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Beginning your Career during the COVID-19 Pandemic - Potential Impacts on Newcomers

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ABSTRACT

The following master's thesis examines the potential impacts on career beginners during the COVID-19 pandemic and how their newcomer socialisation may be impacted in such unprecedented times, by drawing on qualitative research. Within the framework of this research, newcomer socialisation refers to the process of successfully integrating and adjusting a newcomer into their workplace. This thesis finds evidence for newcomer socialisation being influenced due to the associated burdens of working remotely, resulting in the majority of newcomers not yet feeling entirely integrated in the organisations.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; newcomer socialisation; young newcomers; proactive newcomer behaviour; remote job entry; challenges; expectations; Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic by the World Health Organisation in March 2020, hundreds of millions of individuals have faced lockdowns alongside numerous other disruptions (WHO, 2020). While still in the throes of such disruption, it is undoubtedly a complex and problematic task for scholars to make definitive predictions about the future. One outcome, however, that can arguably be considered as definite is that remote work has become a new normal, with many businesses having shifted to remote work. In the EU alone, it is estimated that 40% of people are currently working remotely full time (European Commission, 2020). During the past months, countless young adults have launched their career remotely. Needless to say, the experience of young workers starting their career has been redefined in 2020. Newcomers are new employees within an organisation, and their socialisation has been defined as "the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organisational role" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). Newcomer socialisation is already stressful, even before factoring in the implications of the pandemic, with the challenges that are faced through the transition into a new workplace and organisational setting (Reichers, 1987). This year, the socialisation of young newcomers is expected to be extraordinary as employees are confronted with a novel situation; with the bigger picture of challenges still in the dark, this thesis hopes to act as a small light to highlight key points in such a complex discussion. It does not aim to conduct a comparative analysis of before or during the pandemic, but rather seeks to explore the current situation and to understand how young newcomers feel. To be able to draw conclusions from the current situation, important characteristics for newcomers to experience a successful organisational socialisation, including proactive behaviours of newcomers, are identified in the literature review and serve as a theoretical framework for the empirical analysis (Grant & Ashford, 2008). With young newcomers being the potential future leaders of our world tomorrow, this topic is of high relevance. A Google Keyword Search analysis demonstrates the relevance of this topic as

revealed by the number of people worldwide trying to find answers for their situation (See Appendix I).

Against this background, an attempt is made to answer the following main research question:

How is the newcomer socialisation process of recent graduates starting their career within a company impacted by the remote working arrangements resulting from COVID-19?

Additionally, the following sub-questions are elaborated: How are proactive newcomer behaviours hindered due to remote work? What challenges do newcomers face? What are newcomers' expectations of the future work environment?

This will be achieved through the critical discussion of theories surrounding newcomer socialisation and recently debated issues related to the impact of COVID-19 on the successful integration of newcomers in an organisational setting. My findings will be analysed against qualitative methodological data collected from interviews with young newcomers in a virtual workplace setting. This amalgamation of research will allow me to highlight some of the barriers that young newcomers now face in a virtual organisational setting. Furthermore, it will open a discussion that not only reflects the present implications of COVID-19 in the workplace, but also highlights the principal impacts created for young newcomers that may be overlooked in the haze and confusion of the post-pandemic future.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

For the purpose of investigating the perspective of young newcomers in light of the pandemic, it is crucial to review what newcomer socialisation is and summarise topic-relevant findings of newcomers. Both seminal works on socialisation preceding into the 1990s (Feldman, 1981; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977) and recent studies (Bauer et al. 2007, Saks & Gruman 2018) agree that for good performance to occur, newcomers must be familiarised with the requirements of the job and their role in the organisation. This period is known as socialisation. The key bodies

of the socialisation model are the newcomers and the organisation (See Appendix II). Whereas organisational socialisation emphasises tactics to facilitate the learning of newcomers, newcomer socialisation discusses the personal process of establishing oneself to become a valid member of an organisation (Hurst, Kammeyer-Mueller & Livingstone, 2012, p.5). Newcomer socialisation is considered to be "at the heart of any organisational socialisation model" and is deeply anchored within the concept of organisational socialisation (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2005, p.117). The main points of socialisation are presented in the following discussions.

1.1 Organisational Socialisation

Organisational socialisation is a dynamic process, which includes the acquisition of knowledge about the new workplace and the culture of the organisation in order for a newcomer to become a successful participant within the organisation (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Organisational socialisation deals with the process of employees making the transition from being an organisational outsider to an organisational insider (Bauer et al., 2007).

1.2 Newcomer Socialisation

Newcomers desire to learn how an organisation functions, which requires the newcomer to learn about its politics, values, resource networks and values (Bauer et al., 1998; Louis, 1990). When entering a new organisation, newcomers experience a sense of excitement and anxiety, resulting from the uncertainty they are facing (Edmondson, 2004). To reduce this uncertainty, newcomers seek to "increase the predictability of interactions between themselves and others within the organisation" (Bauer et al., 2007). Past scholars have identified newcomer experiences associated with socialisation outcomes only a month after entry up to twelve months (Ashford & Black, 1996). The initial approach to newcomer socialisation regarded the newcomer as a passive or reactive agent and announced the organisation as a major driver for socialisation (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). However, more modern approaches have further

recognised the newcomer as an active agent in the process (Morrison, 1993). Since the 1990s, the development in socialisation literature has widely accepted the role of the newcomer as actively involved in their own socialisation process through a set of behaviours. This thesis regards the newcomer as an active agent, or also described in literature as a proactive agent (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998, p. 174). The proactive behaviour of newcomers can be described as "anticipatory action that employees take to impact themselves and/or their environments" (Grant & Ashford, 2008). In other words, newcomers strive to feel comfortable in a new setting, requiring them to be proactive (Wanberg, 2012, p. 69). One of the most classic studies by Ashford & Black offers a number of proactive behaviours for newcomers. These will be presented in more detail in the following sub-chapter 1.3. Four behaviours have been studied in depth and are particularly investigated in this thesis: information seeking, seeking feedback, relationship building and positive framing.

1.3 The four Proactive Behaviours of Newcomers

i. Newcomers seek information. Information seeking in general leads to the newcomer gaining more control in the new workplace with more information (Berger, 1979). The information obtained has been categorised into information of either technical or normative nature (Morrison, 1993). **Technical information** involves which skills and job-related knowledge the employee needs to acquire, especially organisation-specific information to perform tasks well (Dubinsky, Howell, Ingram & Bellenger, 1986; Comer, 1991). This information is acquired by asking co-workers, supervisors, mentors or by reading written material. **Normative information** is information which seeks to understand the values, norms and the overall culture of a company. It includes the social expectations and expected behaviours within the working environment (Morrison, 1993). Normative information is primarily sought through observation and relates to an evaluative standard (Ashford, 1986).

ii. Newcomers seek feedback. Feedback is defined as information given by an agent about one's performance or understanding. It provides knowledge which newcomers can learn from, improving and developing their performance (Hattie, 2007). Feedback is granted in both a formal and in an informal manner. **Formal feedback** includes formally scheduled meetings, employee surveys and performance conversations, whilst **informal feedback** is given through casual conversations which occur on a continuous basis. Consequently, work surroundings have been considered as informal informative environments (Hanser & Muchinsky, 1978).

iii. Newcomers are expected to use positive framing. In practical terms, positive framing is a cognitive self-management mechanism to alter the understanding of a new situation (Plous, 1993). In stressful situations, such as a new job entry, positive framing is often used and is correlated to job satisfaction, as happenings and surroundings are interpreted in an optimistic way (Gruman et al., 2006).

iv. Newcomers try to build relationships. Here, the internal initiation of social interactions with organisational members is disputed. The social exchange with new colleagues is key to assimilating into a new workplace as it facilitates the newcomers' socialisation process (Lapointe et al., 2014). The types of relationships are categorised into **strong** and **weak ties** for a clearer distinction in the empirical part. Strong ties give emotional and social support, increasing the well-being of employees, while weak ties are important for career development and networking (Schaefer, 1981). Relationship building has been connected to social integration, person organisation fit, job satisfaction, job performance and social integration (Gruman et al., 2006; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000).

1.4 Young newcomers

The core focus of this thesis pivots around the exploration of young newcomers, who differ from other newcomers, as they do not enter the organisation armed with professional experience due to being at the beginning of their career. Each significant role change involves a

socialisation process into a new setting and a new role, with the process being more intense if the old and new environments are considerably different (Lois, 1980). For young newcomers, the socialisation process is an initial experience after education or previous internships and thus entails contrasting environments. Current research and historical debates have spent little time focusing on newcomer socialisation and potential differences for this age group. Nevertheless, a negative correlation was established between age and information seeking, as young newcomers have more social costs when exposing inexperience (Finkelstein, 2003). In addition, research indicates that young newcomers are more motivated to make new friendships with colleagues compared to older newcomers (Phillips, Barrett & Rush, 1978). Surely, in this context, it should be noted that younger workers often move to a new city for their first job, not knowing too many people, making work a main channel for establishing friendships. Moreover, a study revealed younger workers to be more oriented towards the organisation, as they require more guidance at work due to the lack of experience (Kramer, 1993).

1.5 In the context of COVID-19

Before COVID-19, remote work was usually associated with flexible work arrangements for employees. However, these prepared arrangements were made out of convenience and consensus. The pandemic caused an exceptional situation where work shifted to remote set-ups out of necessity and not comfort. Past research on newcomers teleworking has been disregarded in this thesis due to its focus on teleworking that was not determined by the same cause, making it consequently difficult to compare. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, some research has been conducted which gives insights into how remote work is for employees. A study from the software firm Smartsheet found that young employees especially are struggling during the pandemic; with 82% of younger workers feeling less connected in remote work, reporting a non-thriving environment and issues in communication (BBC, 2020). HR managers, including Dan Schwabel have warned that the soft skills of young workers will decrease as interpersonal

contact is missing (BBC, 2020). With the shift to a digitalised working environment, video conferencing became a major tool of communication, resulting in the emergence of a new phenomenon called *Zoom fatigue*. It describes the emotional and physical drain resulting from enhanced cognitive efforts as more attention is needed to compensate for the reduced non-verbal communication, as those signals are often lost in digital translation (Fosslien & Duffy, 2020). Employees who actively use their imagination are reported to experience lower levels of exhaustion and depressive symptoms (Bakker, 2020). A recent survey concluded the major struggle for employees during remote work in the pandemic to be the disability to unplug during free time (Routley, 2020). To illustrate this finding, the National Bureau of Economic Research detected the average workday of Europeans and Americans to be lengthened by 48.5 minutes (DeFilippis, 2020). Consequences of the inability to disconnect during the pandemic include increased stress, decreased mental health, lesser productivity and lower motivation (Giurge & Bohns, 2020; Gorlick, 2020; Van Buggenhout et al., 2020). Organisations are being advised to set particular goals and bring more role clarity for their employees, which refers to employees knowing what they are expected to do, in order to reduce uncertainty (Kniffin, 2020). Furthermore, resilience in leadership will play a major role and gain more significance in the future when navigating change (Cunha, 2020). Moreover, COVID-19 is projected to transform the way we work, with a survey estimating a considerable long-term increase in remote work after the pandemic (Gartner, 2020). Noteworthy suggestions include the proposed 3-2-2 workweek from Harvard Professor Whillians, with three days in the office, two days at home and a two-day weekend (Business Insider, 2020). With these studies revealing possible impacts on employees and work environments, it is nevertheless fair to argue that the effects of remote working on the integration of young newcomers within a company, who are starting their career during the pandemic, have not yet been examined in depth. This thesis hopes to lessen at least a bit the still under-researched gap within such academic debates and recent concepts.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

The following chapter gives an overview of the methodology used to answer the research questions as thoroughly as possible by elaborating on research method and design (2.1), participants (2.2) and data analysis (2.3).

2.1 Research Method and Design

The goal of this study is to explore both the feelings of young employees and their experiences when starting a new job remotely during the pandemic. In order to achieve this, interviews with young newcomers were conducted, constituting a qualitative methodology. A qualitative approach was chosen as the special characteristic of qualitative research is its openness to the research field. Thus, gaps in knowledge can be closed, and new knowledge can be developed (Kuckartz et al. 2008). Furthermore, qualitative research is characterised by its view from the inside world. This means that with the help of this research, one looks into the lifeworld and describes and interprets reality from there, according to Flick et al. (2000). Potential disadvantages of the chosen method are addressed in the section 4.3.

2.2 Participants and Interview

Eighteen young newcomers from Europe were interviewed, with the individuals primarily approached within the author's personal network. Beyond, chain-referral sampling led to existing study subjects recruiting more required subjects. All subjects participated voluntarily, with personal information treated confidentially. Before the interview, each respondent was informed about the purpose of the study. The interviewees are young newcomers, who have graduated from university and are at the beginning of their career. They have been working in the organisation for up to 9 months, with most only having work experience from previous internships. Their ages range from 23 to 26 years. Following Krueger's *purposeful* sampling protocol (1994), the respondents are thus a relatively *homogenous group of people with something in common that is relevant to the topic of the study*. Refer to Appendix III for further

details of the participants, including their age, gender, thesis ID, the company they work for and the interview duration. The interview was a conversation to find out about the major pain points of the experience of young newcomers and how young newcomers managed to implement proactive behaviours remotely. At the beginning of the data gathering process, the number of interviews was not priorly fixed and cases were added until a theoretical data saturation point was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 1998, Corbin & Strauss, 2014). With the 12th interview constituting 80% of the categories and the 15th interview covering 90%, three supplementary interviews were conducted and at the 18th interview, no new themes were generated. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were chosen as a method as there is no list of questions set in stone. This left room for interviewees to feel comfortable to reflect on the personal experience and discover their feelings, perceptions and struggles. The interviews were carried out via telephone, recorded with a digital voice recorder and then fully transcribed. An interview guide was developed with open-ended questions to partly structure the interview. The guide was not standardised: the order of the questions could be changed in the course of the interview and could vary from interview to interview (Atteslander 2008: 125ff.). Consistent with the goal of the research to address a new phenomenon (i.e. young newcomers during the pandemic COVID-19), several questions were formulated in general terms, eg. *"How was it to start work remotely?"*, *"What were the main challenges?"* *"What are your expectations for the future?"*. Various questions were formalised to direct the interview towards the goal to assess the newcomer socialisation behaviour, e.g. *"What do you do if you have questions?"*, *"Would you regard the situation as an opportunity or a source of frustration?"*, *"Are you able to network?"*. The semi-structured approach also allowed for the interviewer to react spontaneously to statements of the interviewees, to formulate new questions during the interview and to include in it the knowledge acquired during the interview to interact with the interviewees. See Appendix IV for the interview guide.

2.3 Data analysis

For the data analysis of the interviews, an inductive approach was used following the grounded theory approach, known as the Gioia method. It offers a “systematic approach to new concept development and grounded theory articulation” (Gioia et al., 2012). The research began with “an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data” and literature partly guides the data collection in a dynamic way. Therefore, using the grounded theory is appropriate (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998). At the same time, an interpretative lens is applied, as an attempt is made to explore a new phenomenon, i.e. newcomer socialisation during the pandemic (Corley & Gioia, 2011). To enable a reduction in the data amount, each interview is coded in an open scheme, with the data examined line for line. It refers to the initial interpretative process by which raw research data is systematically analysed and categorised (Berg & Milmeister, 2008: paragraphs 26-44). To reduce the amount of data, all relevant statements in each interview were assigned codes. The codes are defined as "labels or marks that connect the units of meaning with the descriptive or infectious information collected during the study". (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 56) and their development is fundamental to the analysis of data. In the first step, the codes assigned were sorted into categories followed by a thematic criterion trying to retain the language of respondents (first-order indicators). In the second step, similarities and differences were searched along categories, with similar categories being grouped together iteratively into high-ordered themes (second-order themes). As a means to interchange between data and the relevant literature, this step was iteratively used to relate to the theoretical framework “newcomer socialisation” (Gioia et al., 2013, Eisenhardt, 1989). In this way, the researcher created a “theoretical sensitivity” beforehand, intending to increase awareness to detect the subtleties and meaning of the data (Glaser, 1978). In the final step, the second-order themes were transformed into aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013, p.20). To support the interpretation of the qualitative data, the author used the NVivo text analysis software, in which marked paragraphs or fragments are sorted and stored in the appropriate codes. Through this

process, twenty-two first-order indicators were classified into nine second-order themes, as the visualisation of Figure 1 shows. For representative data regarding each coding, refer to Appendix V. The main findings were ultimately summarised and presented to the interviewees via a Google Docs Document encouraging participants to reflect on the proposed theoretical assumptions. This is known as participant checking, especially useful as the interviews were conducted via telephone, where investigative errors may have occurred due to the non-visibility of facial expressions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236). The input helped to improve the accuracy of the results. For the document and comments, refer to Appendix VII.

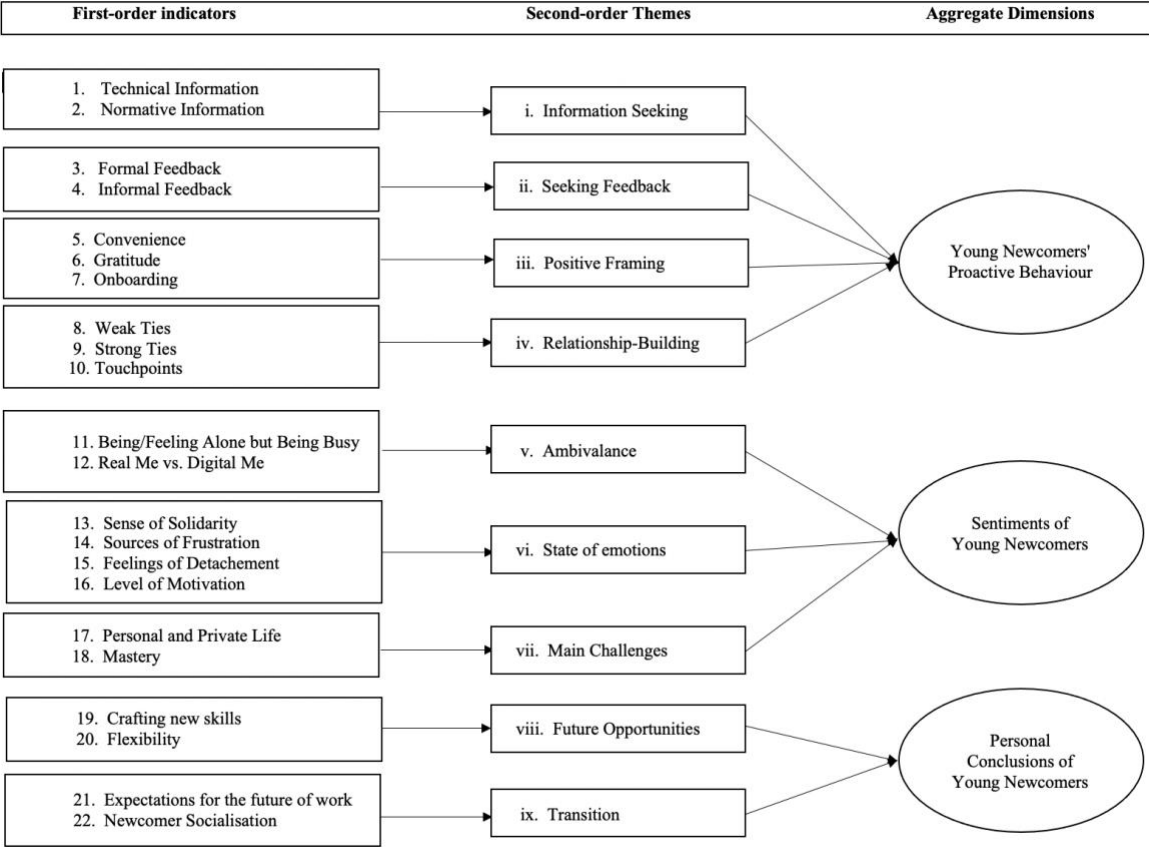


Figure 1: The final coding structure

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

The findings will be presented on the basis of Figure 1, in the following order: Young Newcomer Proactive Behaviours (3.1), Young Newcomer Sentiments (3.2) and Young Newcomer Conclusions (3.3). It is important to note that not all findings are presented as it would go beyond the scope of this thesis, consequently only the major findings relatable to the objective to answer the research question are discussed. Accordingly, the following chapter presents these findings in more detail, illustrating them with examples of the collected data. Statements and quotes are sourced to the participants ID's. Refer to Appendix VIII for interview transcripts.

3.1 Young newcomer behaviours

To begin with, the newcomer behaviours are assessed and divided into information seeking, seeking feedback, positive framing and relationship building. These four second-ordered themes are anchored in chapter 1.3, where concepts were outlined in more detail.

i. Information Seeking: Technical information was conveyed mainly during “Onboarding” of the young newcomers, which is the process in which a new employee is introduced to the new job to help get acquainted with basic company procedures and the most relevant information. Respondents' Onboarding process was characterised by one-on-one meetings and many calls. However, seeking for technical information in daily work was raised as a key difficulty for the majority of young newcomers due to several reasons. Participants explained how they tried to find information by themselves before reaching out to colleagues, as they were conscious of appearing “annoying” (9) or “taking up too much of the colleagues' time” (13). Various respondents also felt embarrassed to ask too many questions (4). with one respondent affirming how he goes "the extra mile" (10) to not have to ask someone. One newcomer reported not approaching her supervisors after seeing their full calendars/diaries and consequently thinking that her issue is of less importance than those of her busy superiors (16). Although it is unfair

to argue that these findings are predominantly caused by the impacts of the circumstances caused by the pandemic, it is not incorrect to state that these difficulties may be exacerbated. For instance, one participant reported perceiving a digital threshold before contacting someone, especially when sitting at home alone (7). One participant also confessed to often disregarding questions, as picking up the phone and calling someone is a burden for her (18). Considering this, many participants described how it is usually not only difficult to know who is responsible for what, therefore causing a chain of communication to get to the needed person of contact, but also to decide how to contact the person, as there are several opportunities of communication, e.g. Slack, Zoom, Phone, Mail, Text etc. In addition, constructing the question in a clear and efficient written or verbal manner to ensure mutual understanding was described as being time-consuming. Moreover, several participants struggled with arranging meetings to receive the required information. This sometimes resulted in task delays and misalignments (4). The collected data is also powerful evidence towards challenges to acquire normative information. Although the experience and interpretation of culture by individuals is inevitably subjective, considering their own beliefs and also their perspective on the organisation, some relevant findings are presented. As normative information is primarily obtained through observation, it became apparent how the judgemental observation process has changed due to virtuality. As the individual one is communicating with is only seen from the shoulders upwards, body language and gestures are not completely visible and hard to interpret. Furthermore, facial expressions are harder to read over Online-Video-Calls. Other normative information includes company values. Several respondents observe these through the behaviours of colleagues, with participant 8 stating how leadership skills of the company are witnessed through the actions of his bosses, but only in "mild portions" from remote. Likewise, several participants sensed companies' value transmissions through the employees, as one respondent observes:

" I am still able to understand the culture, because it's just not by talking, it's how people in general have excused themselves for being late for a meeting and have tried to get in touch with other people [...] this reflects the company culture of transparency and openness and the mindset of employees, which came across digitally as well." (2)

Nevertheless, participants also criticised how culture is solely grasped in pieces when working remotely, as the physical workplace as the backbone of culture is intangible. Especially when comparing their own experiences to former experiences of acquaintances, young newcomers felt rather disappointed as the following quote implies:

“When you enter a new position, you don't know the workplace and the culture. All you know is what people have told you, but you have to form an opinion yourself. It was difficult at the beginning, as the culture is not the same if it's only from remote.” (10)

ii. Seeking Feedback: Data on the formal feedback was divided among participants: whilst some participants reported a strong formal feedback culture, others report to have been “floating in the air” (1) until feedback was received, outlining a poor feedback culture. The data supports formal feedback to not be affected by remote work and its situational factors, but extensively dependent on the feedback culture of the company. Participants also mentioned actively seeking feedback, as it is necessary to know if company expectations have been met.

Implicit feedback has been reportedly received through the style of writing or the response time of colleagues (6,7), which can be considered as informal feedback in a wider sense but entailing barriers similar to receiving normative information.

iii. Positive Framing: Young newcomers making use of positive framing became clear in several ways. Foremost, young newcomers showed gratitude about even having a job and being healthy in these complicated times, as this example manifests:

“Corona is a challenge we have to deal with [...] I am very lucky to have a job and not be afraid about how to make a living. And I'm healthy. I don't have any psychological

problems that a lot of people are probably fighting with right now. I'm just grateful and want to make the best out of this.” (6)

Furthermore, five participants acknowledged and appreciated the effort their companies made to make them feel welcome and the situation as usual as possible. Moreover, participants see the advantages and convenience factors of working at home, including the time spared on traveling to the office and not being exposed to the risk of being infected by COVID-19. Many newcomers argued the point that their productivity levels were raised due to working in the comfort of their home. One statement was particularly interesting, highlighting how the demands of starting a job virtually were less exhausting, due to there being less vivid expressions and more time to process everything. She reports this as follows:

“I must say, I remember when I started past internships, it was just a nightmare to be in the office and I already felt exhausted after three hours, but the day is eight hours long. And then you run into another colleague where you have to be nice, smile and charming. At home you can take your time, sleep for half an hour, be in your private zone for a moment and be ready again. That was really positive, as it is less overwhelming.” (1)

iv. Relationship-Building: In times of social distancing this behaviour is evidently highly influenced. A key similarity found in the data is that participants intuitively know it would have been different and presumably faster for connections to be established, if in the office. All participants managed to build relationships with colleagues, but rather on a professional basis. This is highlighted by young newcomers saying how they rarely speak to colleagues about private topics. Participants attribute this to diverse reasons including the goal to finish work as soon as possible and thus shortening calls to work matters, having a fear of switching the topic in calls as it may be interpreted as "random" (2). Another respondent feels restricted, as chats and calls are recorded by the company, thus not wanting to get too personal or appear silly with certain questions (6). Respondents also reported simply not having the foundation to start private conversations. Young newcomers explained that the lack of conversational topics

derives from the lack of social and external events taking place within the COVID-19 situation. One participant suspects the COVID-19 topic to be deliberately avoided, as people are growing increasingly tired with this burning issue (2). Additionally, social knowledge of colleagues such as how many children a superior has, are often forgotten before follow-up questions can be asked in subsequent digital encounters (1). However, despite such challenges, young newcomers are able to create a sense of attachment. Mentorship programmes seem to have a positive impact on newcomers, as it gives them guidance and support to fall back on. Newcomers further discussed how there is an emphasis on teams and the closest colleagues, indicating various strong professional ties, with one participant even referring to her team as family (11). This, however, does not come without a parallel challenge, with several young newcomers stating they have struggled to see the broader perspective and intercorrelations to other departments. To one, it seemed as if she was working for a start-up and not a big company:

“Although it's a huge company, you're only in contact with your own small team and it feels as if working in a start-up because. [...] And it fits into a bigger picture of a bigger project, but you don't get a sense of how far-reaching it is.” (11)

This supports the major findings of this thesis, that due to the lack of intra-personal networking and socialising with an array of colleagues, young newcomers are consequently unable to establish a collection of weak ties within the workforce. One participant further expresses the concern of not receiving job offers and promotions as easily from different departments, as her level of reference is lower in the company (1). Nevertheless, many respondents are exposed to virtual networking events from their companies. But even though they have the opportunity, participants seem to lack motivation to attend, as they consider online events to be fairly awkward. The reasons mentioned for this are that events feel forced and are exhausting, with a few speaking and the rest listening. Participants claim it does not feel normal and if many people are online, it is difficult to speak without interrupting other colleagues, not reaching the point

of conversations being on a deeper level. Even if networking events are one-on-one, respondents seem rather unimpressed, as one participant recalls:

“... it is a programme where you get allocated to another colleague every week for a coffee catch-up. But it's kind of awkward, because you're supposed to talk for exactly 30 minutes, [...] it's not natural to sit in front of your laptop with a coffee mug and be forced to speak to the other person for 30 minutes.” (14)

Notwithstanding, a few participants also experienced bonding moments. One respondent, who started working with many other young newcomers in her age group, managed to build numerous friendships and strong ties, successfully building and maintaining a social relationship with her colleagues outside of work hours (3).

3.2 Young newcomer sentiments

As the thesis seeks to find out how young newcomers go through starting their job remotely and during the pandemic, the main and most engaging perceptions are discussed in the following. To start with, young newcomers give the impression of going through stages of ambivalence. This becomes apparent, when young newcomers compare the real version of themselves with the digital version of themselves, as revealed in the following quotes:

“I also know I have a different appearance in real life. I am quite tall, so people notice when I walk into a room, which is not the case during online meetings, which feels strange sometimes, to just not have this effect.” (2)

“During virtual introductions, I sometimes felt like a fraud, as there is no real person that you're introducing yourself to, it is just technology. [...] In person, I can smile and be nice.” (1)

This almost looks as though there is an inferiority complex between the digital and real self-image. One participant also elaborated how it was difficult for her to gain a "digital voice", although she is an outgoing person (13). This hints how challenging it may be for introverts, who may be forgotten in daily work along the way. Another contradictory observance is how

young newcomers sometimes feel alone at home, or even lonely, but at the same time there is a whole different world inside the computer. Participants seem to switch between these two different worlds and the contrasting emotions these worlds may entail, as this quote illustrates:

“Well, sometimes I feel weirdly lonely. Because you never really are, because you're just lonely in a physical sense because there's no one around you. But there's so much happening on chat and emails [...] and although it is just business, it replaces not being alone somehow.” (11)

On top of that, another respondent remarks how genuinely special it actually is to work closely with colleagues but at the same time not knowing them personally (12).

Negative feelings of young newcomers which seem to be triggered in the context of the pandemic were found to be frustration and detachment. Frustration was experienced by some young newcomers in the beginning, as it took time to adjust to the unusual situation. This also resonates with the level of motivation expressed by some participants, which was occasionally low, when tasks were not properly defined or understood yet, as this passage of the respondent working at Procter & Gamble underlines:

“...no one in my team was online, there was no one to ask me what I'm doing or how far I am with a certain task [...] those days went by with me asking at the end, what have I actually done today? I felt so unaccomplished [...] If there are not many tasks, the time goes by very slowly, that definitely lowered my motivation.” (6)

Furthermore, young newcomers were disconcerted by the fact that they did not know their fellow workers personally. One respondent even went as far as feeling detached at times, as there is little connection between colleagues, with one informant expressing:

“It is such an extraordinary situation. Sometimes, I feel a bit detached, it's easier to distance myself, as I do not know the people in person.” (1)

However, the majority of participants noted, how despite such difficulties faced newcomers experienced unique moments implying comradeship and a sense of solidarity.

As a newcomer who started work in April 2020 noted:

“First, there are a lot of uncertainties, the numbers are no good, people are worried about the job position [...] but when the worst first months were behind us, people realised it was the new normal and that we had to accept it, we had to live with it until further notice. So, what we started doing was to have a digital beer every Thursday night.” (10)

When young newcomers were asked what the main challenge is, the most frequent answer with eight consents was the indistinct barriers between private and professional life, with the two often lacking clear definition and boundaries and consequently being intertwined. Young newcomers proclaim to occasionally work after hours, as the end of the working day is not as clear cut as compared to leaving the office. Young newcomers also reported feeling guilty when, for example, watching a movie after working hours (5), as the space reminded them of work and their duties. Other main challenges were getting information and getting to know colleagues, which have both been formerly discussed in 3.1.

3.3 Conclusions of young newcomers

Within the reflections of the young newcomers, newly acquired skills during remote working were frequently mentioned. Although young newcomers may not have been given the opportunity to develop particular skills such as presentational confidence, they have been provided with the platform to develop unique and specific skills such as communication techniques. These include adopting precision when bringing a message across via mail or on the phone and preparing in-depth for meetings, e.g. to know what is needed when key stakeholders are present. Additionally, remote work scenarios have placed more focus on the demand for responsibility, due to the simple fact that one has to be more self-aware in order to successfully approach tasks. One participant mentioned his increased level of critical thinking (12), and due to the volatile nature of the workplace, traits such as agility and flexibility were mentioned within participant commentary as imperative skills to develop, highlighting the point that young newcomers manage to see future opportunities in their situations.

Additionally, all interviewed young newcomers expect to go to the office a few days a week and work from home the rest of the days, or even having the option to work remotely full-time. However, participants are confident that the opportunity to go to the office will remain and will be used more for social aspects and team meetings.

Such a collection of factors can be amalgamated to the self-assessment of newcomers as a measure of their successful integration in their organisations. Several indicated findings may have foreshadowed the main consequence. The newcomer socialisation seeks to find if the process of transferring from an organisational outsider to an organisational insider was successful. Arguably, a key finding of the research explored in this thesis illuminates the majority of the respondents' identification that they are yet to be fully successfully integrated into their companies. When young newcomers replied yes, modifications to their answers followed. These set relativisations to the situation. Most young newcomers believe they are socialised in a very small margin of the organisation, only in their teams and with their closest colleagues, but not beyond that. Young newcomers do feel comfortable and socialised in work-related aspects, but most miss a deeper personal element. Some also believe their socialisation process would have been faster and different in the office, even though most do not have any benchmarks from previous experience. However, young newcomers are intuitively aware that despite a lack of personal integration at the present time, future possibilities to undergo a full socialisation process will be presented once working within the office is reinstated. With participant 7 commenting dryly:

"When everything is over, it could be that I go to the office and actually hate everybody."

Young newcomers are aware of the situation being temporary and accept their limitations on progress and integration, knowing it is not the final stage in the process of their newcomer socialisation.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The major findings emerging from the analysis will be discussed in the following chapter. To refer back to the research question, young newcomers are impacted by remote working arrangements resulting from COVID-19. The major shortcomings of young newcomers are the limited socialising aspects in remote working and the difficulties of obtaining information. The categories information-seeking and relationship-building were the most discussed issues during the interviews, emphasising their significance (See Appendix VI). This resonates with past literature, identifying socialising as a key factor for job assimilation as well as for younger workers to be overly enthusiastic to become friendly with colleagues (Lapointe, 2014; Phillips, Barrett & Rush, 1978). With relationships not having the possibility to be as extensive in remote work, it seems as though strong ties provide more importance for newcomers to bring social support and feelings of well-being (Schaefer, 1981). However, developing strong ties is not as easy from remote and young newcomers indicate how a more private level is not as easily reached with colleagues. With newcomers being highly receptive to information in the first months of employment to reduce uncertainty, the tactics of obtaining normative and technical information as well as informal feedback are threatened due to the distance, possibly higher for participants as past research has proven social costs to be higher for young workers (Finkelstein, 2003). Proactive behaviours are associated with the task mastery, organisational commitment and social expectations of newcomers. It is likely that the feelings of detachment may be a consequence of the limited ability of newcomers to be proactive, as they are not able to obtain sufficient information to become a complete insider. As newcomers are not being able to take in the corporate culture and everything it entails, they are left with a gap. These findings resonate with the young worker percentage of 82% feeling less connected, finding the work environment difficult and having communicative issues (BBC, 2020). Furthermore, *Zoom fatigue* becomes clear as young newcomers prefer to reject networking events, primarily describing them as exhausting. Nevertheless, young newcomers succeed in being optimistic. It

can be discussed, how, in times of crisis, one's good fortune becomes even more apparent, especially as global inequalities are exposed. In the face of such challenging work environments, young newcomers have successfully identified new personal skills to develop within the past months, such as critical thinking, reading facial expressions digitally and precise communication. This contradicts the warning of HR managers, as skills may not deteriorate but merely adapt to new work settings. One main challenge of newcomers to divide the professional and personal sphere further echoes the findings of underlying statistics and surveys (DeFilippis, 2020). The expectations of young newcomers in synergies combined to form a hybrid work model for the future resonate with the proposed 3-2-2 work model, which qualifies it to win more acceptance (Business Insider, 2020).

4.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings provide some meaningful insights for newcomer socialisation and how it may be impacted in difficult times. The findings contribute to newcomer socialisation being challenged in an extraordinary setting of crisis. Even so, the theory of newcomer socialisation and attributed proactive behaviours of newcomers does not lose its importance in the process of integration for newcomers. It underlines how essential it is for newcomers to be able to realise the set of behaviours. This unveils the theoretical findings that relationship-building and information seeking have been identified as the most impacted behaviours of young newcomers during the pandemic. As newcomer socialisation is not experienced by newcomers as intensively when working remotely, for a successful socialisation to take place, the organisation may have to adapt a more active role in times of crisis, especially as young newcomers were identified to need more organisational guidance in past research (Kramer, 1993).

4.2 Managerial Implications

Based on the emerging findings, some important lessons for managers are highlighted. It should be noted that although the end of the pandemic is still unknown, this "black swan" event has

demonstrated how resilience and agility are critical for vast adaptation. For the time being, remote working for newcomers can be encouraged by motivational coaching and offering training to develop remote skills. As participants were struggling to get information, a digital pinboard of all colleagues can be useful to provide basic background and personal information, including the preferred means of contact and areas of expertise in order to help newcomers familiarise themselves. Making use of the findings from Bakker (2020), a more playful approach, also in networking events, such as an Online Escape Room, to increase the level of excitement and help team dynamics to flourish. Already now, companies should prepare the work format for a post-pandemic world. For companies to receive food for thought, perceptions and visions of young newcomers should be collected, as their experiences provide first-hand knowledge. The suggestion can spur possible transformations and develop socialisation from a digital angle, which will likely remain important, even in a hybrid work format.

4.3 Research limitations and future research

Although this study makes a new contribution to the timely literature on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on young newcomers and their experience, it is not without its limitations. Firstly, the qualitative approach is difficult to verify and is not statistically representative. Secondly, though respondents all fulfilled the given criteria within the framework of this thesis, it stands to be determined whether these findings can be generalised for career starters as a whole or if findings are industry or company specific. Furthermore, it can be argued that all participants enjoy fairly favorable positions, having enjoyed an educational background and being employed in companies having the means to adapt to global events to a certain degree (i.e. digitalisation). Thirdly, given the data collection is a mere fragment of newcomers' experience, a longitudinal study would deepen the understanding of remote socialisation relating to the time spent in the organisation. Lastly, this study focused on the perspective of the newcomer; only portraying one side of the socialisation process. The

study raises several avenues for future research. Scholars are invited to explore if various industries (entertainment industry, technology industry, consulting industry etc.) and how various types of work (project-based work, teamwork etc.) correlate in some way to the socialisation process. In addition to this, it would be interesting to determine the different needs of remote young workers and try to connect these to traits of newcomers' personality types. Also, this research has provided a broad perspective of young newcomers on their socialisation process; examining single variables and possible intercorrelations that constitute to socialisation in these settings would strengthen understanding. For example, it would be instructive to find out how a digital socialisation affects variables such as a digital role clarity. Or, a quite specific example, associating how many hours are spent on digital tools to how socialised newcomers feel. Along these lines, the theory could be adapted to a digital newcomer socialisation model. Lastly, it is crucial to uncover the corresponding perspective of the organisation to provide a more insightful and holistic picture.

CONCLUSION

The main goal of this thesis was to investigate how young newcomers who began their career during the pandemic in 2020 have been impacted. The key finding is, that most participants of the study do not yet feel completely integrated within the organisation. Especially implementing the proactive behaviours of building relationships and seeking information are difficult for young newcomers from remote. With young newcomers facing a lot of challenges during the pandemic, it seems as if they still manage to stay optimistic and recognize the potential for future work environments and the advantages of a hybrid work format. It remains to be seen in what way the work environment and newcomer socialisation will alter in the future, but the fact that it will change is definite. And as the adage of the theologian Caspar Huberinus (1500–1553) goes:

"Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis" - "The times change, and we change with them."

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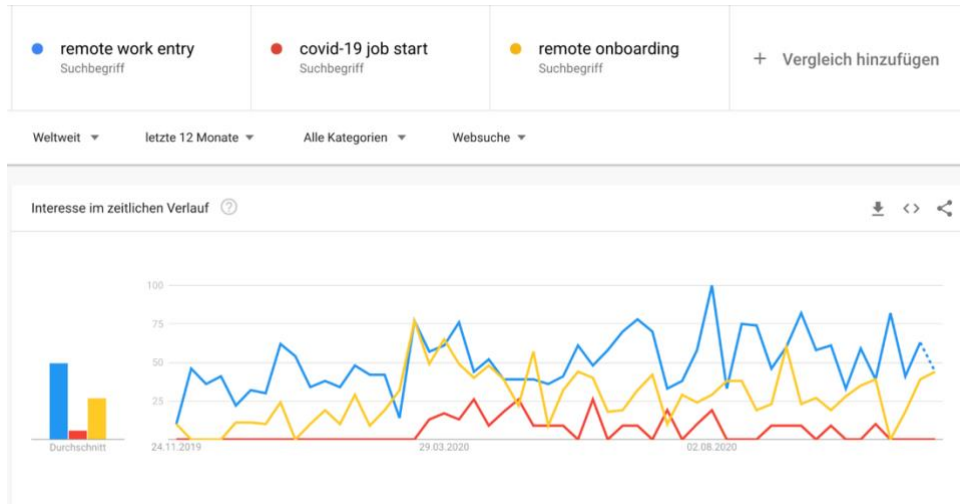
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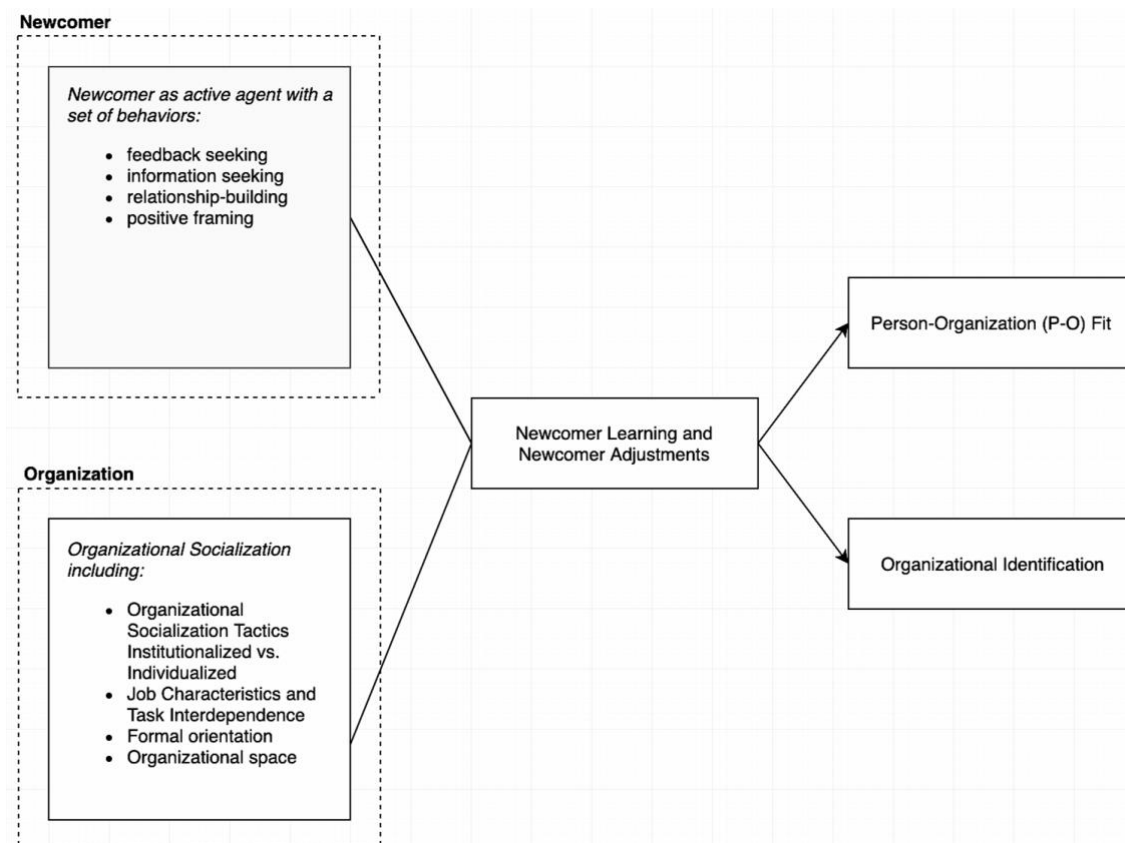
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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Google Keywords searching for these circumstances have been made, undermining the importance of the topic.



Appendix II: Framework of Organisational Socialisation, with the newcomer box representing the perspective of the thesis (own illustration)



Appendix III: Some details about the Interview participants

ID	Company, Location	Entry Month and months at company until interview	Gender	Age	Interview Duration (min.)
1	E.ON Innogy SE, Essen	May (7)	Female	26	33:08
2	Otto Group, In-house Consulting, Hamburg	June (6)	Male	26	16:14
3	About You, Hamburg	September (3)	Female	26	22:27
4	Capitol, Amsterdam		Male	26	10:38
5	BDO Consulting, Vienna	September (3)	Male	25	10:27
6	Procter & Gamble, Frankfurt	October (2)	Female	25	23:17
7	My Advice, London	September (3)	Female	25	10:39
8	Amplifon, Hamburg	September (3)	Male	24	13:03
9	Art Night, Berlin	September (3)	Female	23	17:02
10	Restaurant Brands International, Madrid	April (8)	Male	26	24:56
11	Amazon Munich	August (4)	Male	24	08:00
12	Workers Association, Düsseldorf	June (6)	Male	26	16:48
13	Amazon Operations, Munich	August (4)	Female	24	21:44
14	Kollex GmbH	March (9)	Female	25	09:30
15	Real Estate Law Firm Munich, Arnecke Sibeth Dabelstein	September (3)	Male	25	11:30
16	Amazon Music, London	July (5)	Female	25	27:18
17	JWC Group Vienna Logistics	September (3)	Male	25	10:00
18	Gallery Hauser & Wirth	July (5)	Female	24	11:20

Appendix IV: The Interview Guide with predetermined and optional questions

1. Hello. Thank you for speaking with me. Could you tell me where you work and when you started?
2. (What are your daily tasks?)
3. How was it to start working remotely?

Theme	Main Questions
<i>Positive Framing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Would you say you regard the situation as an opportunity or a threat? Or as a source of frustration? – Would you say you still manage to look on the bright side of the situation? – What are the advantages?
<i>Relationship-Building</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are you able to network? – Do you know many people from different departments? – Do you feel socialised within the company? – Have you established closer ties?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you also talk about private matters with colleagues? - Do you understand how your job contributes to a larger organisation? - Do you enjoy attending the virtual networking events? - Do you believe socialising would be different in the office?
<i>Information Seeking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you do if you have questions? - How do you seek information? - Did you learn the organisational structures? - Do you feel as if you get a sense of the corporate culture from a distance? - Do you feel as if you can judge your colleagues through digital tools, such as Zoom?
<i>Seeking Feedback</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you seek feedback? If so, how? - Do you receive informal feedback? - (Is there a feedback culture?)
<i>Possible Follow-Up Questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you think not knowing the people personally has an impact? - What are the main challenges for you? - Do you feel as if you have been developing soft or hard skills from home? - What are your expectations for the future work environment? - Do you believe you have a disadvantage, starting work during the pandemic? - Do you have a mentor? - How was your level of motivation?
<i>Spontaneous Questions (only relevant ones were added to guide after)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How many hours did you spent on Zoom daily? - Is it weird, working with so many different people, switching communication partners permanently? - What things that are frustrating? - Do you have a digital threshold if contacting people digitally? - Do you feel comfortable in the company? - Do you have a great sense of responsibility for the company or is there a feeling of detachment or missing emotional bond which may disrupt the feeling? - Did you have like a formal onboarding process? - Do you feel lonely sometimes working at home?

Last Question: Do you feel as if you have successfully and fully socialised within the organisation? Meaning you have integrated and have changed from an organisational outsider to an organisational insider?

Second-order themes	First-order indicators	Representative data
<i>Aggregate dimension: Newcomer behaviours</i>		
i. Information Seeking	1. Technical Information	<p>"...you cannot just quickly go to your manager and ask something or you cannot look across the shoulder and see how they do it. And you have to kind of first try to solve it on your own. And then if you cannot solve it, you need to reach out to many questions to many people. And I think this always takes a lot of time, because you have to write down your question, you have to be very specific to make sure that the other person understands what you're trying to say. And to make sure that you actually get the answer that you're looking for. Because when you're new, you sometimes don't know what the right question is." (13) " I didn't really want to annoy someone that I didn't know. Also finding the time to ask question was difficult. So, when it was possible, I always try to ask the people that already have been in contact with me, but sometimes, obviously, it's impossible, then you just have to basically tear down the antenna and send them a message asking like, Hey, I'm this person and have that question. Do you have so maybe 15 minutes in the next week? Or today even? But obviously, that's something completely different than asking them whilst standing in the same room with a colleague, where you can just like, stop by when you grab a coffee and quickly ask something, as compared to if you have to actually write a message to someone." (8); " I mean, I see this kind of obvious, but it was weird to I mean, I kind of forced myself to find out things myself in this position, maybe in case of any doubt or so. I force myself to try to go that extra mile for not have to call my manager for asking or a colleague for doubt. And that was kind of weird, because since you are working from remote you don't have, I mean, your colleagues are not as handy. So, you have to you don't you do not want to do let them know that you have doubts." (10)</p>
	2. Normative Information	<p>"No. I mean, like, for me, I have a completely different picture than what like my friends or people that I know that how worked for the company have, like, I picture Amazon as like a company where, as I said, it's like, I only get to like I like I only talk on daily with like, five to 10 people. And those people are the ones that create a culture for me off like the team." (16); " I do have the feeling from like talking to the people that everybody is super friendly. And I know from even before applying to About You, you know, like I already read into the company culture and informed yourself and there your kind of already felt like, "Hey, this is what would be a fit", an open-minded young culture and motivated people." (3); " like at the beginning, I thought that I could, like, I thought I had a profile of a bit of a person, like immediately, oh, yeah, they're like this kind of worker or that kind of way, or whatever. But over time, it really does change, like, I don't think you can, because you really don't see the way people are working. Everybody's in their own space in their own unit, like at home, and they're just getting, like, throughout the day, you don't get to see those like, who is working closely what, who, like everybody in our team, we all work together." (16)</p>
ii. Seeking Feedback	3. Formal Feedback	<p>" And we also have a feedback culture, it is quite strong, especially without Corona, I think the Otto Group has a very strong feedback culture." (2); " Yes, that's something as the company does very well, because we always have feedback. And even though I would work with someone, and they know the process better, and I would</p>

		do it for the first time, they even asked me if I want to have feedback afterwards." (9)
	4. Informal Feedback	"... in the beginning of my training, I had to ask a lot of like, Did I do it right or not? Because obviously, nobody can look over my shoulder to see if I'm doing it right. And often, I would be guessing. So, in the beginning, at the end of every day, my boss would go through all the tasks I did with me, and then give me feedback if I did it right or not." (7) " Well, so there's no like direct feedback, it comes in, it used to come at the end of the day. And sometimes you feel like you're bothering people if you ask too many questions during the day over text, because you can actually see how many texts you write and questions to ask, but I tried to like to gather all the questions and then send them all at once." (7)
iii. Positive Framing	5. Convenience	"I am really, really starting to enjoy the advantages for example, getting up at 8.45 sitting on your desk at nine pretending like you're prepared for the day, no pants and everyone thinks you have like a had a normal morning routine, no breakfast no shower nothing. So that's honestly like, the time that I'm saving for getting ready and driving to work. It's like straight on my sleep accounts."; (6)
	6. Gratitude	"I mean, you have to see I'm so happy I got a job. That's honestly, like, it is just put in front of my eyes every day. How lucky I am to have a job and not be afraid of my existence. And I'm healthy. I don't have any psychological problems that a lot of people are probably fighting with right now. So yeah, I'm just grateful already. And trying to make the best out of this." (6); " Well, I do not know where I am at most of the time, I just get outcome feedback and a Thank you but I do not know how my work was actually going and what I could do better, or how to be proactive, I do have a mentor though who tries to give me cool tasks as well and he is supposed to make my integration easier, he helps me sometimes, but the other lawyers, there is no direct contact point on my performance or progress, that is a shame sometimes but I have to admit that I am happy that I got a position and that it still worked out so I am just grateful to do this remote and I am still productive and learn a lot" (15)
	7. Onboarding	"...it was very unusual, but also quite nice, because they put a lot of effort into taking care of me. And on the onboarding process I had the feeling, even due to Corona everything was very well organised. And that they in comparison to a very normal situation put extra effort into making the start as smooth and like usual as it would be in face-face start as possible." (2); "It was actually super fun, because I really have to say it was very professional, how they planned out my onboarding process. So, when I came, I already had, like, all the relevant calls scheduled, so I didn't really feel like I don't know, like, lost or lonely because I was really having a structured meeting agenda." (3)
iv. Relationship-Building	8. Strong Ties	"Like you would get to meet people and create context outside of your very close team. That is impossible. Now it's like an hour you have to Yeah, like it's your very, very, like you meet like four to five people and it is like a family." (16); " Yes, well kind of. I would not say we are friends yet, but I think contacting them is easy now, networking is not happening much in the company, as it is a small one and there are not many online events or so to get to know the others. So, I know their names, but I do not really know them personally." (17); " Yes, I think that I have established closer ties to my colleagues, we have weekly calls with the team in London and monthly calls with the team in the US which never happened before, which is very nice. So, this is very good but on the other hand I also miss the lunch breaks with my colleagues like

- the physical, the physical meetings entirely, which is very important for I don't know for networking." (18)
9. Weak Ties
(Networking) So, it's really hard to get to know, people outside of your circle. Like usually in the office, I guess, we would bump into each other, like random people and just like, talk to them, or like have a coffee with people or just, you know, have deeper conversations, but now that is kind of missing."; "Hard to answer. On one side yes, because people will not know my face and I will not be as present in the minds of other people, but in my team, that I have a lot of contact with, it is totally fine, if they had a free position, they would think of me, even though they did not meet me personally. But in the office, there would be more moments, in which I would be able to present myself, they would know my face and people would think more often - ah yes, maybe she is a fit. So, the level of reference is lower. People are just less aware of me." (1) " And even myself I have not attended those meetings, because I think it's quite weird to meet people online with like putting on the camera having a coffee. You also don't have that many topics you could talk about except of how I have experienced the start, or the current situation with Corona. And I guess most people have been very bad or annoyed about talking about this topic. So, it was very difficult to get in touch with other people so far, even if there have been quite some opportunities to get in touch." (2)
10. Touchpoints "Actually, the opposite is the case, I think because of the video chat, this as a proximity to the person is definitely missing. So, it's not that you're saying something like on the side, which you would have probably said to your colleague leaning towards them, like you know, like, kind of privately in the office. In the video chat you cannot create that closeness. And then on Chat, it's also super different because on Chat, everything is reported or recorded, right? You can write stuff so everyone could read it and probably the company will save the conversation somewhere. I mean, our chats are apparently being deleted after a month. But this is very, this is very, like really something that you are thinking about. If you're asking a colleague, or so and the second question you're like, forget seems so weird to ask and write, and they can read it, they may probably think, oh my god, is she stupid or what? And if it were something that you were just saying in person- Probably it would have been forgotten, like a few days later, but when it's in the chat, you can see it." (6); " Not socializing with the colleagues, not really knowing them. Yeah, when everything is over, it could be that I go into the office, and I actually really hate everybody. Well, I don't think so. Because you get to know them a bit. But yeah, just also getting a bit bored at home." (7)

*Aggregate dimension:
Sentiments of newcomers*

- v. Paradox/Ambivalence 11. Being/Feeling Alone but Being Busy " So actually, I don't feel like I'm sitting alone in front of a computer. But it's, yeah, sometimes it's frustrating. It's so much alone time." (1) ; " Weird lonely. Yes. And no, at the same time, because you never are really, because you're constantly like, you're lonely in the sense of like physical only because there's no one around you. But there's like so much happening on your chat. And the emails that you are not really and like home schooled schools like, so whenever there's something people just go. Yeah, but maybe that is just business, but it replaces it somehow."(16); " I already had, like, all the relevant calls scheduled, so I didn't really feel like I don't know, like, lost or lonely because I was really having a structured meeting agenda."(3)

	12. Real me vs. Digital me	"I really thought it was difficult, I remember thinking I am better in person, also those big calls, with 100 people and every new starter had to introduce themselves, it was terrible..."(1); " I also know I have a different appearance in real life, I am quite tall, so people notice when I walk into a room, which is not the case during online meetings, which feels strange sometimes, to just not have this effect. I don't know."(2); " And when you write emails, it becomes more apparent when you do something wrong, or when you are not aware of certain things."(1);" Like there is no real person you're introducing yourself to which is technology? In person, you're a person, you can just smile and be nice. And it's not so much that you always think I'm a fraud. "(1) "... In the beginning there was a lot of uncertainty, it was frightening the situation. Nobody knew what we were facing or how to react. There was no real guidance, as nobody experienced this. We were all in it together." (10)
vi. State of Emotions	13. Sense of solidarity	"...in the beginning, I was to be honest, quite frustrated with it. Because I have seen like the first weeks in the office, where you get to know all the people when you meet your colleagues, like super enriching and exciting and then when I was at home, and in my home office, I didn't have the like, my proper tasks yet, if you want to say like this, like you're sitting there alone, you don't really know what to do it. Like it was kind of weird in the beginning, but you get used to it. And now it's changed a lot." (6); " Well, I hope Corona will end soon and that I can meet my colleagues. But yes, it gets a little bit frustrating also in the winter, because, I mean, you either take walks, and other than that you cannot really do anything. If it's cold, not really fun to take walk, so you just in your flat, and look at your wall. So, this is not really nice. So sometimes, of course, I'm hoping that the situation gets better. But sometimes it's very frustrating." (14)
	14. Sources of frustration	" Yeah, it's such an extraordinary situation. Sometimes, I feel a bit detached, it's somehow easier to distance myself, as I do not know the people in person." (1); " The main challenge is that you don't have any social contact. So, I just am just with them on the zoom. So, you just don't have the social interaction, you just sometimes feel a bit lonely. And you also don't move a lot, I get cold often because I don't move." (14)
	15. Feelings of Detachment	"Moderately, I would say. It depends. Sometimes it's fun to be in home office. Sometimes it is very easy to be in home office. But for long-term, going to your desk every morning at eight and leaving the same desk every evening at eight or so you are just not having variety and it is frustrating."(5) " Somehow, it was not that high, one of the main aspects is to get to know the company in the beginning. and also talk to the people in order to build a network. But the network building aspect was not that easy due to not meeting in person, so the motivation level was quite low at home, but I am trying to do a good job. That is always the aim." (2); " And I think it's extremely hard to actually remain motivated during the two hours when there's no face-to-face contact." (4)
vii. Main Challenges	16. Level of motivation	"...there's always something popping up and when you decide you're closing your computer, but then you still see your mails on your mobile and then you're like, well, I could quickly do that, even though it is not during working hours anymore. And then someone is still calling you, if you would just be in the office, it would not happen as much, because you are less tempted, rather want to go home and eat something but right now, I just cook myself something and then work again often. So, there is no real
	17. Personal/Private Life	

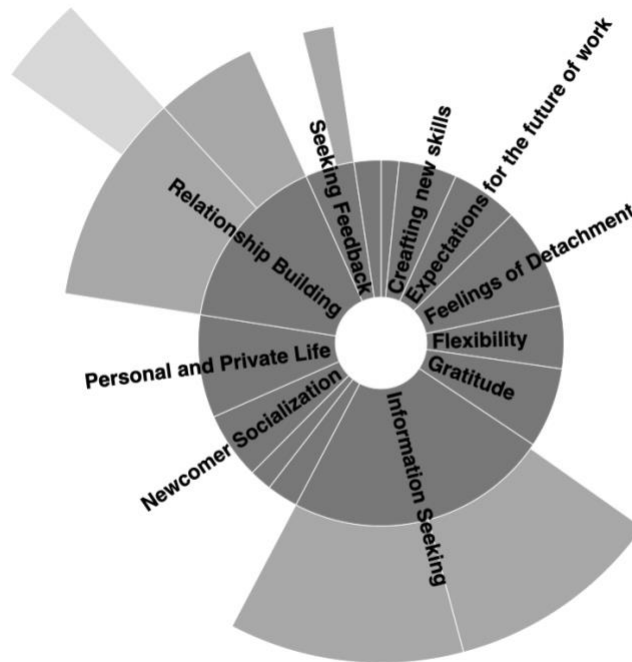
<p>Aggregate dimension: Personal conclusions of newcomers</p>		<p>separation from private life and working life anymore."(1); " Um, you never stop. I would say, there's no clear working hours, which is fine. But it's like you don't rest, it's not like it's not a challenge. But it at the same time is, because not I wouldn't necessarily say that, like, you, Oh, you don't have a private life or whatever. Because, in the office like, it's not like you're always available. And you know, you're always available. And it's incredibly hard to switch off. Because you very often feel useless, and because, like you Oh, you are at home, and you should be at home, and then you might as well should work." (16)</p>
	<p>18. Mastery</p>	<p>"The biggest challenge is simply continuing. Mastering the start of the career. So, everything that it entails, to acquire your position, to do a good job, but at the same time, of course, to build up such a personal relationship with your colleagues. There are just a lot of balls in the air." (12); "one was exposed to certain challenges beyond the career entry somehow and that then more or less successfully handled is always quite differently mastered in any case." (12)</p>
<p>viii. Future Opportunities</p>	<p>19. Crafting new skills</p>	<p>"...I learned a lot of skill and straightforward communication and remote communication. I worked with a lot of partners externally who I met. So, building trust, building relationships over remote are kind of skills that I learned."(13); "...One was exposed to certain challenges beyond the career entry somehow and that then more or less successfully handled is always quite differently mastered in any case [...] one is now pretty well armed to be flexible and also to question things again and again. It is critical thinking that you have to display as well."(8) " And then also the fact that so for me, talking specifically about presentations, the hardest thing is standing in front of a crowd, having to talk freely, looking into their eyes, etc. And, and being nervous by doing so. And of course, this task just disappeared. Because you can have your notes next to your laptop, or even on the screen, you don't really have to see the faces if you don't want to. So, you're talking like, anxiety presenting via zoom or whatever is a lot less." (6); " but not essential things like interviewing, negotiation, personal negotiation or similar. Now for your own career or development, but also with other partners or with other target groups or the like" (12); " And I learned to be more precise and more sharp, maybe more reflective about who I need for which topic. And to directly set aside time and reserved time to get out a decision that we need to make to learn something or two sides kicking off with a partner." (13); " It's crazy. Like you stop being that awkward in front of camera and you get very comfortable." (16)</p>
	<p>20. Flexibility</p>	<p>"And we will because we're getting used to working remotely now, I hope that this will also impact the future with it being okay that you for example, I don't know fly to Portugal Lisbon for like two weeks get an Airbnb there where you have proper internet and stuff and then work from there. I think it gives you a lot of great opportunities" (6); " This is something that especially in Germany, wherever, maybe it hasn't been so flexible in the past, and maybe because of the pandemic mind starts to change." (8)</p>
<p>ix. Transitions</p>	<p>21. Expectations for the future work environment</p>	<p>"Well, I know there's going to be the day where we're going to be back to the office, at least for some days of the week. I would not say 100%, who knows, how the long-term culture is changing, but I do imagine a hybrid format of work, like maybe around 3 days a week."(3)" very independent, very flexible and with very short decision-making paths, in order of course simply to be more efficient, to produce more results, to generate more work output,</p>

22. Newcomer
Socialisation
Self-Assessment

ultimately to be more successful, to work better, to work faster." (12); " It's something that we can look back how pretty it was in the past, and how beautiful it will be in the future. And currently, you're just getting through it, you know? Like an interim. I only think there will be a lot more flexibility." (16)

"I'm not yet. I'm on a good way. I think it takes a longer time than it would have usually done. But I'm happy with how it goes. And I'm confident that by like, I don't know, let's talk again in three months, and then I will probably say something different. But I'm sure now I would say I'm on a good way." (6); "Yeah, like for now, for the virtual world, I do feel socialised with the people I know, and I do feel confident during my work. But I know it would be different if I would go to the office normally from the beginning onwards. I think going back in the office will be difficult, not work wise as I know what I am doing and know my work responsibilities by now, so I would be relaxed in this sense, but meeting everyone will be weird for sure." (1); " I do not really know anything about the company culture yet. I did not speak to everyone just with my close colleagues that I have working tasks with. So no, I think there's a lot more to explore, except the tasks that I have to do. And because of Corona, my only job is limited itself to the task." (14); " No, but maybe it is different in my case, as I am just fulfilling tasks to the main lawyers, so not sure how well I fit into your scheme, but if I would have to answer I would say no, not really. Or not yet." (15); " Oh, no, or is it hard from the distance. I don't think so. Because the thing is, like, you know, and I don't think you ever will, it is as if, like you are transferred to a new school, in like, four in the last year in high school and the senior year, you will never know, all the people and the connections and everything that happened before, because like you just weren't there." (16); " I do feel as if I kind of moved from an organisational outsider of organisational Insider, but main emphasis is on work, so work wise I feel good about it all. Although I do not think I still am really an organisational Insider, but I believe as soon as I meet my colleagues in person, this will change." (17); " I am not sure to be honest, yes kind of, kind of no. My colleagues told me we are connected more on a global level now with all these calls, that we did not have before and we are trying to establish a more aligned approach. And I do get along very well with my colleagues, but I think it all would be different if we would have met in the office, but all are artists or at least creative thinkers, so everyone is quite open-minded so to say. That probably helps." (18); "No, probably not a 100%. There is still some distance working from remote. Some things are really difficult to say or difficult to judge. But also, because I would not know what it would be like, if I would have started in the office you know? So, it is a tough question to answer. I am still feeling like the new one, especially because there are so many people. I would not say I feel bad or anything or that I am not in the comfort zone, but I am not fully there yet still considering most of my moves and so on." (1)

Appendix VI: Visualisation of Coding Frequency (Visualisation made by NVivo software program)



Appendix VII: Google Docs Screenshots with exemplary feedback comments of interview partners

Summary of Key Findings: Beginning your career during the COVID-19 pandemic - potential impacts on newcomers

Newcomers Sentiments and Behaviours

- Newcomers show **gratitude**, as they are happy to have gotten a job and are well off during the pandemic, source of optimism
- Obtaining technical information (about work, tasks etc.) is challenging, as newcomers struggle due to several reasons;
 - ◆ trying to see, **if newcomers can figure it out themselves**, as there is a **burden** to contact someone
 - ◆ not knowing WHO to contact for specific questions
 - ◆ not knowing HOW to contact the person, which digital communication channel to use?
 - ◆ investing time in WHEN to speak to persons (scheduling a meeting etc.)
 - ◆ not knowing WHAT the **exact question is so that it is understood in a written and verbal format and to receive the needed answer**
- Normative Information:
 - ◆ difficult to judge mimics and facial expressions via Zoom, body language missing
 - ◆ corporate culture reflected in the behaviour of colleagues, learned a prior job entry and due to value shifts in company
- Feedback
 - ◆ Formal feedback is more connected to the culture of the company, not the external situation of the pandemic
 - ◆ Informal was somehow implicit, due to the answer time of questions etc.
- Motivation got to higher levels, when newcomers knew what they had to do
- Newcomers reported of acquiring new skills, such as reading mimics digitally, precise communication

