However, building actual trust amongst coworkers is easier when they meet physically, partly because of the

earlier mentioned contribution of nonverbal communication to meaning-making processes in conversations (Cho & Choi, 2019). Moreover, physical distance decreases not only our ability to read nonverbal cues, it also decreases our communication frequency (McIntosch et al., 2008). When we physically communicate, we are continually receiving informal, nondeliberate messages from each other in ways such as body posture, eye contact and facial expressions. These moments of picking up spontaneous cues also make a big part in the office culture of indeliberate interaction between employees.

Communication seems to move across the entire ICT scale, there is phone and video conferencing, but also intranets and other collaborative software such as Microsoft Teams and Slack (McIntosh et al., 2008). Videoconferencing software such as Zoom and Hangouts allow meetings that are time efficient and easy to (re-)schedule (Byrnes et al., 2020). Moreover, the traditional e-mail is still a practice that is used to communicate within organizations, but the rise of alternative communication tools seem to decrease the popularity of the good old e-mail. Finally, mobile communication serves a crucial function in HBTW. Early literature on mobile communication focused on the nature of this practice, but more recent literature is exploring the significance of this communication's functionality (Mannell, 2018). Mobile phones are often used for entertainment, sociability and maintaining personal relationships (Przybylski& Weinstein, 2013). In contemporary times, mobile devices might be used for both personal and professional communication and not all organizations provide workers with the resources to separate the two. Ownership of the phone makes it harder to differentiate what it is used for (Schalow et al., 2013). However, mobile connectiveness also influences how people feel. As an example, people seem to feel more pressure as a result of their mobile presence. Even without actively communicating with colleagues or supervisors, people seem to feel a sort of "structural expectation embodied in the mobile phone" (Mannell, 2018, p.77). Mobile messaging application such as WhatsApp could be used by employees to connect with friends and colleagues. Nonetheless, it does not appear to facilitate interpersonal connectedness among individuals who are low in social connectedness, such as young professionals who recently joined a new company (Lundy & Drouin, 2016). The consequence of the usage of this device in such a way that it blurs personal and professional lives, indicates that the presence of mobile communication technology could interfere with relationship building.

2.2.3. Virtual teamwork and management

The interference with relationship building is an important aspect to consider when exploring virtual teamwork and virtual management. Remote work in contemporary businesses often translates to virtual work and virtual teams in a virtual workplace. Virtual teams, which became increasingly common in business organization as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, are defined as "work arrangements where team members are geographically dispersed, have limited face-to-face contact,

and work interdependently through the use of electronic communication media to achieve common goals" (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017, p. 569). One of the defining characteristics of virtual teams is that they use technological tools to communicate with each other (Marlow et al., 2017). Traditionally, one of the reasons to move to remote work was that virtual teams allowed organizations to let geographically dispersed specialists enroll in their company (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). In the current context, colleagues are geographically dispersed because the COVID-19 pandemic prevents them from working together in the office. For this reason, project groups and other collaborating colleagues are forced to work as virtual teams. A benefit of this is that individuals with diverse skills and abilities are allowed to be leveraged as they can easily virtually join a workplace (Ferrell & Kelsey, 2012). The virtual teams have even shown to be more effective at certain specific tasks than face-to-face teams, such as for instance brainstorming (Kniffin et al., 2021).

However, HBTW-ers in virtual teams seem to face a lot of difficulties as well, including the negative influence on collaboration (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Virtual teams seem to generally take longer in completing tasks, which could be explained by the usage of virtual tools (Marlow et al., 2017). During online video calls, for example, issues such as bad internet connection or time lag between participants responses, negatively influence the collaboration of virtual teams (Byrnes et al., 2020). Due to the decrease of interactivity of a video call, combined with the technical difficulties, miscommunication and low levels of interactivity happen often. Furthermore, virtual work brings a dependence on technology in work-related interactions between employees (Raghuram et al., 2019). Hence, high quality communication is key to be fostered, for enabling team members to clarify team roles, define team norms, establish cognitive models, and provide mutual support (Marlow et al., 2015). Moreover, online calls are most often formally scheduled with the purpose to add value. Other meaningful social interactions such as coffee talks and spontaneous conversations are unlikely to happen, while these informal talks are often useful to create certain familiarity amongst colleagues (Ford et al., 2017). Instead of casually consulting colleagues in the office, workers have to directly address them via digital communication tools when they want to speak to them. These factors both influence communication overload and communication underload. Remote workers have increased feeling of information overload, but are equally left out of important conversations depriving them of valuable information (Stich, 2020). These two phenomena can be experienced as equally stressful and can have an enormous negative effect on virtual team collaboration and engagement.

Virtual teams are often defined by the communication processes between team members and colleagues. Another important communication aspect is the managerial support. When it comes to the relationship between managers and employees, a positive perception of managerial support translates to greater levels of work performance and better work attitudes (Merriman et al., 2008). Especially for young and new employees the collaborative practices are also evident in their mentoring. Merriman et al. (2008) explored these managerial relationships between two types of virtual status: regular employees who are allowed to work from home and free agents who are employed for a shorter

period. Mentoring exclusively done via ICTs can be called e-monitoring and facilitates development without the boundaries of space or geography (De Janasz et al., 2008). The asynchronous nature of this type of mentoring could facilitate interaction when it comes to complex problems, but a big issue of this is personal contact. Paradoxically, studies show that women and people of color have a harder time establishing and maintaining effective mentoring relationships in person. In this case, the earlier mentioned lack of visual cues helps with preventing prejudice and stereotypes based on racial, gender or sexuality differences (De Janasz et al., 2008).

2.2.4. Trust

Trust in team members is a key to an efficient collaboration and communication within groups differs in significant ways, depending on the amount of trust within the group (Pearce, 1974). Business literature defines trust as the expectation that colleagues will not act in a self-interested manner at the expense of the other's welfare (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). As a result, it increases readiness to accept vulnerability, meaning one is more open to assume trust than to assume suspicion (Choi & Cho, 2019). When it comes to important communicative actions such as knowledge sharing, trust seemed to be of higher importance than a shared vision (Choi & Cho, 2019). In situations where ICTs are used as a means for virtual teams to interact and to share knowledge, trust is therefore particularly important (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996). When knowledge sharing is not done in formal settings, this needs to happen outside of the regular scheduled meetings. It is also shown that physical distance decreases trust as the intimacy of meeting physically is important in trust building (McIntosh et al, 2008). Virtuality as an independent factor also seems to play a role in trust building in the workplace. Przybylski and Weinstein's experiment (2013) shows that in the presence of a mobile phone, participants had a harder time establishing trust due to a lack of intimacy in a digital conversation. Interestingly enough, their debriefing procedure showed that these results happened outside of their conscious awareness, indicating that they experienced lower levels of trust without really noticing this (Przybylsky & Weinstein, 2013). The trust experienced by workers can therefore decrease without much notice and especially without notice of a supervisor. If there is no one who recognizes the cues that there is a decline in trust, this could be harder to prevent and repair.

Luckily, there are ways to measured and evaluated trust within different teams. Trust can be evaluated by four dimensions of interpersonal trustworthiness: ability, benevolence, integrity and congruence in goals (Choi & Cho, 2019). According to Jones and Shah (2015), perceived ability is the extent to which the trustor perceives the trustees competences. The benevolence is explained as the trustee's perceived willingness to act in someone else's best interest. Integrity reveals the perceived trust when it comes to the trustee's principles and whether they act morally or right, in the eyes of the trustor. The last important antecedent of trust is goal congruence, which entails the degree to which a trustor perceives that the trustee has similar goals or congruent views (Choi & Cho, 2019). There is

some evidence that what is most important in virtual relationships is cognitive trust, which is based on competence, rather than affective trust, which comes from emotional relationships (Merriman et al., 2008). According to Pearce (1974), ways to identify trust could be to identify its effect of the frequency and form of communication behavior. Therefore, it would be interesting to see how these two factors can be studied in this study, where frequency, quality and content are important factors when studying virtual interpersonal communication. In essence, trust is an important factor especially when it comes to virtual teams where certain factors which determine trust are incredibly different. According to some, trust can be seen as the glue of the global workplace and is becoming more integral when the virtual workplace is growing (Marlow et al., 2017).

2.2.5. The lack of spontaneity

A big group of young professionals in 2020 and 2021 started their career from their homes, missing certain office like behavior such as unintentional information exchanges and spontaneous decision-making (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Indeliberate and informal communication plays a major role in how workers perceive each other. Managers say that these moments allow them to read the 'real person' because in these moments of relaxing, people tend to reveal more about themselves (Rich, 1998). In times of enforced remote work, understanding what is going on with your colleague, professionally *and* personally is especially important as many employees work remotely in a business as usual context (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015). Virtual interaction is often less spontaneous and lacks opportunities for small talk at the coffee machine. As mentioned before, not only is the spontaneity of interpersonal communication affected, the frequency of this communication is also decreasing in a virtual workplace (McIntosch et al., 2008). Yet, the frequency of other communication, such as online meetings seems to have increased (DeFilippes et al., 2020). The meetings might be longer and they happen more frequently. Thus, workers seem to have a higher amount of time in meetings, with significantly less informal contact. This increases the workload, especially because virtual meetings seem to be far more intense for workers, and too many meetings can backfire on virtual teams (Waizenegger et al., 2020). This so called virtual meeting-fatigue can feel invasive, especially when meetings overlap with professional or private schedules. This does not only negatively affect the willingness to participate, but also negatively affects collaboration outside of virtual meetings. For a large group of people, the COVID-19 pandemic limited their social interactions for a period of time to virtual communication and communication with their household.

2.2.6. Relationships and motivation

A growing body of literature showed that certain consequences of virtual communication, such as low access to information and the lack of clarity in communication, resulted in employees feeling overwhelmed and psychologically strained (Gilson et al., 2015). This interaction between the

pandemic and remote work brings up how certain emotions including unwillingness to participate, stress and anxiety are regulated when the ability of picking up social cues is relatively limited (Kniffin et al., 2021). These cues could regularly be picked up by informal, spontaneous communication. Unplanned interactions amongst team members can build rapport and a lack of it can negatively influence the shared identity and connectedness (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005). Not only is it good for the team, effective informal communication benefits the internal motivation of a worker. When people work around and closely with a team that is well functioning their motivation seems to go up. This is also shown as the 'social facilitation' effects, that people seem to work harder when they are not alone (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Logically, these effects are harder to foster in a virtual workplace which open up room to investigate how these effects *can* be encouraged. Furthermore, the inability to look at each other's work, which continues the unplanned communication, leads to a reliance on assumptions which can cause negative effect (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

The mitigation of negative assumptions are important for team members, as well as supervisor-employee relationships. Supervisors are responsible for a high level of the perception of virtual workers on an organization (Golden et al., 2008). For this reason, high quality superior-subordinate allow enhancements of organizational commitment, job satisfaction and work performance. It was also found that for employees who extensively work from home, job satisfaction was highly depended by the relationship they had with their supervisor (Golden et al., 2008).

2.3. Managing boundaries in HBTW

The previously discussed challenges are intertwined with boundary work. The implications of virtuality of interpersonal communication go hand in hand with the experience of working from home. The home has become the new workplace and balancing personal and professional life is an important factor for young professionals to take into consideration. Furthermore, their evenings on the couch could be interrupted with a laptop on their lap, while on the other hand, they might also do some laundry during business calls. For this reason, this section is exploring the existing theory on boundary work and the negotiation thereof.

2.3.1. Boundary work and the home office

The 'home office' is perceived differently based on the environmental and working style preferences of the worker and the work itself (Ciolfi et al., 2020). As previously mentioned, teleworkers are most likely white-collar office workers, but their task might differ between more individualistic and more team focused tasks. Moreover, workers might have personal preferences regarding how they focus best (Baker et al., 2007). Regardless of these preferences, certain indicators of HBTW seem to be generally universal. Motivation, preparation and choice of HBTW can make the difference between carefully designed to abrupt; comfortable to uncomfortable; and highly connected

to precarious infrastructure. Boundary theory provides a helpful concept to understand how workers deal with blurring boundaries. Nippert-Eng (1996) describes the concept of boundary work as "strategies, principles and practices that we use to create, maintain and modify cultural categories" (p. 564). Specifically, when it comes to the work-home boundary, the concept of boundary work contains the tactics to construct, maintain and deconstruct one's work-life boundaries by changing their environment (Jahn et al., 2016; Sayah, 2013).This study focuses on practices that are about (de-) constructing and responding to boundary work, which can be measured in thick (strong) and thin (weak) boundaries (Jahn et al., 2016) Thick boundaries entail a higher and stronger boundary between personal and professional life, while thin boundaries suggest a stronger blur of this boundary. Another way to categorize a worker's boundary work is by looking at the "integration-segmentation continuum" (Nippert-Eng, 1996). When home and work are fully integrated, their existence is practically the same and there are no boundaries that separate content or practices. At the other end, when one's home and work are completely segmented, everything belongs exclusively to home *or* work.

When applied to the home of a young professional, boundary work and engagement in boundary negotiations can describe the key challenges individuals face when they manage their work roles (e.g. as an employee), their personal roles (e.g. as a roommate or friend), and the transition between the two (Jahn et al., 2016). According to boundary theory, the greater the dissimilarity between the two identities of the roles, the harder the transition between the roles (Duxbury et al., 2017). Nippert-Eng (1996) used the term "territories of the self" to classify certain forms of one's self. She describes how people make a distinction between who they are at home and who they are at work. These practices are based on mentality as well as influenced by certain triggers such as tangible cues. Calendars are an example of this, one can have separate calendars for work and personal life. Another less tangible example of this could be conversations, one could choose to avoid work talk in the home (Nippert-Eng, 1996). An unforeseen consequence of HBTW is that workers find it hard to ensure that their hours and work intensity are visible to their team and management (Wheatley, 2015). For that reason, employees who work from home often feel pressure to prove their worth and tend to overwork (Ciolfi et al., 2020). This often happens in their private time and causes work-home boundaries to blur.

2.3.2. ICT and boundary negotiations

Boundary work theory shows that when it comes to teleworking, the boundaries between personal and professional lives are easily blurred. A factor that plays an important role in this in the contemporary study on virtual teams is ICTs. For instance, work-life boundaries seem to easily get disrupted as a result of the interrupting and distracting nature of mobile technologies (Duxbury et al., 2014). These technologies put employees in positions where they are expected to be reached instantly and to always be 'on' (Aroles et al., 2019). For instance, WhatsApp allows to communicate in real

time, on a large scale and is therefore often used for work as well as to stay socially connected (Wang et al., 2020). In this case, private and professional conversations are located in the same digital space with no tangible boundaries (Mols & Pridmore, 2020). Additionally, these digital applications hold the power to distract a person at any time, at any place, especially when they are not setting specific boundaries for themselves (Duxbury et al., 2014). In order to deal with this, scholars came up with frameworks for different tactics to increase control over these blurred boundaries. Kreiner et al. (2009) suggest tactics when it comes to communicative boundary work. They suggest that some workers seem to actively practice in setting boundary expectations while others confront violators of their boundaries. These practices can be defined as sculpting boundaries and are especially relevant when physical work is brought into private domains (Mols & Pridmore, 2020).
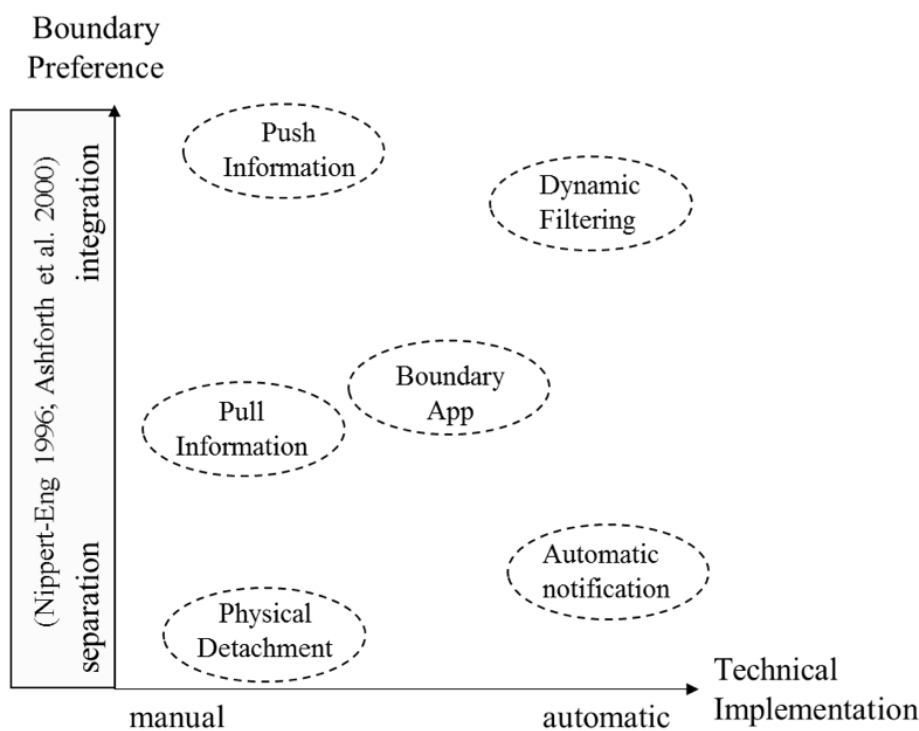

Figure 2 1 IT related boundary tactics (Jahn et al., 2016, p. 8)

The boundary tactics in figure 2 were constructed by Jahn et al. (2016) and explains how the aforementioned integration-separation continuum can be applied to IT related practices. The six practices are categorized by these boundary practices and technical implementation. The two tactics that are common for separation objectives are *physical detachment* and *automatic response*, meaning e.g. turning your phone off and sending automatic emails after working hours. The mediating tactics are *pull information* and *boundary app*, which include practices such as actively looking for new messages and using the same device for personal and professional life. The last two tactics belong to integration objectives and are *push information* and *dynamic filtering*, meaning one would receiving messages anytime (push), anywhere or one would filter based on specific individuals they would want to let through (Jahn et al., 2016). The segmentation objectives show how people seem to disconnect,

one way or the other, to set their boundaries. Mannell (2019) speaks of the acts of disconnection in their study in which they noted two key observations, that add to the model of Jahn et al (2016). The first is the wide variety of reasons *why* people seem to disconnect and the second are the disconnective practices that people seem to take. Burchell (2017) identified some of those practices such as ignoring or delaying responses and restricting certain moments for specific communication. These two practices of disconnection fit into the model presented by Jahn et al. (2016) as they seem to practice tactics on the objective of separation.

The theoretical framework given in this chapter gives a better understanding of the phenomena that are explored in this study. The rise of remote work over the past decades have changed the way of working and the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic enforced a new remote way for knowledge workers. The existing benefits of traditional remote work are becoming less applicable to contemporary HBTW in the business as usual context. Interpersonal communication plays a big role in understanding remote working experiences and virtuality is an important factor to consider when understanding these communication processes. Interpersonal trust and relationships are prominent topics in existing literature on this topic for and are additionally indicators for motivation. Lastly, this theoretical framework explored boundary theory and presents different types of boundary setting tactics. This research will identify which of the implications of HBTW are relevant in the current social context and how these are experienced by young professionals with relation to interpersonal communication.

3. METHODOLODY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This research aims to expand on existing research on remote work, virtual teams and interpersonal communication in order to better understand the current experiences of enforced remote working young professionals. In this chapter, the exploratory research design will be illustrated, including in-depth interviews, followed by the sampling and data gathering method. After this, the operationalization of the theory will be discussed as well as the method of analysis. The method of analysis for this research is constructivist grounded theory. This method focusses on how the "participants' construct meaning in relation to the area of inquiry"(Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 2).

3.1. Research Design

The research was done through an inductive, qualitative approach. A set of knowledge workers, to be specific, young professionals from different industries who started working from home as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, were selected to gather a variety of insights and perspectives. The data for this research was collected through in depth interviews, which created a framework to answer the research question and its sub questions. Previous research has focused mainly on remote work of a voluntary nature, therefore this research focusses on involuntary implementation of HBTW (Choi & Cho, 2019; Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). Due to the lack of literature in enforced remote work, this study focusses on this phenomenon through an exploratory analysis on interpersonal communication. A qualitative approach is most applicable as this research looks at how specific people are experiencing events and the meaning they give to these. At the same time, it is important to understand the experience of enforced HBTW in a larger frame, which this research established by combining a theoretical background with a diverse sample (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). An interview guide was constructed to lead the interview (see: Appendix A). Simultaneously, it left room for interviewees to initiate potential unexpected insights, and ensured flexibility for the interview (Brennen, 2012). In-depth interviews allowed meaningful new observations to be made (Babbie, 2015). These interviews allowed for interpretive analysis of the meaning behind the experiences of the interviewees (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The interviews resulted in diverse data due to the open nature of the conversations in the interview. During the process of interviewing, the researcher used a recording device to collect the data, while simultaneously taking notes. Later, the transcripts of the recordings were analyzed following constructivist grounded theory in Atlas.ti.

Grounded theory methods are systematic, yet flexible methods of collecting and analyzing data in order to construct or add to existing theory (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore grounded theory uses an inductive approach to theory. Explanations and theory derives from data, instead of testing existing hypotheses (deductive). For this research, a constructivist approach to grounded theory was taken, in order to explore the experiences from the complexity of the participant's mind (Mills et al., 2016).

Taking this constructivist approach entails that the researcher becomes part of the construction of the study, while the study itself is perceived as fluid and open-ended (Charaz, 2006). Due to the relatively small scope of this research, developing new theory is not the intention of this research. The aim of this study is to expand on existing literature on interpersonal communication and enforced HBTW for young professionals

3.2. Sampling and Data Gathering

For this research, twelve interviews were conducted (N=12) with different young professional knowledge workers who are working remotely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (see: Appendix A). These interviews were conducted in April 2021 and had an average duration of 61 minutes. The sample size of this research is twelve (N=12), in order to get a comprehensive sample of young professionals in the Netherlands who are enforced to work from home. Appendix A shows an overview of the young professionals that were included in this research. To successfully recruit this sample, a purposive sampling method was constructed according to predetermined criteria (Robinson, 2014). This was done in order to aim for a maximized variety in the sample by including respondents from different fields of occupation, which was one of these criteria. Young professional knowledge workers from a variety of fields were included to get an understanding of the phenomenon across industries. The second criteria was age, the sample is predominantly made up off people between the ages of 23 and 30, who are defined as *young* professionals. The last criteria is that these young workers were working from home full-time at the moment of the interviews, with a possible exception of one physical office day per week. All participants were gathered in the Netherlands and were all Dutch citizens. This research also took into account the gender of the participants, since the aim is to find balance in the sample when it comes to gender. In total, this research had seven participants that identified as female and five participants that identified as male. These criteria were set for the purpose of understanding and making meaning of the interpersonal communication when working remotely, in a group of varied Dutch young professionals

For these reasons this research conducted a purposive form of sampling. Gathering the sample used referral processes, like snowball sampling to recruit participants (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). This method of nonprobability sampling ensured that relevant participants were found for this specific research (Babbie, 2015). In order to recruit the correct participants for this research, the participants were contacted through mutual acquaintances. From this first group of interviewees, some participants referred other colleagues or acquaintances who were also invited to participate. The participants were contacted via email or phone to inform them about the scope of the study and request them to schedule a one-hour interview.

3.2.1. Ethical considerations

Due to the personal nature of the method for this research, it is important to take into account ethical considerations, such as the receival of informed consent and the protection of participants' identities (Brennen, 2012). Prior to conducting the interviews, participants were sent a digital form to establish consent, this was verbally obtained at the start of each interview (Appendix C). In addition, at the start of the interviews, the participants were ensured of their privacy by stating that their personal information will not be included in this research, with the exceptions of their gender, age and field of occupation. As mentioned in their consent form, each participants got the opportunity to choose a pseudonym that was used for them during this research. Upon request of several participants, the exact job and/or company of the participants are not specified to respect their privacy. For that reason, Appendix A shows an overview of all pseudonymized participants and their field of occupation. The majority of the interviews took place in an online setting. Video calls allowed for a comfortable environment when the interview could not be conducted physically and it still enabled genuine conversations (Babbie, 2015). A small minority of participants preferred in-person interviews. The interviews were conducted in Dutch, as this was the mother tongue of the participants of this research. Speaking in Dutch ensured that participants could fully express themselves without certain text getting lost in translation. Before each interview, the research aim and scope were informally discussed to make the participants feel at ease and comfortable in order for the participants to share their thought and feelings openly.

3.3. Operationalization and Interview Procedure

This research is based on qualitative, semi-structured interviews. This method offered flexibility in the process and therefore allowed the topic to be analyzed in depth (Babbie, 2015). Table 1 shows the thought process behind the operationalization and construction of the interview questions, which can all be linked back to the sub questions of this research. An interview guide was constructed with open-ended questions (see Appendix B). This was carefully designed to ensure that the focus of this research was able to be met and that the key topics were explicitly touched upon (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The questions left room for the interviewees to apply their knowledge and experience where they could. The design allowed the participants of the interviews to bring to light the personal experiences that were most important to them and left room for other topics to arise in the conversation which ensured comprehensiveness (Babbie, 2015). The interviews existed of four parts: a general introduction; perceptions on working from home; perceptions on remote collaboration and collaborative communication and lastly, engagement in boundary setting. During this conversation, follow up questions and probes were used to ensure a thorough and complete understanding of the participant's answers (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Table 1 shows an overview of how parts of the interview were constructed, based on the research question(s) and theory. The semi structured interview allowed for flexibility . During the interviews, notes were taken to grasp the complete

context of each interview. Moreover, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Due to the flexible nature of this research, the interviews were all unique in their perspectives, experiences and focus. Since three of the interviewees were working in human resources, their interviews were designed to also obtain input in observations and implications they experience in an organization from an HR perspective.

Table 1. Operationalization interview questions

Research sub-question	Sub-topic	Example questions
1. What constitutes interpersonal communication in a remote workplace? *Informed by Marlow et al. (2017) and McIntosh et al. (2008)*	Understanding of interpersonal communication	* How do you generally experience communication as part of your job and your day to day work tasks?
	Attitude towards HBTW	* What, to you, are the benefits and drawbacks from HBTW?
	Understanding the setting of HBTW-communication	* What devices and communication technologies (or platforms) do you use to communication with your colleagues?
2. How is collaboration in virtual teams experienced for enforced remote workers? *Informed by Kniffin et al. (2021), Kaduk et al. (2019) and Choi & Cho (2019)*	Internal and external collaboration	* How is it going to collaborate your colleagues from home? * Or clients/business partners
	Team work and knowledge sharing	* How are you experiencing the ability to come in contact with your coworkers?
	Trust	* A little more abstract, but do you feel like HBTW influences the trust between you and your colleagues?
3. How are young professionals incorporating boundary work in their home-based work environment and what are the implications? *Informed by Nippert-Eng (1996), Jahn et al. (2016) and Aroles et al. (2019)*	Understanding boundary work for HBTW-ing young professionals	* Can you tell me a bit more if you have certain routines around your working day?
	ICT and boundary work	* How do you disconnect/switch between personal and professional (digital) communication?

3.4. Analysis

After the data collection, the data was immediately prepared for analysis. The interviews were transcribed manually and this was done using a verbatim method (Charmaz, 2006). This entails that each interview could be analyzed word by word. Afterwards, the data was analyzed following a three-stage inductive coding procedure, via a constructive grounded theory approach. This research project makes use of theory in a constructive manner, meaning that theory informs the research questions but does not determine or steer the inductive analysis in which themes emerged in a bottom-up manner (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). More specifically, the researcher emphasizes the interrelationship of the participant and researcher and how they construct meaning to the interview (Mills et al., 2006). In the case of this research, that includes the co-creation of meaning when it comes to the interview conversations.

The data was analyzed using an analyzing software, namely Atlas.ti whereby the focus was on the words and language used and the meaning these implied (Walker & Myrick, 2006). This was done through a coding process, which allowed for the identification of differences and similarities in the data and for categorization and labeling of this information. This coding process followed the principle by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and was divided into three phases: open, axial and selective. The first step of the coding process was done to generate the initial codes. Open coding means that labels are attached to segments of data that depicts what these segments are about (Charmaz, 2006). In the first phase, these open codes were constructed line-by-line and were aimed to be provisional, comparative and grounded. Figure 3 illustrates a visualization of the coding process of the transcripts in Atlas.ti. The second part of the coding process, axial coding entailed the reviewing of the codes constructed in the first phase. At this point of the analysis, the researcher worked to understand categories in relationship to other categories and their subcategories (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Axial coding provided an overarching scheme to apply, that organizes categories by conditions, actions/interactions and consequences (Charmaz, 2006).

In the final part of the analysis, the selective coding, theory was integrated and refined. All categories were linked to a core category which represent the main phenomena of this research, in this case: interpersonal communication in an enforced HBTW environment (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In order for the theory to have an explanatory role, each category had to have conceptual depth. This was explored in this phase by revising all axial codes and conceptualizing how these were related (Charmaz, 2006). Finally, as a result of the coding, a report was produced where fragments from the

corpus were used to clarify the selective codes. The complete overview of the coding scheme can be found in Appendix D.
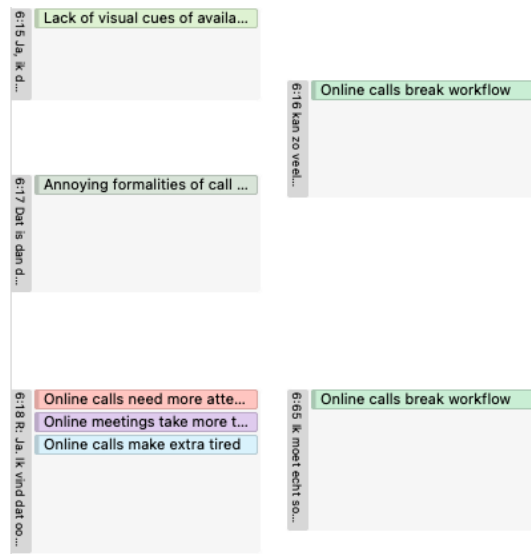

Figure 3. Visualization of open coding in Atlas.ti

3.5. Reliability and Validity

To ensure that this research adds value to the existing body of literature on interpersonal communication in an enforced HBTW-ing environment, the current research aimed to establish high validity and reliability of the data. Trustworthiness is considered highly important when reporting qualitative findings. According to Morse et al. (2012), without rigor, a research can be deemed worthless. This term, rigor, is defined as "the quality or state of being very exact, careful, or with strict precision" (Cypress, 2017, p. 254). In quantitative analyses, reliability refers to the replicability and the repeatability of a research (Drost, 2011). Cypress (2017) argues that in case of a qualitative research, reliability comes down to a thorough description of the research practices and bases it on the consistency and care of applying these methods. The reliability of this research was ensured by interviewing a varied but specific sample, that ensured representativeness of the sample of our research. In addition to this, the guide used for these interviews allowed for a consistent approach that allowed for consistent practices of the data gathering. To ensure reliability, the role of the interviewer in this research was limited, leaving room for participants to have an open attitude. During the analysis phase, the tool Atlas.ti was used, which allowed the consistency of this research to extent by providing a method of coding to that is precise and minimizes errors within the results.

The validity of the research comes down to the accuracy of the research and the research methods (Cypress, 2017). A valid research should be measuring what actually exists and in other words, measure what it is supposed to measure. Internal validity speaks of the validity of the research itself and therefore holds the question if the different data sources in this research could truly and coherently answer the research question (Drost, 2011). The current research focusses the validity

aspect of the study on trustworthiness, quality and the beforementioned rigor. For instance, validity of the research was established by taking detailed notes of visual or vocal behavior that occurred during the interviews to gather complete data from the expressions of the participants. Additionally, the validity of this research can be confirmed by the operationalization model that is suggested in table 1.

4. RESULTS

As a result of the coding process, several core concepts came to light that are presented in this results section. Guided by the selective codes established in the analysis, the sub questions of this research will be answered in relation to interpersonal communication in an enforced HBTW-environment. Table 2 provides an overview of the themes and indicates that firstly, the implications of formal virtuality in relation to interpersonal communication will be discussed. Subsequently, the focus shifts towards the second selective code that highlights young professionals' relationships and social deprivation. Finally, the increased boundary negotiations of young knowledge workers are examined. In order to provide comprehensive results, throughout this chapter observations found in this study are connected to existing literature to contextualize the themes.

Table 2. Overview selective and axial codes

Selective codes	Axial codes
Implications of formal virtuality	Formality of online communication
	Virtual meeting fatigue
	Perceived higher pressure
	Decreasing personal growth
Relationships and social deprivation	Importance of relationships and informal communication
	Changing basis of trust
	Distance from company
	Motivation comes from people around you
Increased boundary negotiations	Blurred lines from HBTW
	Implemented routines to disconnect
	Cruciality of environmental conditions
	Voluntary HBTW beneficial

4.1. Implications of formal virtuality

The first results of this research show how the participants of this study experienced the implications of formal virtuality. Communication in HBTW has turned virtual and this digital way of communicating brought some notable consequences to light. Formal virtuality entails the formal communication processes, as experienced by the interviewees, the implications of which are described here. The frequency, quality and content of the communication experienced by young professionals was something used by many to describe their experiences in a HBTW. The opinions of the participants on HBTW were divided, but many patterns were found when it came to the virtuality of the communication and how it affected the performance of them and their colleagues in their day to day job.

4.1.1. Formality of online communication

"And now every time I have to send an entire polite email to ask if we can have a call about something or schedule a meeting for it" (Henk). This section explores the formality of online communication. Henk (accounting), outlined how he and his colleagues are experiencing the process of having work-related conversations amongst each other and with their clients. There was a pattern amongst the interviewees that a lack of quick in-and-out conversations was something they experienced as highly inefficient for their work communication. Whereas, in the office one would walk to someone's desk for a quick question, colleagues and clients are now dealing with additional factors that are making this quick contact a lot more challenging.

> Yes, that bar seems to be a lot higher when you have to do everything online, because you obviously can't tell if you are interrupting someone. Because offline, so in the office, you will see that right away and you can ask: 'Hey, do you have some time?' (Paulina)

Unintentional decision making and spontaneous conversation were suggested to be very important for virtual work (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Paulina (marketing) confirms that when it comes to efficiency in formal communication, virtuality is not a beneficial factor. Similarly to the findings of Marlow (2017), communication frequency seems to be decreasing. Even though verbal communication in the form of online meetings seemed to have increased in frequency, all other unintentional communication has disappeared. The social cues and nondeliberate messages that are regularly sent and read by people in a physical workplace are not being shared, but at the same time, people are also deliberately deciding to not share certain things. Amongst the interviewees there were five that specifically addressed that for them, the bar to contact any colleague, client or supervisor is very high. One of the consequences of this is that they seem to bundle questions and comments and save these for one moment to share with the person in question. Logically, due to this lack of interaction, some information might stay behind that could have been discussed at the very moment.

Due to the time that goes by, some questions will probably not get asked anymore, but also, when it becomes time to actually contact the person in question, the formalities seem to extent to a point where one seems like they might be bothering them too much.

> So most of the time, when I actually ask a question, I read my message like 10 times [before sending it], to see if everything is clear, because you do not want to repeat your message 10 times. So I am generally more careful in communication when it comes to asking for help or when there are problem, because you just want to be directly clear. And you want someone to be able to help you right away but they can't always. Yeah, I'm not always sure when it is. (Paulina)

This strain on the communication flow is visible between co-workers, between business partners and companies, but also between managers and newly employed young professionals. As Paulina's (marketing) previous quote illustrates, when her request was potentially perceived as non-urgent or not specific enough. From the perspective of young professionals in leadership roles, multiple examples came up of interviewees that negatively associated the formalities of communication with their co-workers. These formalities resulted into subordinates asking for help less often and supervisors not being able to help due to the lack of communication to respond to. Moreover, the social formalities of asking questions, as illustrated in the following quote, was widely recognized by the group and described to feel like an obligation and was perceived as interruptive.

> If you talk to each other now [colleagues], you always have to get over that little point to ask how they are doing, you know, small talk. That obligation is really there, whereas in the office I would ask: "Hey, how did this work again?" You would not have to do that. (Roberto)

Roberto (sales) points out that they have to engage in small talk when asking questions. Small talk could be perceived as positive informal conversations, but in practice transpires to be a superficial formality that makes the communication unpractical and inefficient. Interviewees recognized that these communication moments had no room to share how they were actually doing.

4.1.2. Virtual meeting fatigue

Online meetings were turning more formal and therefore were experienced with higher amounts of perceived pressure. Waizenegger et al.'s (2019) virtual meeting fatigue was widely recognized. The feeling of receiving a spontaneous request for a video call or a phone call were perceived as highly disruptive and was negatively influencing their workflow. Moreover, the interruptive nature of mobile technologies as described by Duxbury et al. (2014) was highly recognized by the interviewees who dealt with this via different tactics. One group felt pressured to constantly pick up while others decided to not pick up. Regardless of responding, both groups experienced the interruptive nature of the spontaneous call. Romy (accounting) explains how this costs her energy:

I think it [receiving calls] also costs a lot more energy. Their picture suddenly pops up on my screen and I cannot really look away so I am just staring at my screen and it feels weird to continue my work when someone is calling. (Romy)

Many of the interviewees pointed out how virtual meetings needed higher levels of focus and concentration. Participants experienced a higher pressure on making virtual 'eye contact' in order to be perceived as engaged. Where physical meetings would allow you to look around and zone out a bit, the lack of social cues in virtual meetings heightens the pressure to overly accentuate attention and engagement. These calls were also generally perceived as more boring, as they were highly task oriented and lacked interactivity. They were perceived to be exhausting and often irrelevant for a large part of the attendees. Overall, interviewees were not happy with the current ways of video conferencing. The current ICTs, such as laptops that use Ms Teams, allow for superficially similar looking meetings, but are perceived as highly bothersome for those whose days were largely consisting of these meetings.

Without live interaction it is harder to respond to someone, you can anticipate to [virtually] raise your hand, see, it is never good to interrupt someone during a meeting, but it is still different. In MS Teams someone is sometimes just making a plea for five minutes and then it is impossible to say something. Maybe it is our structure, that is possible. (Nadine)

4.1.3. Perceived higher pressure

The previously mentioned formalities seemed to be disruption and annoyance to many participants when it came to communication, but other factors seemed to be of higher prevalence when it comes to increased pressure. Overall, many interviewees felt that the pressure of their job increased in relation to their pre-HBTW working life. Now that your coworkers know that you are most likely behind your computer all day, many feel the pressure to be always 'on'.

Sometimes I can get a message from a manager who says: 'Hey, maybe it is time for you to close your laptop.' The funny thing is that the same manager, one day later, will throw another mountain of work on your plate that you cannot finish without overworking. (Gerrit)

Even though managers seem to realize the problems surrounding this pressure, they sometimes still put a lot on the plate of these young professionals. Ciolfi et al. (2020) expected this observation and confirm that young professionals who work from home can tend to feel this pressure and as a result overwork. Interestingly enough, once this pressure is deflated the home-based young professionals seem to be acting completely opposite, as will be elaborated on in chapter 4.2.4. One could argue that depending on the job, this pressure might be higher or lower and non-influenced by HBTW. Yet, an important concept that came to light in this research was that for many young professionals, their work expectations and planning stayed the same or increased, while the time needed for work increased as well. Henk (accounting) described this situation in his team, while others

also explained how their commercial targets were staying the same, while their targets were much harder to reach.

> In the end things just have to get done and you are productive if those things are getting done but if these things are not going efficiently due to working from home, yes, you will not be productive … and our assignment just generally exceeds the time allocated and there is not more time created in the planning. (Henk)

This pressure was also translated in the form of guilt. Interviewees were found to experience a lot of guilt when it came to decreased productivity. On the one hand, some argued that moments of being non-productive were similar to the moments they had when they were working at the office. On the other hand, others such as Romy (accounting) states that they sometimes felt as if there were 'scamming" their employer. Romy (accounting) stated that this guilt increased her work pressure with regards to, that she would be afraid if people asked her what she did that day, as she sometimes would not have a lot to update her employer or colleagues on. Hence, this pressure that young professionals feel is also due to a change in the way they are being guided and supervised in a virtual workplace. Keeping in mind that the interviewees all work in different levels of organizations, there seemed to be an overall understanding of the negative effects of virtual supervision. In this case, both on the giving and receiving ends of the supervision. Interviewees seemed to be highly against close supervision. Joyce (HR) recognized this behavior amongst different teams within the organization, where also once again, the increased work pressure is demonstrated.

> I remember in the beginning we had check in moments and some people expect you to send an email at the beginning of the day with what you plan to do that day and an email at the end of the day with a report of what you did and did not do … You can see that this causes a lot of resistance, also because they feel like: "Listen, I am doing my job and it only costs me more extra work to do that. Just let me do what I am doing." (Joyce)

4.1.4. Decline in personal growth

These struggles in virtual supervision and guidance were something that translated into worries amongst new employees and HR managers in this study. Especially when it came to people who started working in new organizations, current employees and HR managers observed that these new workers experienced a bad landing. It was found that due to the difficulty to supervise and guide new workers, they tend to get assigned easier and less challenging work and are receiving less critical feedback. This was perceived as highly problematic by Michelle (HR) who expressed the importance of a physical orientation in the initial stages of a new employee's career.

> I have to say, from the three people who we hired in this period who really worked from home, one of the realized after a few weeks already: this is not going to work. The others also

did not land very well. I am assuming that these will not be working here for a very, ehm, for the long term. (Michelle)

Michelle (HR) recognized the dissatisfaction amongst the new employees but this was also something that was expressed by other interviewees who experienced this themselves. This dissatisfaction was a result of a decline in learning opportunities. These learning opportunities were divided into two types of learning: formal and informal. The decrease of formal learning opportunities come as a result of the decrease in formal learning facilitation, decrease in task responsibility and hindrance of virtual knowledge sharing. E-mentoring as described by De Janasz et al. (2008) was therefore deemed to be unsuccessful in most cases. Some recognized that the extra time it takes to get settled in with the company made them lose a lot of valuable time growing within their profession. Nadine (marketing) is in charge of the internship portfolio at the company she works for and she experienced how she has a hard time giving the interns the learning opportunity they signed up for.

Normally I would take my interns to my meetings to just look around and then, because you are at the office, you hear a few things here and there and you will get briefed. This whole part has to be done actively now and that is very exhausting. (Nadine)

This learning process in the form of informally overhearing conversations was something described by a large group of the participants. This went hand-in-hand with the lack of work talk at the coffee machine, spontaneous brainstorming with a drink and not being able to learn from colleagues around you. These informal conversations were all thought to be of important when it came to relationship building, but just as well contributed to the quality of their work. These informal moments were stressed to be moments where spontaneous decisions are made and important knowledge is shared subconsciously. Joris (consultancy) in particular, stressed that to him the drinks were moments where he and his colleagues would discuss important job related matters that were not assigned to a specific meeting. Ford et al. (2017) mentioned how informal spontaneous and informal contact moments were useful to foster familiarity and relationship building within teams. This finding can be extended with the formal value that these informal moments bring to organizations and team outcomes. Unintentional decision-making and spontaneous conversation there are experienced and confirmed to be of great importance for team engagement (Morrison & Smith, 2020).

The virtuality of interpersonal communication has several levels of implications and throughout the sample of this research opinions were varied. Nonetheless, certain patterns such as problems with exhaustive online communication formalities, higher perceived pressure and concern about the personal development of (fellow) young professionals was widely recognized.

4.2. Relationship and social deprivation

Social relationships have shown to impact motivation in a HBTW-environment. Furthermore, social relationships seemed to show a significant impact on the work environment and experience in

the day to day work life of a young professional. This selective code 'relationship and social deprivation' discusses the impact of HBTW on the establishment and maintenance of relationships that young professionals experience and the implications of this process.

4.2.1. Importance of relationships and informal communication

New young workers at a company experience a variety of challenges when they start working at a new organization. While getting used to the tasks and life of a working adult, relationship building within a company is highly important as it lays a foundation for feeling connected and engaged with an organization and its employees. Other interviewees confirmed that, some stressed how much comfort they get from their colleagues, while others mention how much work value they get out of strong work relationships. In this study, the depth of these relationships varied based on the social preferences of the interviewees. Michelle (HR) and Nadine (marketing) preferred to keep their friendships completely separated from their work, while another recognized that for some of their colleagues, their work is their social life. Subsequently, the depth of these relationships were also influencing the impact on the relationships. According to Paulina (marketing), relationships with people you work close with were easy to maintain. Henk (accounting) mentioned that strong relationships got even stronger, due to the benefits they experienced from ICTs. Nevertheless, next to Paulina (marketing) and Henk (accounting), the interviewees recognized that existing superficial relationships with distant colleagues were disappearing and chats you would have at the office were not happening online. Similarly, building new relationships was found to be equally challenging and without any physical meetings did not develop into deeper relationships. Interestingly enough, when it came to client relationships, the existing close relationships also seemed to increase among the interviewees.

> And I think that with the clients that I knew before the pandemic, that we maybe got a little more personal, because you know each other, you have a basis. So whenever we talk via teams, it is a lot easier to ask: 'Oh, how is it going at home?' And yeah, I think you actually have a closer bond. (Anne)

Thus, relationships were also expressed to be very important when it comes to client relationships. The interviewees who were occupied in consultancy, accountancy and sales experienced increased trouble in building formal and informal relationships with their clients. In addition, they experienced a decrease in their perceived job performance and an increase in pressure. These relationships were expressed to be established mainly through the conversations before, after and in between meetings. Marlow et al.'s (2017) communication content is most important here, as the modes of communication are influencing the content, which influence future communication processes. Especially for the participants in sales, it was found to be hard to meet the same expectations from the employer and client, even though the means to establish these expectations

decreased. Logically, the relationships between the manager and employee were also found to be very important.

4.2.2.   Changing basis of trust

The data from the interviews confirmed that social relationships and communication are great indicators for mutual understanding. Moreover, when it comes to trust within an organization these social indicators are of great importance. Marlow et al. (2017) showed how trust is an integral part of the communication process. Working together, seeing each other, hanging out with each other, responding quicky and doing quick checkups were all indicators for to the trust felt between young professionals and those they worked with. This trust could also be felt, based on the nonverbal communication people read from one another. With the social relationships moving online, the basis and expression of trust are affected due to a lack of social input. Three of the respondents explicitly mentioned that the trust they feel within their company is now purely based on the output and quality of work that they deliver. The expression of this trust translated in higher supervision when the quality was low and more independence when the quality was high. This result confirms the theory of Merriman et al. (2008) that stressed the importance cognitive trust in virtual relationships. In that sense, the basis of trust and the expression thereof are very much changed when teams move online. Besides that, many felt that once they had a physical meeting with one of their coworkers, the trust between them had (temporarily) increased. This also entails how the affective trust, which is based on emotional connection, is increasingly important once physical communication is reoccurring.

> I also notice that people behave differently in video calls, I have that less, but one of my colleagues always had a very defensive attitude. I once went on a walk with him in a park and we talked about our private lives for an hour and I really see that it made our work relationship better. There is a lot less suspicion and a lot more trust. This really made it a lot better. (Bart)

It is clear from this example from Bart (consulting) that he experienced in an increase in trust after meeting up with his colleagues. Out of the four measures of trust: ability, benevolence, integrity and congruence, this quote already shows that the perceived ability was increased due to physical bonding (Choi & Cho, 2019).

Another example of increasing trust between two parties came from Roberto (sales) who mentioned that even simply knowing whether the other person is wearing fun pants would increase their perceived trust relationship. Other interviewees, for example Anne (sales), mentioned that informal communication in her job is key to building trust. Being able to interpret the status of a personal connection with someone is extremely important to establish higher perceived integrity and benevolence between companies and clients. Moreover, as you can see in the following quote from Anne (sales), the congruence (repeat explanation) is just as well affected with clients when you cannot see each other.

I see that whenever I have contact with people that I never met before in real life, that sometimes those people more easily contact me right away, whenever I make a little mistake, if something is not good enough or if they didn't get a reply back fast enough. (Anne)

The analysis of perceived trust seemed to show that on the four measures as discussed by Choi & Cho (2019), each of the four seem to be affected by virtual communication amongst young professionals in an enforced remote workplace.

4.2.3. Distance from the company

Goal congruence as a measurement of trust can also be investigated to understand the depth of organization commitment. With respect to the experiences within the company internally, young professionals are experience more distance from the company and the company culture. According to Joris (consultancy), colleagues who had a similar passion for the company were also perceived to share the same vision and therefore had a high perceived congruence. However, interviewees like Bart (consultancy), whose "identification with the company is zero", experiences that this low organizational identification goes paired with low goal congruence as well. In Bart's (consultancy) case, the factors of feeling distant from the company are related to an absence of shared vision, but for many others, identification was missing due to the absence of physical encounters.

You know, what you see, there are a lot of positions that are extremely dependent of the colleagues with whom they work with. And if you do not know anyone and you are also not inclined to make the first step, you will most likely not feel connected with the company. You might be working for the company, but you would have no idea with who, merely by name. (Michelle)

Some interviewees who started working from home when they started their job experience very low levels of company identification and sometimes barely knew anyone within the company, as described by Michelle (HR). Even across different departments, young professionals seem to prefer a certain amount of social interaction to feel engaged and committed to a company. Two interviewees explicitly mentioned that they missed informally hearing about updates from different departments, as they felt like currently they have no idea what is going on. On certain days Paulina (marketing) would physically overhear her colleagues talking about their work and engage in with them. Now, when these people update her on their work activities, she finds it harder to understand what they mean and as a results feels more distanced from them and the projects they work on. Paulina (marketing) also mentioned that the energy from an office influenced her to get into a better workflow. An interesting point that three of the interviews pointed out, is the possibility of a virtual office. Even though they expressed that within their companies, the opinions were divided, for those who did appreciate it, it was extremely beneficial.

How those afternoon sessions work? Well, mostly I check if people are interested in these session, then I will schedule one between 1PM and 3PM. But then you will see that everyone is hanging out in that call until 5PM or after they stop working, because once I did not return and I actually got a message with: "Aren't you returning?" So I thought, shit, but I only scheduled it up until 3PM right? (Romy)

As you can see, many employees are enjoying the benefits of this open hangout, where people are quietly working with their microphones off, but can just turn them on if they want to ask a question or make a comment. The general consensus of these calls were also that this type of interaction was allowed and therefore a certain type of office simulation was accomplished. This idea of creating a virtual office on demand seems to be something which could combat the lack of social facilitation, which will be further explored in the next section of these results.

4.2.4. Motivation comes from people around you

I remember thinking, for what and for who am I even doing this? Because I wasn't hearing anything. I thought: "If I hand in poop, you won't look at it anyway." So my motivation really decreased due to that, those [engagement from coworkers] are things that I really appreciate. (Romy)

It became evident that workers are motivated through the people around them and showing from the quote by Romy (accounting), a certain feeling of social control would benefit their motivation. The social facilitation effects were previously addressed in literature by Morrison-Smith & Ruiz (2020). This motivational aspect of the presence of others was found in many of the interviews. The majority mentioned that the presence of others was especially important to do their best for certain projects. Firstly, the general motivation to do their work was impacted for some by the lack of social presence and interaction in their home office. To many, the presence of others who are working and talking about the work was a motivational factor and would give them a boost to continue working. The second motivational factor regards the motivation to work on specific project. This would decrease if they felt less involved with the project or if they had the idea that no one really knew how hard they were working on it. This could partly be explained by the absence of recognition as well as the absence of identification with the company, team or project. These relationships were also mentioned to be one of the key motivators to actually go to the office and do your work in general. Moreover, a majority of the interviewees noticed that they, or people around them, realized they did not like their job or their field of work. The lack of social interaction and relationships was therefore a point of realization where they reflected on their ambitions. Likewise, making the job more enjoyable and challenging for ambitious young professionals was suggested to be a highly important request in order to continue to happily stay at the company.

When it comes to relationships and social deprivation, it is clear that young professionals are in need of better resources for (informal) communication and relationship building. Informal communication and relationships were proven to be highly important for the mental wellbeing as well as the productivity of these young professionals. The basis of trust is changing due to a change in input and trust within virtual teams is becoming more and more output based. At the same time, young professionals are feeling distant from the company and have a harder time identifying with the company they work for and the people. Lastly, social facilitation in a physical office proved to be key when it comes to motivation.

4.3. Increased boundary negotiations

The final selective code of this study is the increased boundary negotiations. After a year of HBTW, young professionals mention they have gone through different phases. From days of excitement and curiosity for a new way of work to getting stuck in a rut. During these phases, different individuals implemented different kinds of strategies to increase their boundary negotiations. One the one hand, young professionals have a feeling of entrapment in a constant home office. On the other hand, many interviewees experienced the potential benefits of HBTW under the right circumstances and most importantly, on their own demand. This chapter explores how the boundaries were blurred, new routines to disconnect from work were implanted and the conditions that are crucial to benefit from HBTW.

4.3.1. Blurred lines from HBTW

As previously mentioned, young professionals experience a blurring of the boundary between work and personal life. Some young professionals explained that this phenomenon was already existing pre-HBTW, but all interviewees agreed that this boundary has become smaller since working from home. This blurred boundary can be found in the smallest things, such as the fact that some explain they talk more about their work with their friends than they did before. Moreover, this is also found to be more outstanding when it comes to the point that they find it harder to relax at home. This is connected to the factor that is that due to fact that one is working, living and often times sleeping in their office, they constantly feel as if they are in their workplace. The theory of the territories of the self would suggest that in this case, the person who one is at work and the person that one is in their personal life are more and more becoming the same person (Nippert-Eng, 1996). As a result of this, it is logical that one starts to talk more about their work life with their personal friends, as these two lives are so intertwined. This is especially problematic on the long term for young professionals who do not have the choice to separate their work and private lives with different spaces, since they might be living with flat mates.

I work and sleep in about 16 square meters, so without painting a too depressing image… I wake up, I look at my workplace and I basically see the spot where I will be spending the rest of my day. (Gerrit)

Moreover, young professionals explained how they are struggling with stopping with their work activities during a regular workday. This includes breaks and finalizing the workday. A common reason, as explained by multiple participants, is that their laptop is always open, or at least in sight. The bar to open a laptop seemed to be higher once they closed the laptop, physically left their office and came home. In their home office, they stay within their office and do not follow the same end of day ritual as in their organization's office and therefor experience a lower threshold to continue working. Similarly, due to the absence of such a routine, young professionals find it hard to establish a clear end of their workday and catch themselves working until late at night, despite their preference not to. Certain environmental factors are making it hard for young professionals to disengage from their professional life. One of these factors is that many of them work sleep and live in one and the same room. For this reason, they do not have a chance to physically disengage from either their personal or professional lives, consequently blurring the boundary between the two inevitably. The following part of the results section will discuss how young professionals are (trying to) disengage and negotiate thicker boundaries.

4.3.2. Implemented routines to disconnect

As a result of these blurred boundaries some of the interviewees made adaptions to their work environment. For most of the participants, a mix of integration and separation tactics were implemented, where none of the participants where exclusively choosing one over the other (Jahn et al., 2016). When it comes to their laptop, they try to ensure that their (work)computer is out of sight or in a different room. However, another group of the respondents leaves it on the table and describe to not experience negative effects on work-life boundary as a result of this tangible reminder. The previous section on blurred boundaries confirm the definition of boundary theory from Duxbury et al. (2014) where they clarify how the transition between two roles is greater when the two roles are so different. This can be explained by the struggle with disengaging psychologically as seen by the interviewees. Especially since the personal and private lives are becoming more and more similar, the real transition between the two lives is becoming harder. Many of the interviewees explain that they implemented certain routines or conscious behavior to disengage from their working lives. These boundaries seem to conform most with the manual tactic on the scale by Jahn et al. (2016). Most interviewees implemented strategies manually and rarely initiated any automatic tactics. Some of the respondents found this in sports, while others found it in simply moving out of the house for groceries at the same time daily. The most occurring strategy amongst the interviewees was the tendency to move outside of their house to find relaxation and disconnect from their working day. Similarly, these

young professionals also mentioned that their home was now a place where they are hardly able to disconnect since they are constantly reminded of their work. The quote by Anne (sales) shows how she implemented a routine to disconnect and also hints to an implementation of behavior that imitates going to the office and returning home.

> When my day is over at 5 o'clock, then I really put my laptop and everything away. Then I go outside to go for a walk or to do groceries or get someone. Either way, I make sure that I am away for a moment and come back again. (Anne)

4.3.3. Cruciality of environmental conditions

When discussing HBTW with the interviewees, many had something to say about the conditions in which they performed their work activities. Overall, it was found that in order for HBTW to be implemented efficiently, there are certain environmental conditions that need to be optimal. These conditions included spatial implications, which for some concerned their furniture and for others their house and their roommates. The majority of the interviewees were sharing their house, most often with flat mates. This environmental aspect of sharing a house, leads to hindrance such as noise complaints and lack of space to do your work.

> It is quite hard to work from home there, with your laptop on your bed or I don't know. We have more girls in the house that are studying or working. So everyone kind of needs their space, so you cannot really move to the living room. Especially with meetings, yeah, if I were to call all day in the living room, that would be very annoying also for my flat mates, so it was quite a challenge. (Nadine)

For this reason, many young professionals are working from their bedroom, in which space is a big issue. Most employers in this research facilitated physical necessities such as extra screens or chairs. Importantly though, these were given only temporarily, but were also often declined due to a lack of space. Often times, young professionals do not have the space to create a functional work station, especially when they work from their bedroom. Those who did have the ability to work in the living room still experienced spatial problems. These consisted of the fact that the small houses did not offer a special place for a desk or chair. Moreover, the dilemma that was brought up with computer screens was also a problem for many of the interviewees. It is functional for their work, but hard to put away and therefore a constant reminder of their work activities in their personal space. Those who did not work from their bedroom all worked from their dining table. In the following quote, Joris (consultancy) draws a clear picture on how many young professionals struggle between furnishing their home as a house or as a workplace.

> My laptop is on my dining table, so when I am not working I take it off and it turns into a dining table. What is annoying is that I don't really have a comfortable chair or something like that, it is something that I can still arrange, but some of my colleagues already got a chair. So

it would be something which I would have to actively pursue. But then it is: where am I going to put this thing? I live in a tiny apartment, where would I put a giant chair? That also doesn't sound ideal. (Joris)

Another important condition is the dependence on digital technology including mobile devices, good internet connection and high functioning enterprise social media. Firstly, the importance of having separate mobile phones was recognized amongst the interviewees. For Nadine (marketing) a work phone was never facilitated. Consequently she experienced a lot of intrusion in her personal life, as she did not get the option to turn off her work phone. She specifically mentioned that was something that would make her HBTW experience much better for her. Most seemed to agree that they prefer to have a phone for work, which they can put away whenever they are not working. The interruptive nature of mobile phones can therefore be combatted by separating two devices for personal and professional life (Duxbury et al., 2014). At the same time, Michelle (HR) mentioned that good internet connection is also key when it comes to performing your job from home, but also for communicating with others. As virtual interaction already limits the amount of nonverbal communication, bad internet connection seemed to worsen this situation and increase confusion and miscommunication. High functioning enterprise social media was something that could then again increase the communication flow, allowing interactive chat functions and other knowledge sharing opportunities when implemented correctly. Gerrit (consultancy) said this as his closing statement, he firmly believed that companies and young professionals could not have benefitted as much from HBTW without ICTs such as teams. It was also seen that those who used less developed internal communication had less interaction and lower levels of knowledge sharing practices than the others.

Teams is by far the best communication technology. There are so many things integrated in there. A lot of things that we and other companies do, happens within Microsoft applications. So a platform that can integrate all of that and that can also be used as a communication tool is worth a lot. Your calendar is in there, everything is connected, it really is beyond value. I think the pandemic should not have happened 10 years earlier, because our ways of communicating would be so limited, so let's say we were right on time. I think that is it. The technology is important and decisive to be productive from a distance. (Gerrit)

Lastly, an important factor that came out of these results is that the work activities of individuals is an important factor when determining the benefits of HBTW. People who are less dependent on team activities and work more individualistic are enjoying the benefits substantially more. Correspondingly, workers who depend more on others, teamwork and ICTs are experiencing the disadvantages of HBTW more which impact the overall experience.

4.3.4. Voluntary HBTW beneficial

The last part of these results show the findings that young professionals, surprisingly, are relatively optimistic towards the future of HBTW. Voluntary HBTW, including better facilitation of tools to work from home, were perceived to be desired. Most interviewees were ready to move back to the physical office, however, they all mentioned that they could benefit from one, up to three days of HBTW. Overall, many acknowledges that the home office adds great value when they can enjoy the benefit of less interruptions and ease to focus without social distractions. Additionally, components such as travel time to, from and in between work were also noted to not be missed for reason such as more time for work, but also environmental reasons. Bart (consultancy) was generally not a fan of HBTW but mentioned that he is happy with the flexibility it fosters to allow employees to work on other projects at the same time, or relax a bit more when possible. Others, like Anita (marketing) recognized that the shift to virtual work also allowed a wider range of learning opportunities, such as online seminars. The quality of the seminars were not perceived as great, but offer opportunities to tackle beforementioned issues regarding personal development when revised. The benefits that were described that came from HBTW were mainly related to their productivity and were strengthened when they autonomously chose for this option. This was also one of the first 'rules' for most of the young professionals, which is that HBTW should be choice. The second condition to make HBTW beneficial is to ensure that the environmental conditions of the home office are up to appropriate standards. If your home situation does not allow you to enjoy the benefits of HBTW, your employer should actively facilitate resources to enhance your physical or technological environments.

The lines between personal and professional life are blurring due to the involuntary adaption of HBTW. In order to combat this, young professionals are implementing strategies to maintain a healthy balance. Initiative to help combat this from the employer is lacking and more guidance is desired. The environmental conditions of young professionals are less than optimal, spatial problems are creating an increased environmental disadvantage for the teleworking young professional. All in all, HBTW is showing potential, even for young professionals, to be positively implemented in the future. However, the currents implications that HBTW seems to have on the experiences of young professionals need to be addressed and tackled for HBTW to work on the long term.

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this concluding chapter the research question and sub questions will be answered through a summary of the findings. After this the scientific and societal implications will be reflected on and managerial suggestions are made. Lastly, insights are provided into the limitations of this study, and finally this paper will be concluded with suggestions for future research.

The virtuality of an enforced HBTW environment proves to be challenging for Dutch young professionals. Concludingly, these insights provide the means to answer the research question that was presented in this research: How do Dutch young professionals experience interpersonal communication in an enforced remote workplace? Following the constructivist grounded theory approach, a total of three selective codes were constructed. First, the formality of informal communication proved its' relevance in the experience of young professionals. The way communication changes in virtual teams goes beyond the means and implementation of ICTs. This study illustrates how the key indicators of virtual communication: communication frequency, communication quality and communication content, influence the work activities, commitment and experience of young professionals (Marlow et al., 2017). Consequently this answers the first sub questions of the research, what constitutes interpersonal communication in a remote workplace. The second sub question questioned how collaboration is experienced, this study illustrates how the importance of relationships and social contact within an organization are amplified when employees work in a virtual office. Building relationships is important for many young professionals to build trust, improve their work and collaboration through quality relationships and experience the benefits of social facilitation (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

The last sub question explored the incorporation and implications of boundary work. The boundaries between personal and professional life were hard to uphold in the early phases of HBTW. Over the year that these young professionals have been working from home they have started to install routines and other implementations to enhance their HBTW-ing experience. Worries about mental and physical health were combatted by implementing stricter breaks and routines to leave the house or work out. Boundaries that were blurred within their physical space were reviewed and either accepted or strongly reinstalled. The young professionals who valued the boundaries more found ways to work in different environments outside of their personal space. Generally, the interviewees came to a general consensus regarding one topic: HBTW can be highly beneficial under certain conditions. HBTW should be a choice made together with the employee and companies should consider and facilitate the resources to make it environmentally possible. The benefits of focus and flexibility seemed not to weigh enough for the young professionals to disregards the absence of social connection.

5.1. Scientific Implications

The current research explored existing theories in relation to an underexplored phenomenon: enforced HBTW. Previous scholars studied telework and boundary theory but were primarily focused on geographically dispersed teams or voluntarily remote work by privileged employees. This research adds to the existing theory on HBTW and gives a basis for future research to build on. The findings of the experiences of young professionals in an enforced remote workplace allow future scholars to further explore this research topic. When it comes to relationships, Merriman et al. (2008) stressed the value of managerial support and its impact on work attitudes. The findings in this study confirm this theory but add to the two groups of workers they describe, i.e. the regular employee and the free agent (Merriman et al., 2008), a third group existing of enforced HBTW-ing employees. Important to consider about this group is the high chance of non-appropriate environmental situations for HBTW, the lack of autonomy in the HBTW-ing situation and the dynamic of working in a business as usual context while work practices have completely changed. ICTs allowed organizations and young professionals to experience new work and relationships far beyond spatiality and locations and established new ways of work. At the same time, these technologies negatively affected the interpersonal connections when it comes to the quality of this new way of work and establishing and maintaining relationships.

5.2. Societal and Managerial Implications

The COVID-19 crisis gave a boost to companies to explore and invest in new ways of work. The results of this study can inform society of the potential effects on the experiences of young professionals. Young professionals are the future of the labor market and worth investing in. Individually, young professionals can do a lot to enhance their HBTW-ing experience. Nonetheless, when it comes to HBTW as the new way of work, companies should take steps and ensure a healthy work environment. The research showed that making HBTW function well is especially tricky when collaboration is required. It is important to ensure that the talent of these young professionals does not get lost due to spatial or geographical implications. Consistency and longevity run like a thread through the managerial implications. The temporary one-off solutions such as incidental informal meetings and random personal and professional checkups seem to not be received positively. Young professionals need structure to develop, while fostering their talent, growth and mental health. Therefore, three suggestions are formulated on the basis of the research findings.

Invest in development. When it comes to work involvement and work attitude, many suggestions could be given to encourage positive behavior by tackling problems like low company identification, decline in personal development, and lacking managerial support. Young professionals seem to be in need of clear expectations. These expectations include a need for organized personal development

activities and conventional supporting practices that are currently lacking such as regular feedback, meetings and training. These practices can be in the form of structured mentorships programs. More importantly, companies need to ensure that these activities are continuous and lasting events. Relationships build over time and positive outcomes need time to develop, careful design and communication of such programs and activities fosters the positive outcomes.

Invest in teambuilding. The results of this research highlight the importance of building relationships in a workplace. This is not only important for the wellbeing of your employees, but also for their attitude towards the company. Strong relationships within teams seem to go paired with more positive attitudes towards the job and the company. Moreover, weak to no relationships within the organization lead to decreased motivation, trust and incentive to go the extra mile. Employees, specifically young professionals, need to be facilitated with ways to build these relationships and maintain them while being physically away from each other. This research suggests that leaders of virtual teams should be actively involved in the facilitation of online and offline relationship building. Leaders are encourage to emphasize focus on team members with a low to moderate relationship or communication frequency, as these interpersonal relations suffer most as a result of HBTW.

Invest in ICTs. Enterprise social networks such as Slack, but especially MS Teams, were mentioned to be of extreme importance when it came to effective HBTW. At the same time, more creative ICTs such as MURAL (i.e. a digital workplace for visual collaboration), were perceived as very encouraging for collaboration and communication. Similarly to investing in new ways of working and meeting in a physical office, the usage of ICTs should be revised and invested in to ensure the best experience for young workers. For instance, when it comes to brainstorming, creativity, interactivity and intimacy of ICT seem to be key when it comes to well-functioning collaborative tools. However, for general work communication, consistency, usability and diverse functionality of ICTs seemed to be pivotal. Concludingly, the 'always on' technologies blur the lines between the professional and personal lives of the young professionals. It is important for organizations to be consistent in how they account for all these factors in order to move towards a healthy HBTW-ing environment. In doing so, organizations may be rewarded with a clearer idea regarding how to foster both effective communication and performance in highly virtual teams.

5.3. Limitations and future research

With the aim to explore how young professionals in an enforced remote HBTW-ing environment experience interpersonal relationships, this research addressed a variety of perspectives and implications. However, this research is subject to certain limitations. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the interpretive nature of the constructivist grounded theory approach that was used to analyze the data. During this process, the researcher is actively involved in the meaning making of the data and for that reason the results are subject to the interpretation of the researcher (Walker &

Myrick, 2006). Furthermore, the limited sample size of the current data set is also a primary limitation. In order to comprehensively study the research topic, a relatively small data set was purposefully sampled. The sample was made out of knowledge workers in four fields of occupation. Even though it was aspired to represent each group extensively, there was only opportunity to interview three employees from the same sector. In addition, the group of HR workers that were interviewed to generate additional knowledgeable insights entailed a limited scope of perspectives. Nonetheless, this research leaves room for future exploration of each field of occupation, or a larger scope research with a more extensive sample.

In addition, this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though the aim of this research was to explore enforced HBTW, it is important to acknowledge the nature of the working conditions during the time of HBTW for these young professionals. While designing the interview guide and constructing the interviews, the researcher aimed to primarily focus on HBTW and avoid data that was overly focused on the pandemic. Nevertheless, it is not possible to isolate the implications of HBTW in this study from the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the perceptions of the interviewees. However, it is important to consider that the prevalent aspect of this study is the status of an *enforced* HBTW-ing experience. This non-voluntary nature of HBTW is less likely to happen beyond pandemics or natural disasters such as described by Donnelly and Proctor-Thomson in 2015. Concludingly, this limitation implies that this research is highly prevalent for the contemporary socio-economic situation, but could be less applicable after the pandemic.

In order to extend beyond this study on interpersonal communication and HBTW, recommendations for future research are suggested. Firstly, with regards to the last limitation, similar studies can be conducted in future phases of HBTW, as this current way of work is predicted to stay around. The limitation of the COVID-19 pandemic can consequently be mitigated and a more precise focus of HBTW can be established. Secondly, considering that this research has focused solely on the experiences of young professionals, future research could expand the study by focusing on employee's perceptions of HBTW through interviews or focus groups with either knowledge workers in different age ranges or knowledge workers with different home arrangements such as young families, to obtain clearer insights on the implications of enforced HBTW. This in-depth analysis opens the way for future research to explore a wide variety of organizational and employee experiences across diverse fields, demographics, personal circumstances and disaster events. Lastly, a reoccurring topic throughout this study is the need for social facilitation to get motivated but also to foster good mental health and productivity. The beforementioned virtually simulated office space can be researched to explore possibilities of creating an augmented office reality, where employees can benefit from social facilitation effects from their home office. HBTW has become a common mode of work and is not going away any time soon. An improved understanding of the implications and possibilities of this mode of work will allow organizations to better cope with this situation in the future and for young

professionals to be prepared for the future work. As the workforce and leaders of the future, investing in young professionals should be prioritized.

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Appendix A: Description of the sample

Young professionals

Pseudonym	Identify as	Age	Field of occupation
Henk	Male	26	Accounting
Romy	Female	27	Accounting
Anita	Female	24	Marketing
Nadine	Female	25	Marketing
Paulina	Female	26	Marketing
Joyce	Female	28	HR
Michelle	Female	28	HR
Joris	Male	26	Consulting/HR
Gerrit	Male	26	Consulting
Bart	Male	23	Consulting
Anne	Female	23	Sales
Roberto	Male	29	Sales

Appendix B: Interview Guide

<u>Prior to interview: Practical information</u>
Thank you very much for participating in this research. My name is Imke Greven and currently I am studying a Master in Media and Business at Erasmus University. I am conducting a research for my Master's thesis on interpersonal communication in a home-based work environment, since I see that all around me young professionals like you have a lot to say about this. Thank you so much for taking time to sit with me today. Before we start, I have to go over some of the formalities with you. Prior to this interview I sent you a consent form which explains this study and your rights as a participant. To officially check, did you read the form thoroughly and do you agree with everything that was stated here? … Then more importantly, do you agree that this interview will be recorded, to be created in a transcript and after that deleted? This transcript will only be used for academic purposes. Then lastly, as I will note down your business area and age, I a want to ask you if you have a preferred pseudonym that I can use for this research?

Then now we will start with the interview, it will take about 45 to 60 minutes. I have prepared some questions, but if you want to talk about certain topics that you find relevant, please feel free to add this if you think this is valuable to understand your experience. Note that you do not have to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable with and you can withdraw from this interview at any moment. If you want to take a break at any point, this is fine as well. Do you have any questions? Then I will start the interview.

<u>Part 1: General introduction</u>
- Can you introduce yourself by telling me your name, age; where you work and what your profession is?
- When did you start working there?
- How do you like working there?
- What would you say a general working week looks like in your life?

<u>Part 2: Perceptions on working from home</u>
- Can you tell me a bit how you started working from home?
- How did/were you prepare to start working from home?
  - Does your company do anything special to facilitate your HBTW?
  - How is it now?
- How do you and your colleagues/supervisors look at your current way of work?

<u>Part 3: Experiences on remote collaboration and communication</u>
- How is it going to work with your colleagues from home? (or clients)
- How is your technology usage, to collaborate with your colleagues and superiors, interact with clients?
  - What devices and platforms do you use to communicate?
- How is HbTW influencing your ability to reach out to a colleague?
- How are you experiencing trust with colleagues?
  - Do you feel like you are trusted with your responsibilities? Is this different for you now than in a physical office?
- How do you feel general team work is going for you now in a virtual team?
  - What benefits and what disadvantages do you experience?
- When you meet with your teams, what do you generally talk about?
- (How) do you maintain social relationships with your colleagues?

- Do you and your coworkers engage in any informal communication moments?

Part 3.1: Supervisors
- How do you feel the communication with your managers is going?
    - (If needed to be clarified talk about: feedback, guidance and if they know what's going on)
- Are there certain expectations from you regarding availability?
    - How are you experiencing these expectations and following up to these? Especially when it comes to availability to communicate with your supervisor/colleagues?
    - Are there any expectations you find when working with external parties (other companies or clients?)

Part 4: Engagement boundary setting
- Where in your house do you currently do you professional work?
- Do you live with any flat mates?
    - How is that going for you?
- Can you tell me a bit more if you have certain routines around your working day?
- What devices do you use to work?
    - Are these the same ones you use for personal life?
- How do you disconnect/switch between personal and professional (digital) communication?
- Did you make any conscious decision to make your work life or communication while working from home more comfortable or better for you?
- Where do you spend your breaks? What do you usually do?
- Do you do certain things to end your working day?

Concluding questions
- How do see the future of working from home?
- If you could ask your manager for something to make your communication/collaboration with your colleagues easier, what would that be or what needs to be fixed?

Part 4: Concluding the interview
Thank participant and ask if they have anything they still want to be share, or if they feel like there is a question they expected which I did not ask.

Appendix C: Consent Form

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:
Imke Greven, Achterharingvliet 18b Rotterdam, 447884ig@student.eur.nl, +316 822 376 84.

DESCRIPTION
You are invited to participate in a research about interpersonal communication in an enforced remote working environment. The purpose of the study is to understand how young professionals experience interpersonal communication while they have to work from home.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. The questions of the study will be related to interpersonal communication, virtual teams and lastly how you experience boundaries between personal and professional life and communication.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will record the interview.
You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS
A. As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether or not I should use any identifying information in the study. I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by allowing you to choose a pseudonym at the beginning of the interview and not disclosing the name of the company you work at.
B. I am aware that the possibility of identifying the people who participate in this study may involve risks for your work relationships. For that reason I will not keep any information that may lead to the identification of those involved in the study. I will only pseudonyms to identify participants.
I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT
Your participation in this study will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS
There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS
If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS
If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish- Anouk Mols: mols@eshcc.eur.nl

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM
In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, we prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient for signing this consent form.

Secondly, your oral consent is sufficient for giving consent to be audiotaped during the interviews.

Appendix D: Coding scheme

Open codes	Axial code	Selective code
No quick interaction, overcrowded non-interactive meetings, questions saved and clustered, no spontaneity, online meetings overly task oriented, lack of direct message, online checkups overly formal, communication practical and important, annoying formalities.	Formality of online communication	**Implications of formal virtuality**
Workflow break, Constant (video)calls, Decline hesitance, Boring meetings, Tired due to online calls, online calls need more attention, Irrelevant videocalls	Virtual meeting fatigue	
Expected to be always on, Negative towards close digital supervision, Feeling interrupted, Open agendas, Higher pressure	Perceived higher pressure	
Bad landing new employees, Bar for spontaneous call too high, Decline of critical feedback, Difficult to formally learn, Difficult to informally learn, Dissatisfaction employer resources, Guidance disturbed, High bar to ask for help, Losing time, Monotony, Less challenges for new employees, No COVID briefing for new employees, Strain on personal development	Decreasing personal growth	

		Relationships and social deprivation
Missing social aspect of breaks, Client relationship decline, Physical necessity certain topics, Some conversations need to be physical, Team feeling with previous colleagues, Relationships influence trust, Relationship as key factor in work, More inclined to help people if you know them, Colleagues as important factor, Repeated informal meetings turn formal, Reflecting on job (task wise) due to higher focus on work and lower on relationships, Online new relationship require more effort, Strong (work) relations get stronger, Harder to be proactive with clients when only meeting online, High work value during talks at coffee machine / drinks, Intercultural communication struggle	Importance of relationships and informal communication	
Quality of work over hours, Trust based on output, Doubts if colleagues are putting in the work, Physical meeting increases trust, Lack of nonverbal communication online, Social context, Harder to leave an impression	Changing basis of trust	
Loss of overview of other's work, Wish for company transparency, Never seen office, Lack of shared team vision, No identification with company, Need for more personal checkups, New people know no one, No overview of turnover, Lose contact with distant colleagues	Distance from company	
Desire for social control, Lack of visual cues of availability, Positive about online office simulation, Not motivated to go the extra mile, Energy of an office, Social isolation, Physical meeting boosts motivation, Cannot motivate each other online, Motivation dependent on teamwork, Missing informal contact	Motivation comes from people around you	
Blurry end of day, Boundary between work and private life blurs, Checking	Blurred lines from HBTW	

		Increased boundary negotiations
work in bed, Checking work on phone, Client gets private number, Combining private and professional agenda, Constantly in workplace, Deliberate boundary blur, Dual sim, Laptop always open, Talking more with friends about work, Work in evenings and weekend, no coming home, Harder to relax at home		
Email notifications off, Morning run, Alcoholic drink to not go back to work, Setting times, Created workstation, Deliberate end of week, Disconnect through sports, Disconnect outside, Importance taking breaks, Importance to leave house, Not picking up phone, Removing work computer from table, Separate phones, wearing regular clothes, Active meeting dismissal	Implemented routines to disconnect	
High need for social interaction, Missing physical movement, Clean house, Concerned for posture, No desk, Importance work phone, No work objects due to space limitations, No time for lunch, Noise problems, From bed to desk, Desk in bedroom, Unhealthy food choices, workstation in the way, Bother by flat mates, Bad connection	Cruciality of environmental conditions	
HBTW to be a choice, Less interruptions at home, Time for other projects, Relaxing during work hours, Flexibility, Travel time is work time, work with friends, Easier to focus, Excellent ICT is key for HBTW, Social offices as distraction, HBTW beneficial for a few days, More online seminars, Coffee breaks used as moment for chores, Online meetings more efficient	Voluntary HBTW beneficial	