

**The Role of Communication Practices in Shaping Social Identity and Interdepartmental
Collaboration During Organisational Growth**

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Master Thesis Communication Science (201800100)

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February 28, 2025

The number of words 13.747

Abstract

This study explores the way interdepartmental communication and relational coordination influence employees' social identity and cohesion during periods of organisational growth. Transitions such as the integration of new employees and role redefinition have the potential to challenge existing relationships and disrupt the organisational culture, thereby undermining a sense of belonging and collaboration.

This research combines Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Relational Coordination Theory (RCT) to examine how communication characteristics (e.g. frequency, timeliness, accuracy, and problem-solving) interact with relational factors (e.g. shared knowledge, mutual respect, and common goals). Semi-structured interviews with employees from an ICT organisation reveal that both formal and informal communication are key to strengthening social identity and fostering cohesion.

The findings demonstrate that when communication practices are aligned with relational factors, employees experience a stronger sense of belonging and a more cohesive organisational culture. Informal communication, particularly social interactions and team-building activities is found to be crucial in fostering trust and mutual respect. Conversely, a paucity of effective communication can result in the fragmentation of identities and the attenuation of collaboration.

This study emphasises that organisations experiencing growth should prioritise communication strategies that promote relational coordination. By ensuring that communication is clear, timely, and aligned with relational factors, organisations can strengthen interdepartmental ties, reduce fragmentation, and foster a unified organisational identity. The findings provide actionable insights for enhancing collaboration and supporting employees' social identity in evolving organisational contexts.

Keywords: Social Identity Theory, Relational Coordination Theory, Organisational Growth, Interdepartmental Communication, Organisational Identity.

Table of content

Abstract.....	2
1. Introduction.....	6
2. Theoretical framework.....	9
2.1 Organisational identification.....	9
2.1.1 Social categorisation and In-group/Out-group dynamics	10
2.1.2 Social Comparison and Identity Reinforcement.....	11
2.1.3 The Effect of Organisational Growth on Social Identity	12
2.2 Relational coordination theory.....	13
2.2.1 The role of communication in relational coordination	14
2.2.2 Relationship dimensions in relational coordination.....	15
2.3 Integration of social identity and relational coordination theory.....	16
3. Methods.....	19
3.1 Research design and context.....	19
3.2 Participants.....	20
3.3 Data collection	23
3.4 Data analysis	25
4. Results	31
4.1 Employees' experiences of organisational identity	31
4.1.1 Connection and recognition	31
4.1.2 Challenges of Growth for Organisational Identification	35
4.2 Subgroups and departmental identity within X-ICT.....	41
4.2.1 Formation of subgroups	41
4.2.2 Departmental identity and internal communication challenges.....	45

5. Discussion.....	50
5.1 Main findings	50
5.2 Limitations	53
5.3 Implications.....	54
5.3.1 Theoretical implications.....	54
5.3.2 Practical implications	56
5.4 Conclusion	57
References	59
Appendix.....	67
Appendix A the use of AI	67
Appendix B Interview scheme.....	68

1. Introduction

Organisational growth presents a multifaceted challenge, requiring a delicate balance between adapting to evolving conditions and maintaining employee cohesion (Van den Heuvel et al., 2020). Transitions such as the integration of new employees or the redefinition of roles have the potential to disrupt established relationships, shared identities, and the organisation's culture (Khaw et al., 2022). Such disruptions are likely to diminish collaboration and employees' sense of belonging, particularly when interdepartmental communication is strained (Butcher et al., 2019). Given the critical role of interdepartmental collaboration in enhancing employee engagement and operational efficiency (Hingorani & Swami, 2024), a deeper understanding of its effects during organisational growth is essential.

The sense of belonging that employees experience is derived from their identification with the organisation and their peers. Disruptions in interdepartmental communication and collaboration can therefore challenge this identification. The social identity theory (SIT) provides a robust framework for examining how organisational dynamics influence employees' sense of identity and cohesion (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A fundamental component of SIT, known as organisational identification, has been demonstrated to be strongly associated with employee engagement, which in turn fosters involvement and commitment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994). However, it is important to note that organisational transitions, such as growth and restructuring, have the potential to disrupt these dynamics by fostering subgroup formation, role changes, and shifts in organisational norms, thereby undermining employees' sense of belonging (Drzensky & van Dick, 2013). Consequently, it is imperative for organisations to explore effective strategies to foster cohesion during such periods, as maintaining a shared sense of belonging amidst structural changes remains a complex challenge.

Relational Coordination Theory (RCT), developed by Gittell (2002), is a theoretical framework that complements SIT by focusing on the relational and communicative processes that enable effective collaboration in interdependent environments. While the SIT examines how organisational dynamics influence employees' sense of identity and belonging, the RCT provides a framework for understanding how communication within relational networks can enhance or hinder this sense of connection. According to Gittell (2006), coordination is most successful when communication within relational networks is frequent, timely, accurate, and focused on problem-solving. In addition to these communication elements, RCT emphasises the importance of shared knowledge, mutual respect, and shared goals (Gittell, 2006). The relational elements are interrelated and mutually reinforcing with the communication elements. This reciprocal relationship between communication and relational dynamics has been shown to enhance organisational cohesion, thereby improving employees' sense of belonging and reinforcing organisational identity (Jones, 2019).

Although previous studies have examined SIT and RCT independently, their combined application when studying organisational behaviour during growth remains underexplored. SIT helps explain the evolution of organisational identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), while RCT focuses on the interplay of relational and communicative dimensions in fostering collaboration and cohesion (Gittell, 2002). This study aims to bridge these perspectives by investigating how communication dimensions (frequency, timeliness, accuracy, and problem-solving) influence and interrelate with relational dimensions (shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect) in shaping organisational identity and cohesion. The study will address the following research question: How do employees perceive relational coordination between departments, and how does this influence their sense of organisational identity and cohesion during organisational growth?

Existing research on SIT has primarily focused on the stability of organisational identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), while RCT has been applied to improving task efficiency (Gittell, 2002). Furthermore, RCT's emphasis on intra-team collaboration often overlooks the influence of interdepartmental coordination on social identity and engagement during organisational transitions. (Sulaiman & Abdullah, 2019; Gittell et al., 20010). Moreover, most studies have been conducted in stable environments, thus failing to address the complexities of role changes, departmental shifts, and the integration of new employees, all of which have the potential to disrupt existing identities and relationships (Van den Heuvel et al., 2020; Khaw et al., 2022). This lacuna in the extant literature underscores the necessity for an integrated approach that incorporates both SIT and RCT, thus providing a more comprehensive framework for comprehending the interplay between social identity and relational coordination in influencing organisational cohesion and engagement during periods of growth and change.

The integration of SIT and RCT in this study is driven by the objective of formulating communication strategies that are designed to enhance employees' sense of belonging and to foster collaboration during periods of organisational transition. This study provides practical insights into the maintenance of a shared purpose and the enhancement of interdepartmental collaboration, thereby strengthening organisational cohesion and identity during periods of growth.

2. Theoretical framework

This section integrates two key theories: Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Relational Coordination Theory (RCT). Following a thorough delineation of the fundamental concepts underpinning each theory, the subsequent discussion explores the way they complement one another within the context of internal communication and the identification of employees. The integration of these theories demonstrates their collective ability to explain the relationship between communication and social identity, as well as collaboration, within organisational settings, with a particular focus on the dynamics that occur across different departments.

2.1 Organisational identification

Organisational identification, a fundamental component of SIT, is imperative for comprehending how employees perceive their organisation, particularly during periods of growth or transformation. According to SIT, individuals shape their self-concept based on their affiliation with social groups. In an organisational context, this manifests as organisational identification, which reflects the psychological connection employees establish with their organisation (Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). This bond has been shown to influence how individuals perceive their role, their alignment with the organisation's goals, and their sense of belonging within the larger organisational structure (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

In the context of a growing organisation, the preservation and strengthening of organisational identity becomes crucial. A clear and cohesive organisational identity helps employees navigate change, aligning them with the organisation's values and goals, even as new roles, subgroups, and relationships emerge (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994). This alignment not only fosters employee engagement but also organisational commitment, which is crucial for long-term success during periods of transformation (Giessner, 2011;

Riketta, 2005). Furthermore, the process of organisational identification enhances collective action and adaptation, particularly when organisational change challenges established norms and values (Oakes & Turner, 1980).

The importance of organisational identification is accentuated during periods of organisational growth, as changes in structure and dynamics can disrupt established identities. Employees may be required to adjust their sense of self in response to changes in roles, norms, or the introduction of new employees, which can challenge their established identification with the organisation (Drzensky & van Dick, 2013). Understanding how organisational identity is maintained and strengthened during these transitions is crucial for ensuring continued cohesion and alignment between employees and the organisation.

To explore how organisational identification evolves during growth, it is important to examine the underlying processes that shape it. Social categorisation and comparison, key mechanisms within SIT, influence employees' perceptions of in-groups and out-groups, as well as their sense of status and belonging. These dynamics become more complex in expanding organisations, where structural and relational changes can challenge established norms and group boundaries. The following sections explore these processes and their implications for maintaining organisational cohesion and alignment during growth.

2.1.1 Social categorisation and In-group/Out-group dynamics

Social categorisation is another core aspect of SIT, describing the cognitive mechanisms through which individuals distinguish both themselves and others as members of specific social groups (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). In an organisational context, social categorisation typically occurs around roles, expertise, or departmental affiliation, thereby shaping the boundaries of in-groups and out-groups (Oakes & Turner, 1980). The process of social categorisation shapes employees' perceptions by highlighting similarities among

members of their own group while emphasizing differences from other groups, thereby strengthening group identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Turner, 1985).

In the context of organisational growth, the formation of new subgroups emerges as a natural outcome, as employees adapt to structural changes, the expansion of teams, or the evolution of departmental boundaries. These newly formed subgroups have the capacity to influence team dynamics and collaboration, creating potential challenges for maintaining cohesion across the organisation (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). The management of in-group/out-group dynamics is critical for aligning these subgroups with the overarching organisational identity. Without careful attention to these dynamics, divisions between groups can escalate, potentially leading to disengagement or conflict (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The successful integration of new subgroups during organisational growth requires fostering a shared sense of purpose while respecting the unique contributions of each group.

2.1.2 Social Comparison and Identity Reinforcement

Social comparison has been demonstrated to play a crucial role in reinforcing organisational identity (Tajfel, 1982). Employees assess their standing within the organisation relative to others. According to SIT, individuals engage in upward social comparison, aligning with higher-status or more prestigious groups to enhance their self-concept and reinforce their social identity (Hogg & Turner, 1985). This process is central to the development of a positive self-image, as employees identify with groups that reflect positively on them (Chatman et al., 1986).

However, as organisations expand, social comparison dynamics can become more intricate. The emergence of subgroups or departmental divisions can precipitate an increase in inter-departmental comparisons, giving rise to shifts in perceptions of status and self-worth (Tajfel, 1982; van Knippenberg, 1984). These shifts in group status have the potential to influence collaboration and cohesion between departments, particularly in instances where

perceived inequalities between groups are present. It is therefore vital for organisations to manage these dynamics effectively to ensure that all groups feel valued and connected to the larger organisational identity, thereby maintaining motivation and engagement across all levels (March & Simon, 1958).

2.1.3 The Effect of Organisational Growth on Social Identity

The process of organisational growth and the associated structural changes can have a profound influence on the social identity of employees. As the organisation evolves, employees may experience shifts in their identification with the organisation, particularly as new subgroups or roles emerge. These changes can alter the salience of social identity and affect how employees perceive their connection to the organisation and to each other (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). The introduction of new norms and the integration of new employees has been shown to disrupt established identities and relationships. For example, Van den Heuvel et al. (2020), in a longitudinal study of employees during a large organisational merger, showed that structural changes notably affected employees' organisational identification, especially when alignment with new norms was unclear. Similarly, Khaw et al. (2022) conducted a mixed-methods study in a fast-growing technology firm that revealed how the integration of new employees disrupted existing team dynamics, highlighting the importance of managing transitions to maintain cohesion.

The repercussions of growth on social identity are not confined to individual experiences but extend to the broader dynamics within the organisation. As organisations expand, alterations in interdepartmental communication and collaboration have the potential to disrupt established identities, resulting in fragmentation and diminished collective action if not effectively managed (Drzensky & van Dick, 2013). This underscores the pivotal role of effective communication in preserving organisational unity, especially during periods of growth and structural transformation. The failure to address these challenges can result in the

erosion of employees' attachment to both the organisation and each other, thereby jeopardising the cohesion of the workforce.

2.2 Relational coordination theory

RCT, as developed by Gittell (2002), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding collaboration within dynamic, interdependent work environments. In contradistinction to conventional organisational theories, such as Fayol's classical management approach (1949) and Weber's bureaucratic model (1947), which accentuate formal structures and hierarchical control, RCT places emphasis on the social processes that facilitate collaboration and task coordination. The theory posits that effective collaboration is driven not only by clear roles and processes but also by strong relational networks that foster interaction, task integration, and alignment across departments (Gittell, 2002; Gittell et al., 2010).

In RCT, coordination refers to the interactive process through which interdependent tasks are aligned and integrated to achieve collective goals (Jarzabkowski et al., 2012). A fundamental aspect of this concept is the reciprocal relationship between communication and relationships. RCT underscores how frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication fosters task alignment, while relational dynamics—such as mutual respect, shared goals, and shared knowledge—underpin collaboration (Gittell, 2002b). This ensures that coordination remains robust even when roles or team structures shift, thereby supporting organisational flexibility during periods of change (Gittell, 2006).

RCT demonstrates how effective communication, and strong relationships form the foundation of a cohesive organisational identity. By promoting shared understanding and alignment with organisational goals, RCT strengthens collective identity and fosters cohesion, enhancing organisational commitment and employee engagement. The subsequent

sections will delve into the intricate relational dynamics and the pivotal role of communication in engendering these outcomes.

2.2.1 The role of communication in relational coordination

Effective communication is pivotal to relational coordination, particularly in environments where tasks are highly interdependent, and collaboration is imperative for organisational success (Gittell, 2002). Gittell (2002) asserts that the quality, timeliness, frequency, and accuracy of communication are critical factors for enabling relational coordination. These factors, when taken together, engender an environment in which teams can collaborate seamlessly, reduce misunderstandings, and enhance overall performance, thereby contributing to developing a cohesive organisational identity (Gittell & Douglass, 2012).

First, frequency of communication is fundamental. Regular communication fosters the development of trust and familiarity among team members, thereby establishing relationships that can withstand the intricacies of interdependent work. Frequent communication enables teams to respond with greater agility to new information or environmental changes (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001; Balas et al., 2012; Seaburn et al., 1996; Palinkas et al., 2009). This assertion is consistent with the tenets of network theory, which posits that the strength of relational ties is enhanced by the frequency of interactions (Granovetter, 1973). The maintenance of continuous communication has been demonstrated to strengthen relational bonds, thereby contributing to the enhancement of team cohesion and the attainment of superior performance.

Secondly, the timeliness of communication is of paramount importance, particularly in circumstances with challenges or change that arise within the organisational structure. Delayed communication can result in errors or missed opportunities, hindering performance and alignment. The concept of timely communication encompasses not only the swift

transmission of information but also the provision of the appropriate information at the opportune moment. This is especially critical in maintaining focus on shared organisational goals (Gittell & Douglass, 2012; Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001; Waller, 1999). Orlikowski and Yates (1991) further emphasize that timely communication is crucial when coordinating highly interdependent tasks.

Thirdly, the importance of accurate communication cannot be overstated. Inaccurate communication can lead to errors or delays, forcing teams to reconsider and clarify details. Accurate communication builds trust, facilitates informed decision-making, minimizes costly errors, and enhances organisational cohesion.. It also promotes shared understanding and alignment, which are essential for organisational efficiency and employee engagement (Faraj & Xiao, 2006; O'Reilly & Roberts, 1977).

Finally, problem-solving communication plays a critical role in overcoming challenges in interdependent work environments (Stevens & Campion, 1999; Jackson et al., 2006). Effective teams focus on collaborative problem-solving, prioritising collective learning and continuous improvement over assigning blame. This fosters a supportive environment where challenges are addressed through cooperation rather than defensiveness. As Deming (1986) suggested, effective problem-solving communication is essential for maintaining organisational cohesion and driving performance.

2.2.2 Relationship dimensions in relational coordination

RCT emphasizes the importance of relationship dimensions, such as shared knowledge, shared objectives, and mutual respect, in facilitating effective collaboration, especially in complex and interdependent environments.

Shared knowledge is defined as the extent to which team members have a mutual understanding of each other's tasks and the way these tasks are interconnected within the overarching workflow. This collective understanding plays a key role in preventing errors

and enabling proactive adjustments by teams. Research has emphasized the importance of shared knowledge in improving task performance and facilitating smoother collaboration, particularly in dynamic environments such as healthcare and education (Cook et al., 2000; Faraj & Xiao, 2006).

Shared goals are also crucial for aligning team members towards a common purpose. When team members are committed to collective goals, they are more likely to collaborate effectively and achieve high performance (Hackman, 1987; Gittell et al., 2010). The alignment of goals has been demonstrated to foster cohesion and facilitate coordination, particularly in settings where collective success is paramount, such as in healthcare and education (Hackman, 1987; Gittell et al., 2010).

Mutual respect is a prerequisite for effective collaboration, especially in multidisciplinary teams. Respect ensures that each team member's expertise is valued, thereby enhancing communication and coordination. It has been demonstrated that mutual respect helps overcome hierarchical barriers, prevents conflicts, and strengthens team cohesion (Gittell, 2000; Palinkas et al., 2009).

The relationship dimensions of shared knowledge, shared goals, and mutual respect are fundamental to relational coordination, enabling teams to collaborate effectively, adapt to challenges, and achieve organisational objectives (Gittell, 2000; Palinkas et al., 2009).

2.3 Integration of social identity and relational coordination theory

This study explores the influence of interdepartmental communication on employees' sense of organisational identity and cohesion during periods of organisational growth. By integrating the concepts SIT and RCT, the study explores the way communication and relational dimensions interact to shape employees' social identity within the organisational context.

SIT emphasises the pivotal role of group membership in the formation of collective identity. Central to SIT are the concepts of social categorisation and social comparison. Social categorisation enables employees to classify themselves and others into different groups (e.g. departments or teams), which influences how they perceive their place within the organisation. Social comparison, on the other hand, involves the comparison of one's group to others, thereby reinforcing group identity, particularly when teams or departments perceive themselves to be more competent or aligned with organisational values than others. These processes are critical in shaping employees' social identity and their perception of interdepartmental relations.

RCT focuses on the role of communication in fostering collaboration and alignment between teams. Key communication dimensions, such as frequency, timeliness, accuracy, and problem-solving, directly affect relational dimensions, including shared knowledge, shared goals, and mutual respect. These relational aspects, in turn, influence how communication is processed and understood, creating a feedback loop that enhances coordination, reduces misunderstandings, and fosters a cohesive work environment.

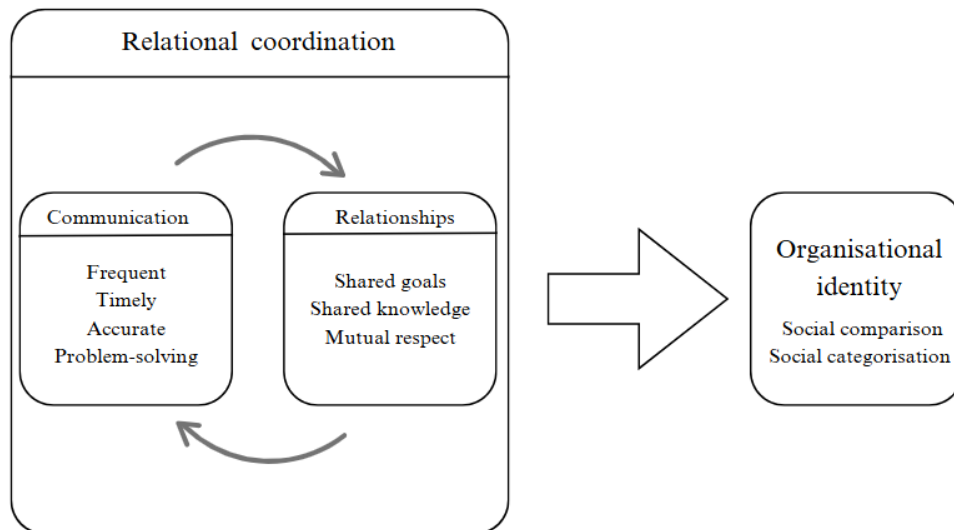
The interaction between SIT and RCT highlights how communication processes and relational dynamics combine to strengthen a unified organisational identity. By improving communication and fostering shared understanding, RCT helps mitigate the risks of fragmentation, particularly during organisational change. When employees experience strong relational coordination and a cohesive identity, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging, which in turn reinforces their social identity within the organisation. This dynamic interaction, as illustrated in Figure 1, emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between communication and relational dimensions in shaping organisational identity.

This integrated perspective underscores the pivotal role of interdepartmental communication—not only in enhancing collaboration but also in reinforcing employees'

social identity, especially during periods of structural change. The following section will present the methodological approach employed in this study, aimed at empirically investigating the practical applications of these concepts and providing insights into how interdepartmental communication influences employees' social identity and organisational cohesion during periods of growth. This approach connects the theoretical framework to real-world experiences, shedding light on the dynamics within the organisational context.

Figure 1

Framework of Relational Coordination and Its Influence on Organisational Identity



3. Methods

3.1 Research design and context

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine how interdepartmental communication influences employees' social identity and engagement during organisational growth. While communication is widely recognised as a key factor in shaping organisational identity, this research moves beyond merely acknowledging its influence by exploring how specific communication dimensions – frequency, timeliness, accuracy, and problem-solving – relate to relational factors such as shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect. The investigation entailed the conduction of semi-structured interviews, which were utilised to explore how employees perceive these interactions and the way they influence their sense of belonging and identification with the organisation. The case organisation, an ICT service provider specialising in network infrastructure, server room design, and monitoring solutions, has experienced substantial growth in recent years. This expansion was not a predefined strategic goal but rather a response to increasing market demand, resulting in a rapid increase in personnel and organisational complexity. Operating from two locations, the company has seen a rise in the number of employees across various departments, leading to the formation of distinct subgroups. This unanticipated growth has presented challenges in maintaining cohesion and aligning employees' identities with the organisation's overarching goals. As teams expanded and departmental boundaries evolved, differences in communication styles and work processes emerged. In this context, the study explores how communication practices influence employees' sense of belonging and collective identity, particularly in an organisation that has undergone organic expansion rather than structured scaling or mergers.

To further investigate these dynamics, semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees across various departments within the organisation. This method has been

demonstrated to be particularly effective for exploring complex social phenomena, as it achieves a balance between flexibility and consistency across participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). By allowing for open-ended discussions while maintaining a structured focus, semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to capture a wide range of experiences regarding employees' social identity and their perceptions of interdepartmental communication. This approach is widely recognised for its ability to facilitate in-depth exploration while ensuring alignment with key research themes (Bryman, 2008; Dörnyei, 2007).

The study received ethical approval from BMS, approval number 240809.

3.2 Participants

Purposive sampling, as described by Patton (2002), was employed to select participants representing a diverse cross-section of the organisation's workforce. The selection process was conducted in collaboration with a management team member and an HR representative to ensure diversity in roles, departments, and employment statuses. The rationale for this varied sample was discussed in an initial meeting, where selection criteria were established. The selection criteria aimed to include office-based and field-based employees, freelancers, and permanent staff while also considering variation in tenure, age, and job function.

To ensure consistency in classification, employees were grouped based on their primary workplace rather than their perceived professional identity. Consultants and sales staff, while frequently engaged in work that takes place off-site at client locations, maintain a structural connection to the office, where they have designated workspaces and regularly participate in office-based activities. Consequently, they were classified as office-based employees in this study. However, it is important to note that due to the nature of their roles, which involve frequent travel and direct client interactions, many consultants and sales

employees identify more closely with field-based staff. In contrast, data installers, who are engaged exclusively in fieldwork, and freelancers, who are similarly engaged in data installation, were classified as field-based employees. While office-based employees hold a variety of roles within the organisation, these specific functions are not detailed to maintain confidentiality. Rather than focusing on predefined organisational dimensions, this study examines communication across different teams and groups.

The management team selected 20 employees from different locations, ensuring representation of diverse perspectives. An overview of the participants and their classifications is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants and their job function

Participant	Job Function
Participant 1	Office-based
Participant 2	Office-based
Participant 3	Consultant
Participant 4	Office-based
Participant 5	Sales
Participant 6	Office-based
Participant 7	Data installer
Participant 8	Data installer
Participant 9	Office-based
Participant 10	Consultant
Participant 11	Office-based
Participant 12	Data installer
Participant 13	Consultant
Participant 14	Freelancer
Participant 15	Office-based
Participant 16	Data installer
Participant 17	Consultant
Participant 18	Freelancer
Participant 19	Office-based
Participant 20	Sales

Following the finalisation of the list of interviewees, the HR representative communicated with the selected participants via email. For office-based employees, including sales and consultants, the HR representative scheduled the interviews on the researcher's behalf, leveraging her access to their calendars to ensure smooth planning. Field-based employees were also informed about the study by the HR representative, who indicated that the researcher would contact them directly to arrange interviews. This approach was deemed particularly suitable for field-based employees due to their often-unpredictable schedules and frequent absence from the office, thus allowing for greater flexibility in accommodating their availability. To maintain the autonomy of the researcher and avoid the perception of the researcher as an extension of the organisation, the study's purpose was communicated transparently, ensuring participants understood that their responses would be treated confidentially and analysed independently.

The final sample comprised 20 employees, predominantly male, which reflects the gender composition of the organisation, where only a small number of women (approximately 4–5 out of 80 employees) are employed. The average age of the participants was 43 years ($SD = 10.6$), with ages ranging from 20 to 60 years. The average length of employment was 6.7 years ($SD = 8.3$), with tenure ranging from less than one year to 31 years. The sample also included two self-employed professionals (freelancers), one of whom no longer had direct employment with the organisation but continued collaborating through its staffing agency. The participants represented a variety of roles, including sales, consultancy, service, project management, data technology, and self-employed contractor positions.

The sample size was determined to ensure data saturation, i.e. the point at which no new themes or insights emerge (Guest et al., 2006). This approach prioritises depth of understanding over representativeness (Mason, 2010). The study's comprehensive approach,

incorporating office-based and field-based employees, as well as freelance contractors, ensured a diverse range of perspectives on interdepartmental communication and collaboration. The inclusion of external contractors was found to be essential for achieving a nuanced understanding of the relational dynamics between internal and external personnel, which was crucial for comprehending the phenomena under study.

3.3 Data collection

The interview schedule for this study was designed to explore key aspects of social identity and communication within an ICT organisation. The primary focus of the schedule was to ascertain how these factors influenced employees' sense of belonging and intergroup relationships. Prior to the commencement of the interviews, the participants were provided with a comprehensive explanation of the study's objectives, methodologies, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Informed written consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of their involvement and how their data would be used (Manti & Licari, 2018). Each interview commenced with an introduction, an explanation of the study's purpose, and an assurance of confidentiality. Participants were asked for consent to record the conversation, and the opening questions were designed to gather basic information and create a comfortable environment for discussing more sensitive topics.

The interview schedule was organised into three main sections: basic information, social identity and group dynamics, and social identity and communication. The first section aimed to gather fundamental details about the participants' roles, professional histories, and job satisfaction. This provided a foundation for understanding their experiences within the organisation, which were then connected to their views on social identity and communication. The interview schedule comprised the following example questions: "What is your role

within the organisation?", "How long have you worked here?", and "Can you describe a typical workday?"

The second section of the study focused on participants' perceptions of the organisation's overall identity and their specific workgroup, such as office, field, or freelance employees. The objective of this section was to explore their sense of group identity (sub-identity) in relation to their broader identification with the company, as conceptualised in SIT. The participants were invited to describe the organisation in three words, which helped capture their perceptions of the company's organisational identity. They were then asked to describe their own workgroup in a similar manner, enabling a comparison between their individual sub-identity and the overall organisational identity. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to reflect on the aspects they valued most in an organisation and how these aligned with the company's culture, which relates to RCT by emphasizing the importance of shared goals, mutual respect, and collaboration between different groups within the organisation.

The third section of this study examined communication practices between groups and the subsequent influence on participants' social identity. The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was originally intended to be a central component of the interviews, with the objective of exploring events that facilitated or hindered communication. The CIT has been extensively utilised to investigate specific events that considerably influence communication, as it facilitates the identification of critical moments that either promote or hinder group interactions (Flanagan, 1954). Although participants naturally shared relevant incidents, rendering the formal use of CIT unnecessary, it still prompted deeper reflection on critical moments influencing intergroup relationships. The questions in this section addressed both positive and negative interactions with other groups and compared communication within and outside their own group, connecting these moments to SIT and RCT by examining how

communication practices affect group identity, coordination, and relational dynamics between workgroups.

The interviews were conducted in two modes: online and offline. The majority of interviews were conducted at the organisation's office, while interviews with field-based employees were conducted by telephone, as these employees were often off-site. The duration of interviews ranged from 17 to 55 minutes, with an average duration of 30 minutes. The duration of each interview was determined by the availability and preferences of the participants. It is noteworthy that all interviews were recorded for transcription and analysis, with the exception of one participant who opted against being recorded. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were encouraged to share any additional thoughts or insights.

This structured approach enabled the collection of rich, context-specific data on communication practices and social identity within the organisation, offering insights into how intergroup relationships are shaped by communication. Furthermore, it was noted that this method highlighted areas for improving the cohesion of organisational culture during periods of growth and change. The complete interview schedule is included in Appendix B.

3.4 Data analysis

The present study employs a qualitative approach, namely thematic analysis. This approach is recognised for its flexibility and accessibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This methodological framework is particularly well-suited to examining the influence of communication and relational coordination on organisational identity and cohesion, as it enables the identification of patterns and themes within complex organisational dynamics. The adaptability of this method facilitates the integration of diverse participant perspectives and the discovery of unanticipated insights, while its systematic approach ensures clarity in handling large datasets (King, 2004). These qualities make thematic analysis an effective

method for exploring the relational and communicative processes that shape social identity within organisations.

The analysis process was initiated with the transcription of interviews in their verbatim form, ensuring an accurate representation of the participants' responses. The utilisation of high-fidelity audio recordings guaranteed precise documentation, while the subsequent transcription process emphasised the selection of relevant and meaningful quotations. This focused approach was instrumental in identifying robust patterns that were aligned with the study's objectives. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this approach is central to thematic analysis, facilitating the identification of key themes within qualitative data. Tuckett (2005) also emphasises the importance of a meticulous selection of quotations in preserving the integrity of the analysis. Personal identifiers were systematically removed, and all identifying details were replaced with anonymized labels to ensure participants' confidentiality, as suggested by Kang and Hwang (2023).

The preliminary stage of the research involved familiarising oneself with the data, which necessitated repeated readings of the transcripts to immerse the researcher in the content. The quotations were selected with great care to reflect important themes and diverse perspectives, thus enhancing the richness and credibility of the analysis while adhering to ethical standards, as emphasised by Eldh et al. (2020) and Lingard (2019). This methodological approach guaranteed that the findings were both representative and grounded in the data, thereby facilitating a nuanced understanding of the relational and communicative dynamics that shape organisational identity.

The subsequent phase entailed the systematic coding of the data, commencing with an inductive approach in which codes were derived directly from the participants' responses. The adoption of this inductive phase was instrumental in facilitating the identification of patterns, a process that was conducted without the imposition of predefined theoretical frameworks.

This methodological decision ensured that the analysis remained firmly rooted in the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this inductive approach is fundamental in thematic analysis, as it allows for the emergence of themes directly from the data, without prior assumptions. In the subsequent deductive phase, these codes were linked to theoretical concepts from SIT and RCT. SIT, as conceptualised by Tajfel and Turner (1986), provides a framework for examining how internal communication practices influence employees' identification with the organisation, particularly through processes such as social categorisation and group identity. RCT, as developed by Gittell (2002), was employed to analyse how communication dimensions (e.g. frequency, timely, accuracy, and problem-solving) interact with relational dimensions (e.g. shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect). The integration of inductive and deductive coding approaches enabled the analysis to capture both emergent patterns from the data and theoretical insights, thereby offering a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between communication, relationships, and the formation of organisational identity.

Following the coding of the data, the identified codes were grouped into categories and then organised into key themes. A theme is defined as "a meaningful pattern within the data that is relevant to the research questions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While categories provide structure, themes capture broader patterns (Creswell, 2013). The overarching themes that emerged from this analysis are: connectedness, engagement, distance, growth, collaboration, communication, and interaction. These were derived through a systematic grouping of related codes to gain insights into how communication and relational coordination shape employees' sense of belonging and interdepartmental collaboration.

To provide a structured analysis, these themes were examined through the lenses of SIT and RCT. The former focuses on how social identities are shaped by communication and interaction, which is reflected in themes such as connectedness, engagement, and group

membership. RCT, in turn, examines how communication and coordination across departments influence organisational functioning, with particular emphasis on collaboration, communication, and interaction. The integration of these theoretical perspectives enables a systematic understanding of how communication and relational coordination influence employees' organisational identity and cohesion.

In line with the research question—how do employees perceive relational coordination between departments, and how does this influence their sense of organisational identity and cohesion during organisational growth?—the emerging themes provide insight into the key mechanisms underlying these processes. Specifically, the findings will illustrate how connectedness, engagement, and distance affect employees' identification with the organisation, while collaboration, communication, and interaction shape interdepartmental cohesion. Tables 2 and 3 present an overview of the themes and categories identified in relation to SIT and RCT, offering a structured representation of how these elements manifest within the data.

Table 2

Themes and Categories of SIT in Organisational Growth

Connectedness	Engagement	Distance	Growth
General connectedness	Overall engagement	Distance within the organisation	Growth and strategy
Individual connectedness	Engagement within teams and groups	Distance between locations and geography	Impact of growth on structure and organisation
Social connectedness	Organisational engagement	Distance between workgroups and roles	Individual growth
Connectedness through context and circumstances	Individual engagement		Challenges and issues due to growth

Note: This table outlines the themes and categories related to connectedness, engagement, distance, and growth as analysed through the lens of SIT. These themes reflect how employees' sense of social identity and belonging within the organisation is shaped

during periods of organisational growth.

Table 3

Themes and Categories of RCT in Organisational Growth

Collaboration	Communication	Interaction
General collaboration	Communication structure	General interaction and social dynamics
External collaboration	Communication skills and evaluation	Limitations and reduced interaction
Improvement of collaboration	Internal communication	Informal interaction and social events
Collaboration problems and limitations	Management communication	Interaction work processes
Collaboration relationships and team dynamics	Personal and social communication	Positive interaction and relationship building
Collaboration structure and organisation	Specific communication goals or contexts	
	Communication as the key to connectedness	
	Communication challenges	

Note: This table presents the themes and categories related to collaboration, communication, and interaction, as analysed through the lens of RCT. These themes highlight how communication and relational coordination mechanisms influence employees' collaboration, engagement, and interaction, particularly during organisational growth.

To guarantee the reliability and validity of the data analysis, several measures were implemented. Initially, member checking was conducted, enabling participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the interpretations made from their responses. This procedure was undertaken to guarantee that the findings accurately reflected their perspectives and that the interpretations were in alignment with their experiences. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is crucial for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research, as it allows participants to validate the researcher's interpretations. Secondly, an audit trail was maintained, documenting every decision made during the data analysis process. This meticulous documentation enabled the researcher to retrace the steps taken and ensured transparency in the analysis decisions. According to Koch (1994), the maintenance of an audit trail is instrumental in enhancing the dependability and confirmability of qualitative

research findings. The application of these methods ensured that the findings were firmly rooted in the data and closely aligned with the participants' perspectives.

By systematically analysing the identified themes and their theoretical linkages, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the role of communication and relational coordination in shaping organisational identity and cohesion. The subsequent section will present the study's primary outcomes, demonstrating how these dynamics manifest in practice and contribute to employees' experiences within the organisation.

4. Results

4.1 Employees' experiences of organisational identity

4.1.1 Connection and recognition

All employees interviewed reported a strong sense of connection to the organisation, which was frequently strengthened by their job satisfaction and the responsibilities entrusted to them. A substantial proportion of employees articulated sentiments of being valued, an emotional experience that served to further solidify their sense of organisational identification. This sense of belonging is not only facilitated by the tasks employees are given, but is also reinforced through both tangible (e.g., salary, bonuses, holiday packages) and intangible (e.g., staff parties, public recognition) forms of acknowledgement. The aforementioned factors contribute to the establishment of an organisational culture characterised by a sense of appreciation and respect among employees. One employee, for instance, noted:

Well, because I do my work with pleasure. And that also comes from how the organisation is. And you're also appreciated for that. So, both in terms of salary and, for example, at the end of the year: a Christmas package, a bonus, or a staff party. (Data installer).

This finding aligns with the tenets of SIT, which posits that recognition and rewards play a pivotal role in fostering employees' personal identification with the organisation. This identification, in turn, contributes to the development of a shared sense of belonging and community among employees. The act of recognition functions as a mechanism for reinforcing mutual respect, both between employees and the organisation, and among colleagues themselves, thereby facilitating social ties within the workplace.

Furthermore, the role of social categorisation within teams in the development of organisational identity is crucial. Employees exhibit a strong affiliation with their respective

teams, a sentiment that arises from collaboration, shared goals, and the cultivation of personal relationships. While these team-based connections are robust, they can also result in a reduced sense of connection with other teams. Nevertheless, employees generally do not perceive this limitation in a negative light, as illustrated by the following employee observation: *"Look, I don't have much to do with everyone. So, I don't always need to speak to those people."* (Office-based). Notwithstanding the team-centric identification, the broader organisational connection remains intact, with employees continuing to perceive themselves as part of the larger company framework. This duality – strong team identification coupled with a broader connection to the organisation – illustrates how social comparison processes and intrateam relationships shape the dynamics of organisational identification. While employees may attach importance to relationships with immediate colleagues, they simultaneously nurture a sense of organisational affiliation through external cues such as collective events and inter-team communications.

The role of social events and informal interactions in enhancing organisational connection is also crucial. Informal exchanges during breaks or team activities provide opportunities for employees to stay connected, both personally and professionally, promoting a shared understanding and fostering a deeper bond. One employee observed: *"In terms of contact, it's good, yes. And that's really fun. We play table tennis sometimes."* (Office-based).

Beyond the context of structured events, informal interactions facilitate engagement across departmental boundaries, thereby reinforcing employees' sense of belonging. One employee noted: *"They organise so many activities outside of work, sometimes even during work hours, that you really start to develop a bond with another team."* (Office-based). These moments of informal communication have the potential to transcend the conventional boundaries that delineate roles and locations, thereby facilitating connections between field and office-based employees and fostering mutual respect across teams. The regular

organisation of social events, such as Friday drinks or team outings, provides a forum for these informal interactions to take place, thereby promoting shared values and reinforcing organisational identification across diverse employee groups.

Furthermore, the reinforcement of employees' connection to the organisation is facilitated by regular communication moments and structured events. One employee highlighted the importance of these interactions:

We have different moments throughout the year. Sometimes it happens via a newsletter or during a meeting. For example, we have four meetings a year, and a New Year's drink where they talk about who has left and who is joining. Every quarter, we have a quarterly drink, where it's mentioned: 'Piet is taking over that role from this person, or we're looking for new candidates for a specific position.' We're really involved, and even asked if we know anyone who would fit the profile.

(Consultant).

The events in question serve a dual purpose: firstly, they ensure that employees remain informed about organisational developments, and secondly, they create opportunities for social interaction that help to strengthen employees' connection to the organisation. The organisation's commitment to facilitating regular social interactions among personnel, such as quarterly social gatherings and team outings, strengthens the sense of organisational identification by ensuring that employees are kept engaged with the broader goals and changes within the organisation.

Furthermore, the integration of team members from diverse divisions has been well-received, thus emphasising the organisation's strategy of fostering interdepartmental collaboration. As one employee articulated: *"We visit interesting projects with the young people from X-ICT. These are data installers and people from the office, mixed. They do try a lot to connect people with each other."* (Data installer). This multifaceted approach,

combining social events and integrated team activities, has been identified as a key strategy for enhancing collaboration and improving relationships between field and office-based employees. Such initiatives facilitate a broader sense of shared identity, demonstrating the organisation's effort to bridge gaps and encourage connection across various divisions.

Within teams, personal communication, whether during or outside of working hours, plays an equally important role in strengthening the bonds between employees. Informal conversations, such as telephone calls or text messages, are used to address both work-related and personal matters. These interactions foster a collegial atmosphere in which employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns. As one employee explained: *"Yes, we often call when driving home, or we occasionally text. We use the time when we have nothing to do to chat. Sometimes it's about personal matters, but it can also be work-related."* (Consultant). The importance of informal channels of communication in enhancing team dynamics, facilitating problem-solving, and contributing to organisational identification is well-documented. These spontaneous exchanges foster not only personal relationships but also a sense of shared identity, as employees feel connected both through formal work activities and everyday interpersonal interactions.

In conclusion, the findings emphasise the pivotal role of social interactions, encompassing both formal and informal interactions, in reinforcing organisational identity. Participation in social events and informal communication practices enables employees to exchange knowledge, reinforce mutual respect, and develop interpersonal bonds that transcend team boundaries. These interactions are of critical importance in cultivating a cohesive organisational culture where employees feel they belong and are valued. It is therefore vital to recognise the pivotal role of communication practices in facilitating these interactions, as they are instrumental in fostering a robust sense of organisational identification. This, in turn, ensures that employees do not merely identify with their

immediate teams but also with the broader organisation, thereby contributing to the establishment of an integrated and collaborative work environment.

4.1.2 Challenges of Growth for Organisational Identification

The accelerated growth of the organisation has had a considerable influence on the organisational identity of its employees, giving rise to both opportunities and challenges that shape the overall company culture and employee experience. Comprehending the concept of organisational identification is pivotal in understanding the transformations employees undergo as they adapt their sense of belonging within an expanding organisation. While the company has succeeded in maintaining an informal atmosphere that facilitates connections and a sense of affiliation, the expansion has introduced a series of challenges, particularly for long-standing employees whose identification with the organisation was once defined by a tightly-knit, smaller team environment.

A salient shift has been witnessed in the organisation's approach to structuring its operations. While informal cultural elements persist, the introduction of formal structures and processes has caused a noticeable disruption in employees' sense of belonging. As one employee articulated: *“Whether you were a director or a cleaner, everyone knew a little bit about everything. And that’s no longer the case.”* (Office-based). This transition has resulted in a weakening of interpersonal relationships, engendering feelings of alienation and uncertainty. The environment, once characterised by collaboration, where informal communication and shared knowledge flourished, is now marked by growing fragmentation. As another employee has observed:

The organisation has grown tremendously in recent years, and what we are experiencing now are the growing pains. Too many different tasks have been assigned to different departments, while this could be done more efficiently. There are plenty of ideas about this, but too little is being done with them at the moment. (Sales).

As the company expanded, its communication dynamics have also undergone considerable change. Initially, communication was characterised by directness and informality, which fostered a sense of shared goals and mutual respect. However, with the increased complexity of the organisation, communication structures have become more layered and bureaucratic, thereby diminishing the timeliness and accuracy of information exchange. One employee commented: *“Now you have more people involved, more links in between.”* (Data installer). The increased number of communication channels has led to inefficiencies in the dissemination of information, which in turn complicates employees' ability to maintain shared knowledge and ensure operational effectiveness. The absence of clear goals further exacerbates this issue. One employee remarked:

We are stuck in a certain way because we don't really have goals for the year. So yes, the company is growing, but we haven't had a clear growth objective from the start, which I initially understood but now also experience myself. (Office-based).

This lack of structured planning contributes to employee uncertainty about the organisation's ability to sustain its growth trajectory effectively.

The organisation's decision-making processes have also changed because of the growth. In the past, decision-making meetings were an essential venue for problem-solving and collective input. However, with the growing complexity of the organisation, these meetings have become more bureaucratic. As one employee noted *“Instead of really having discussions in meetings, it's now more of a checklist”* (Office-based). This transition from collaborative, discussion-driven meetings to more formalised, checklist-style proceedings has resulted in a decline in employee engagement. Employees frequently perceive that their contributions are recognised but not given effect, engendering a sense of frustration and disconnection. This phenomenon has also manifested in the execution of work, as one employee observed:

If you sell something, you also need the people to execute it. But the people responsible for implementation, calculation, work preparation, planning, and execution are always running just half a day behind. In the end, everyone has to work five times harder. Sometimes that backfires a little. (Data installer).

A particularly salient concern among employees is the perceived lack of transparency and openness from management, which further undermines the shared goals that once characterised the organisation. As one employee articulated: *“What actually happens to the work that we, as calculation salespeople, bring in—can the planning handle it?”* (Office-based). Another employee highlighted the broader challenge, noting:

The rapid growth has created many challenges, including the need to work with two different systems, which requires extra time and energy from colleagues who are already experiencing high workloads. This pressure affects the atmosphere because people react differently under stress. (Sales).

This pressure has been identified as a contributing factor to an increase in workplace tensions and frustrations, which in turn has had a detrimental effect on organisational identification.

Notwithstanding the challenges posed by growth, employees continue to value the informal communication culture that has long fostered collaboration and minimised hierarchical barriers. As one employee articulated: *“In other companies, when there is a large hierarchical distance, people lower in the hierarchy can be suspicious. Here, I don’t feel that this is the case.”* (Sales). This form of communication fosters a sense of unity and mutual respect across the organisation, thereby mitigating the sense of division engendered by formal structures. However, as the organisation expands and formal decision-making processes become more entrenched, a growing tension exists between the social categorisation within departments and the shared organisational identity that once prevailed.

Employees continue to articulate a desire to maintain a flat organisational structure, a feature that was a key factor in their initial attraction to the company. As one employee noted: *“I prefer working for a smaller company, not a big company with many layers. Otherwise, I might as well work for a company like KPN.”* (Consultant). This sentiment underscores the social comparison between the organisation's evolving structure and the more hierarchical structures of larger organisations that some employees seek to avoid.

As the organisation continues to expand, long-serving employees have expressed concerns about the erosion of the intimate, close-knit culture that previously characterised their experience and sense of belonging. One employee articulated their concerns as follows: *“In the beginning, we were with 11 or 12 people. It's becoming a bit more impersonal now.”* (Data installer). Another observed: *“It was always like, if I had a challenge, I'd send out a message, and out of the 10, at least 9 would be ready to help. But that's no longer the case.”* (Office-based). The decline in mutual familiarity, compounded by the growing demands of work, has led to feelings of isolation and detachment, profoundly eroding the sense of social cohesion that was once characteristic of the organisation. One employee articulated this transition with remarkable succinctness: *“Some guys have been here since the beginning and always speak highly of the company. Now that we're growing and it's getting busier, you sometimes have less time to socialise with your colleagues because you're simply too busy.”* (Data installer).

In conclusion, while the organisation's rapid growth has introduced necessary structural changes, it has also posed considerable challenges in maintaining the informal, cohesive culture that originally fostered a strong sense of organisational identification. The transition to more formalised structures and processes has given rise to tensions related to social categorisation, social comparison, and communication dynamics. It is therefore vital for the organisation to find a balance between the pursuit of growth and the preservation of

the values that initially attracted and united its workforce. Addressing issues such as work pressure, process optimisation, and improving transparency in decision-making will be key to mitigating the negative effects of expansion and maintaining a strong, shared organisational identity.

4.1.3 Lack of Role Clarity and Its Effects on Social Identity

The accelerated growth of the organisation, in conjunction with the challenges emanating from informal structures and communication practices, has given rise to substantial issues pertaining to role clarity. These issues are closely intertwined with employees' social identity, as the absence of clear role definitions directly affects both organisational identification and communication processes. When roles are ambiguous or poorly defined, employees often experience confusion regarding their responsibilities. This confusion has been shown to diminish employees' ability to align with the organisation's goals and collaborate effectively with their colleagues. This ambiguity has been shown to disrupt both individual and collective social identities, as employees find themselves unable to integrate into an organisational framework that relies on clear, shared knowledge and mutual respect.

The ambiguity surrounding employees' roles has a profound influence on social categorisation. Employees' attempts to understand their place within the organisational structure become fraught with difficulty, as they struggle to identify with specific teams or groups. This pervasive uncertainty regarding their role and status frequently gives rise to a fractured sense of belonging within the organisation. One employee articulated this perplexity, stating: *"When I receive a request, I handle everything from calculations to preparing and presenting the quote, even joining a client call and ensuring the signature is signed. Then I wonder: what is my colleague in the field doing?"* (Office-based). The convergence of responsibilities has been demonstrated to result in a diminution of both

individual clarity and collective identity. The creation of competing claims to ownership over various tasks hinders employees in their social comparison processes. This hindrance impedes their capacity to evaluate their contributions in relation to those of their colleagues, thereby weakening their sense of shared purpose and mutual respect.

As roles become ambiguous, so too does the communication within the organisation. Employees have reported that communication frequently becomes fragmented and inefficient due to the absence of clearly defined responsibilities. This has been shown to result in a breakdown in effective collaboration and problem-solving, which in turn has the effect of creating a further distance between employees and a common understanding of their work and the organisation's strategic objectives. One employee highlighted the challenges arising from this situation, noting: *"The structure in tasks and processes is lacking, and individual responsibilities are barely defined, which sometimes complicates communication."* (Office-based). In the absence of clear, timely and consistent communication, employees find it increasingly difficult to remain aligned with the organisation's goals. This can result in feelings of alienation and a reduction in organisational identification. As these challenges persist, employees' social identities become further detached from the collective sense of belonging, thereby undermining the cohesion necessary for successful teamwork.

The ambiguity surrounding roles is further compounded by the absence of clear growth trajectories for employees. One employee articulated this frustration, stating: *"We are working on it, but when I started here, it was a bit unclear: 'What is my function now?' Personally, I am getting by, but where can I grow? What are the opportunities? That's not really clear."* (Office-based). This absence of direction has consequences for employees' understanding of their roles and undermines their sense of progression within the organisation. The absence of clearly delineated career development opportunities engenders a sense of disengagement among employees, which in turn erodes organisational loyalty.

Moreover, role ambiguity has been demonstrated to exacerbate issues surrounding workload distribution. As one employee noted:

It would help if everyone had more clarity on what exactly is expected of them. When I first started here, I didn't really know what I was responsible for. And that means some people can offload tasks by saying it's not their responsibility, while others become overloaded. You see that too – one person feels very responsible and is busy, while another seems to get away with it more easily. (Office-based).

This absence of clarity engenders disparities in workload management and can engender a sense of unfairness, which ultimately impedes the development of trust and cooperation among colleagues. This situation, in turn, has been shown to weaken employees' social identity, as feelings of inequity and misalignment hinder their emotional connection to the organisation.

To address the challenges previously mentioned, it is evident that employees are in favour of a greater degree of structure, with clearly defined roles and stronger leadership, whilst still maintaining their freedom and flexibility. One proposed solution is the appointment of team leaders for each department, with the potential to enhance communication and clarify responsibilities. However, it is imperative that this structure does not impede autonomy. Achieving an equilibrium between structure and flexibility has the potential to enhance organisational identification, enabling employees to align with company goals while retaining the flexibility to contribute in their own way.

4.2 Subgroups and departmental identity within X-ICT

4.2.1 Formation of subgroups

The accelerated development of the organisation has resulted in the establishment of numerous subgroups, which are primarily categorised according to departmental, functional, and team-based divisions. While these subgroups have been shown to engender a sense of

belonging and reinforce organisational identity at the team level, they simultaneously present challenges to overall cohesion. A salient dynamic in this regard pertains to the mounting inclination among employees to align more closely with their immediate teams than with the organisation. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced when considering the distinction between office-based and field employees. The physical separation between these groups intensifies social categorisation processes, influencing patterns of identification and interaction. The differentiation between in-groups (immediate teams) and out-groups (the broader organisation) has the potential to hinder shared organisational identification and reinforce perceptions of difference rather than unity. One employee highlights the role of distance in shaping workplace dynamics:

I work alone, so it's me, myself, and I. The physical distance is about 170 to 180 kilometres. But with modern communication tools like the phone or Teams meetings, I can still keep in good contact with my colleagues. It's not always ideal, but it works. The distance can sometimes be a challenge, but the communication lines are short. (Office-based).

Despite the enabling effect of digital communication in facilitating connectivity among employees despite geographical separation, it does not fully replicate the spontaneous, informal exchanges that are crucial for fostering a shared sense of organisational identity. The absence of frequent, informal problem-solving interactions has been shown to weaken shared knowledge, mutual respect, and collective understanding. This challenge is particularly pronounced in environments where geographical separation reinforces social distinctions and limits the formation of cohesive relationships across teams.

In addition to geographical distance, the organisation implemented a new office layout aimed at enhancing communication and collaboration. One employee noted that this modification led to a more defined organisational structure, stating:

Because of that, everyone knows more where they stand. And gradually, what we still had quite a lot of were little islands. That has now become less. You have the three dimensions: monitoring, server room, and cabling. Now, the server room and cabling operations are here together. And the sales of server room and cabling are upstairs, together. So that already contributes quite a lot. It makes you communicate more with each other rather than back and forth. (Office-based).

The new layout was designed with the intention of optimising operational efficiency. However, unintended consequences emerged, including the reinforcement of subgroups. As one employee expressed:

I really regret the relocation of our workspaces. We were such a strong group together—it's still the same team spirit, but we've been separated physically. From higher up, it was decided that all project managers and work planners should sit together, leaving us as consultants to move to a different office. While we have a nice office, we're no longer situated among the work planners and project managers. (Consultant).

Thus, despite the layout's initial goal of improving functional alignment, it unintentionally disrupted existing social networks and reinforced physical separation.

The presence of professional diversity within the organisation serves to further reinforce the formation of subgroups. Employees from different functional backgrounds, including data installers, IT specialists, and office-based employees, exhibit distinct work styles and communication preferences. As one employee noted: *"If you let someone from HR talk to a technician, they sometimes speak a different language. It feels like a different vibe."* (Consultant). Another employee elaborates: *"We come from a practical technical background, like electricians. It's just a different type of person than a specialist. Can you bring them together? I don't think it's something you should try."* (Office-based). The

perspectives illustrate how functional distinctions contribute to social categorisation, thereby reinforcing an "us versus them" mentality. While robust intra-group bonds can engender loyalty and expertise, they may also create barriers to inter-functional collaboration, thereby impeding the extent to which employees develop a shared organisational identity.

The divide between field and office-based employees further exemplifies this fragmentation. Field employees, in this case the data installers, report a sense of detachment from their office-based counterparts. Their limited participation in company-wide meetings, informal gatherings, and absence from the office exacerbates this sense of isolation, reducing opportunities for cross-group identification. This segmentation weakens shared knowledge, restricts collaboration, and inhibits the development of an overarching organisational culture. Nevertheless, it is not seen as very problematic. One field employee offers the following reflection on this divide: *"I don't think it's going to happen. No, I don't think you can get the field and office employees together. We're pretty much always working independently, and they sit together every day, having coffee, around the kitchen table."* (Data installer). This remark serves to emphasise the pivotal role that daily social interactions play in the reinforcement of group identity. Employees who are office-based, and thus share a physical space, naturally cultivate stronger interpersonal connections. In contrast, field employees, who work in isolation, develop an independent work identity. The absence of frequent, spontaneous interactions serves to further entrench social categorisation, thereby diminishing the likelihood of cross-group integration.

Despite the evident divisions amongst employees, there is no consensus regarding the perception of these divisions as detrimental. While robust team bonds may curtail cross-group interaction, employees articulate a pervasive sense of organisational belonging, contingent on their active engagement in inter-team communication. One employee observes: *"I think it's fine the way it is. Look, if you don't put in the effort, if you don't reach out to*

others... you shouldn't always expect everything from others, so to speak." (Data installer).

This standpoint posits that employees tend to embrace subgroup formations as an inherent aspect of workplace dynamics, contingent upon the existence of opportunities for cross-team engagement. Organisational interventions, such as team-building activities and company-wide social gatherings, play a crucial role in mitigating these divisions. An employee underscores the importance of these initiatives: *"They organise so many activities outside of work, sometimes even during work hours, that you really form a bond with people from another team."* (Office-based). These activities serve as mechanisms for fostering intergroup interaction and mitigating the effects of social categorisation.

In conclusion, frequent, informal, and problem-solving-oriented communication is critical in bridging group divides and fostering shared organisational identification. While the existence of subgroups is an inherent feature of organisational structures, strategic interventions can enhance cohesion and reinforce a shared organisational identity. Such interventions can include facilitating informal interactions, promoting cross-functional initiatives, and ensuring frequent, accurate, and timely communication.

4.2.2 Departmental identity and internal communication challenges

In organisations undergoing growth, the structural and hierarchical separation between management, office-based employees, and field-based employees can result in a range of challenges. A salient consequence of this is the reinforcement of distinct departmental identities, which has the potential to impede opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration and the cultivation of a shared organisational identity. As one employee observes: *"There is more distance between management and the rest, especially between management and the field employees."* (Office-based). Whilst employees generally report a sense of organisational belonging, the complex hierarchical structure can create a division between groups, particularly between management and data installers. Despite efforts by

management to communicate effectively, employees perceive a lack of responsiveness to staff initiatives. As articulated by one participant:

What could be improved is clearer communication. It should be more explicit what the management wants and the direction we're heading. What do we need for that?

There is still insufficient clarity on these matters. A lot of ideas are coming from staff, but it feels like not much is being done with them. This is not just my feeling, but also from other departments. We have immense knowledge in-house, across all areas. It's often said: 'Let us know, we'll look into it and get back to you.' But for some, it takes too long or remains unclear what happens with it. (Sales).

This observation suggests that the distance between management and employees is not solely a physical or hierarchical issue, but also reflects limited interaction and a lack of mutual involvement in decision-making processes.

The situation is further compounded by the organisation's workflow, which is structured to progress sequentially from sales to consultants, work preparation, and finally to data installers. This limits interaction between departments that are not directly connected in the operational chain. As one participant observes: *"You deal a lot with planning and work preparation, but you rarely speak to a calculator or a salesperson. They're at the beginning of the process, so you don't see them"* (Data installer). This disconnection has been shown to inhibit relational coordination, which is critical for the development of shared knowledge, mutual respect, and collaborative problem-solving. These elements are key to fostering organisational cohesion.

Cultural and professional distinctions have also been identified as contributing factors to these divisions. As earlier mentioned, employees frequently exhibit a stronger sense of identification with their immediate teams than with the organisation. This tendency fosters the development of social comparisons rather than the establishment of a cohesive

organisational identity. As one employee observes: *"There is indeed a gap, partly due to cultural differences. People from one location feel less at home in another and vice versa."* (Consultant). Furthermore, professional identities, shaped by job function and work culture, serve to further complicate perceptions of collaboration. As one employee observes: *"I come from the network cabling side, almost like an electrician. That's just a different kind of crowd than IT people. Can you bring that together? No, of course not. I don't think you should even try."* (Office-based). The emergence of identity-based distinctions, originating from both job function and work culture, poses considerable impediments to interdepartmental cooperation.

Moreover, the manner of communication between employees has been shown to exacerbate inefficiencies and tensions. Indirect modes of communication have the potential to erode trust and transparency, as illustrated by the following observation from an employee: *"Sometimes, I feel like people talk behind my back. I prefer people to come to me directly."* (Office-based). Another employee emphasizes the need for more proactive and inclusive communication: *"I'm working on something, and two others are discussing it without involving me. I'd prefer direct interaction."* (Office-based). These challenges in communication have been shown to be a contributing factor to a lack of shared understanding, which in turn hinders cross-departmental collaboration.

The integration of freelancers into the workforce introduces an additional layer of complexity. As external workers, freelancers are often distanced socially and professionally from permanent employees, which limits their integration into the organisation's culture. As one employee observes: *"Freelancers create distance from permanent employees."* (Consultant), while another employee adds: *"Freelancers lack the specialised knowledge that we have. That sometimes leads to issues with work quality."* (Data installer). These discrepancies highlight the influence of workforce composition on knowledge sharing, collaboration, and internal cohesion.

The communication barriers between departments also manifest in operational inefficiencies, particularly between sales and execution teams. As one participant elucidates:

There is just a difference. This comes from different interests. Sales has a different interest than project management or execution. I work more with departments that are a bit further away from me, like contracts and service. It could really be better.

(Office-based).

Data installers report receiving critical project information too late, creating frustration and inefficiencies. One employee shares: *"Sometimes you really have to switch or call to understand what's going on. Sometimes you think this should have been communicated earlier."* (Data installer). These delays in communication serve to emphasise the necessity for more frequent information exchange to improve coordination.

Employees further emphasise the necessity for enhanced communication between sales and consultants, particularly in the initial phases of projects. While there has been some progress in involving consultants at earlier stages, more frequent interaction is still required to ensure alignment from the outset. This persistent challenge underscores the necessity of striking a balance between prompt communication and inclusivity, thereby ensuring that both teams are aligned in their efforts from the project's inception. Greater transparency from the sales team remains crucial to bridging communication gaps and achieving shared objectives.

Another marked absence of interdepartmental collaboration is evident, particularly among employees who function autonomously or in diminutive teams. One employee offers the following reflection: *"I have little contact with some people. Some colleagues I never see because I work on independent projects."* (Freelancer). Another adds: *"When there's overlap, we get in touch, but a more proactive approach to communication is often lacking."* (Office-based). This absence of proactive communication poses a considerable obstacle to the exchange of knowledge, the establishment of mutual respect, and the facilitation of cross-

departmental problem-solving. These elements are imperative for the transcendence of social silos and the promotion of a unified organisational culture.

Notwithstanding the challenges encountered, employees recognise that variations in departmental priorities contribute to the emergence of communication barriers. As one employee observes: *"Sales has different interests than project management or execution. That's just part of it. I don't have a problem with it."* (Office-based). Another employee points to the inherent challenges in a company with diverse departments, especially when those departments have vastly different specialisms: *"If you ask a data technician if they work with software, they might say, 'What's that?' or 'I know we use it, but I have no idea how it works.'" (Office-based). The disparities in role, background, and approach to work contribute to the complexity of integrating departments and fostering shared understanding.*

Whilst the concept of internal communication is broadly perceived in a favourable light, the identified challenges suggest the necessity for enhancements to be made in the way departments communicate with one another. As the organisation expands, it will become imperative for the organisation to adapt its communication practices to meet the evolving needs of employees and departments. Addressing these challenges will foster a stronger departmental identity, align employees with common goals, and support long-term success. Enhancing communication to be more timely, accurate, frequent, and transparent will not only strengthen social identity within the organisation but also improve overall performance and cohesion across departments.

5. Discussion

5.1 Main findings

The present study examined the influence of internal communication practices and relational coordination on employees' social identity during periods of organisational growth. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees in an ICT organisation to explore the relationship between communication practices, interdepartmental coordination, and the development of organisational identity. The findings reveal that both formal communication (e.g., structured team meetings) and informal communication (e.g., casual interactions during breaks) play a pivotal role in fostering a sense of belonging and reinforcing group cohesion. However, the findings also highlight that a lack of timely updates, unclear role delineations between departments, and inadequate relational coordination contributed to feelings of confusion, frustration, and a weakened collective identity among employees.

The findings are interpreted through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Relational Coordination Theory (RCT). Tajfel and Turner's (1985) proposition posits that identification with an organisation fosters solidarity and strengthens group cohesion. In this context, informal communication within teams emerged as a critical mechanism for enhancing employees' social identity. Employees reported that regular informal interactions, including shared breaks, team events, and casual conversations, were crucial for developing and reinforcing bonds within teams. These interactions have been shown to strengthen employees' identification with the broader organisation by promoting a sense of shared group identity, a fundamental concept in SIT.

These informal interactions were also instrumental in the development of shared knowledge, mutual respect, and trust – critical elements of RCT (Gittell, 2002). Gittell's (2002) work on relational coordination highlights that informal communication fosters trust and enhances problem-solving within teams, thereby creating a cooperative environment that

reinforces organisational cohesion. This finding is consistent with research by Guo and Ayoun (2023), who demonstrated how informal communication can contribute to the strengthening of group identity through relational coordination.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that informal communication can have unintended consequences if it becomes insular. As Smith and Turner (2019) caution, when informal interactions are confined to specific groups or departments, they can foster exclusivity, groupthink, and undermine broader organisational cohesion. This underscores the necessity for strategic management of informal communication to prevent the formation of isolated subcultures and to leverage the relational benefits that effective communication coordination can offer.

Conversely, the study also revealed that ineffective interdepartmental communication had a detrimental effect on employees' social identity. This finding lends support to the RCT, which emphasises the significance of accurate, timely, and frequent communication for effective coordination between departments (Gittell, 2002). Employees reported communication breakdowns, including unclear role definitions and delayed updates between sales and consultants, leading to uncertainty, frustration, and a diminished sense of belonging. These issues hindered the establishment of shared goals and mutual respect, both of which are essential for maintaining organisational cohesion (Jones, 2019). The frustration resulting from these communication breakdowns exemplifies how poor relational coordination can fragment group identity and weaken employees' identification with the organisation (Jones, 2019).

Despite organisational growth, interdepartmental collaboration was reported to be inadequate. Employees voiced discontent with the inefficiency of communication channels and the ambiguity of information-sharing procedures. This phenomenon has been explained by Hickson et al. (2003), who suggest that organisational growth can create pressures that

disrupt effective collaboration. The failure to communicate in a timely manner resulted in confusion, delays in project execution, and misalignment of goals, thereby weakening relational coordination and undermining social identity. These breakdowns in communication have been shown to erode trust and shared objectives, as highlighted by Gittell et al. (2020), thereby weakening both organisational cohesion and operational efficiency. Consequently, effective relational coordination is imperative for sustaining organisational cohesion, particularly during periods of growth.

Furthermore, inadequate coordination among departments was found to have a negative influence on employees' social identity. The respondents reported feelings of disconnection from the broader organisation due to poor interdepartmental communication, leading to fragmented identities within their respective teams. This finding serves to reinforce Gittell's (2002) assertion that both formal and informal communication are crucial for fostering shared norms and trust, which are essential for a cohesive organisational culture. Communication breakdowns, particularly between sales and departments such as project management and data installers, were identified as important contributors to these issues. The resulting delays and hindered trust-building further exacerbated employees' frustration.

To address these challenges, employees recommended integrating digital tools, such as project management software and internal messaging platforms, with a view to improving communication and coordination. The integration of such digital tools has been shown to engender more transparent and frequent interactions, thereby strengthening interdepartmental relationships and fostering a more cohesive organisational identity (Jones & Cooper, 2020). The use of digital tools plays a critical role in streamlining communication, minimising misunderstandings, and ensuring that employees remain aligned with the organisation's goals, thus enhancing both relational coordination and social identity (Jones & Cooper, 2020).

5.2 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of internal communication in shaping employees' social identity, several limitations must be acknowledged.

Firstly, as is characteristic of qualitative research, the findings of this study are context-specific and not intended for statistical generalisation. The study comprised 20 participants who were selected through purposive sampling to ensure data saturation, thereby facilitating an in-depth exploration of employees' experiences rather than achieving broad representativeness. While the study offers valuable insights into ICT organisations experiencing growth and managing decentralised workforces, it is important to note that internal communication structures and coordination mechanisms may function differently in organisations with highly centralised decision-making, rigid hierarchical models, or distinct industry norms. These structural and cultural variations have the capacity to influence the way internal communication influence's social identity, potentially resulting in divergent outcomes (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, by providing a detailed account of communication practices and challenges, this study enables researchers and practitioners to assess the relevance of its findings within their own organisational contexts.

Second, the use of semi-structured interviews and the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) relies on participants' recall of important events. Although recall bias or selective memory cannot be ruled out, the CIT assumes that the incidents highlighted by participants are the most meaningful to them and offer valuable insights into their perceptions rather than an objective account of events (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). The interpretivist approach prioritises understanding employees' subjective experiences over establishing factual accuracy. To reduce interviewer bias, careful question design, reflexivity and a neutral interview environment were maintained. Efforts to encourage open communication also aimed to reduce social desirability bias (Brewerton & Millward, 2001).

Thematic analysis, a well-established method for identifying patterns in qualitative data, inherently involves interpretation by the researcher, which introduces a degree of subjectivity (Creswell, 2009). While this study adopts an interpretivist approach that prioritises employees' subjective experiences, it is acknowledged that researcher assumptions may have influenced the identification and framing of themes. This subjectivity is a common characteristic of qualitative research, rather than a methodological flaw, but it does pose a challenge for replicability. To enhance the credibility of the study, rigorous coding procedures were followed, and themes were systematically developed. Nevertheless, the absence of peer review or member checking means that alternative interpretations have not been externally validated. In future research, the integration of validation techniques could enhance the analytical process while preserving the depth of qualitative inquiry.

Finally, the cross-sectional design captures employees' experiences and perceptions at a single point in time. This design limits the ability to explore how internal communication and social identity evolve, particularly during periods of organisational change or following interventions to improve communication practices. Longitudinal research would provide a deeper understanding of the long-term effects of internal communication on social identity, particularly in dynamic and growth-oriented organisations.

These limitations highlight the need for future research to address existing gaps by including larger and more diverse samples, conducting comparative studies in different organisational contexts, and using longitudinal designs to explore the long-term effects of internal communication on social identity.

5.3 Implications

5.3.1 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the understanding of the role of internal communication in shaping social identity by integrating SIT and RCT. The findings emphasise that clear,

timely, and frequent communication strengthens employees' organisational identification, fostering a sense of belonging and group cohesion (Gittell, 2002; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). This finding aligns with Kramer et al. (2016), who contend that transparent and inclusive communication fosters organisational identification.

Research on the topic of organisational communication has highlighted how fragmented interdepartmental communication can lead to a weakening of social identity (RCT). Poor communication can lead to uncertainty, frustration, and mistrust, which can hinder shared understanding and organisational cohesion (Gittell, 2002; Cramton, 2001). The importance of high-quality communication, with a focus on problem-solving and the sharing of knowledge, in sustaining organisational identity by fostering relational coordination across departments, has also been highlighted (Gittell, 2002; Kraut et al., 2002).

The study also underscores the interplay between formal communication channels and informal networks. While formal communication has been emphasised in previous research, informal peer-to-peer interactions are equally critical for sustaining organisational culture (Ruck et al., 2017). Effective relational coordination, founded upon shared objectives, respect, and trust, has been demonstrated to support both team cohesion and organisational identity (Gittell et al., 2010).

Future research could explore how formal and informal communication interact to shape social identity, particularly in remote or hybrid work environments, where digital tools are increasingly essential (Ahuja & Thatcher, 2012). The study revealed that effective use of these tools ensures timely, accurate communication, fostering trust and shared goals within dispersed teams.

Lastly, the study revealed how poor interdepartmental communication, such as misalignment of goals and delays in information exchange, weakens organisational culture. Future research should explore how communication strategies can be adapted during growth

to preserve organisational identity, focusing on improving communication quality to maintain cohesion despite change (Korte & Lin, 2013).

5.3.2 Practical implications

This research proffers practical recommendations for organisations seeking to enhance internal communication, strengthen organisational identification, and maintain a cohesive culture during periods of growth. The findings underscore the pivotal role of organisational identification in aligning employees with the organisation's objectives, particularly in contexts where complexity increases.

The maintenance of an informal culture is identified as being of crucial importance. Informal communication channels, such as social events and team-building activities, have been shown to foster collaboration, mutual respect, and stronger interdepartmental relationships (Jones et al., 2020). These informal interactions help employees feel connected and reinforce their social identity, even during periods of structural change (Hargie, 2011; Delise et al., 2010).

The role of team leadership in this regard is pivotal in ensuring the continuity of internal communication and the informal culture. Leaders should act as facilitators, ensuring clear communication while preserving a flat structure that encourages collaboration (Xenikou, 2019). This approach enables the maintenance of a supportive environment and the assurance of employee engagement in the context of organisational expansion.

In addition, it is recommended that organisations implement clear communication policies and utilise tools such as project management software to ensure timely and transparent communication across departments. When employees understand how their roles align with organisational goals, it fosters trust and commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

A notable challenge that organisations must face is the social categorisation between teams, a phenomenon that is especially pronounced during periods of organisational growth.

This can lead to fragmentation of communication and a weakening of organisational identification. To mitigate this issue and strengthen the collective sense of identity, it is recommended that organisations encourage cross-functional collaboration through joint projects and informal meetings (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; Loving, 2021).

The integration of field-based employees, particularly those who rarely visit the office, is another critical area (Morrison, 2004). Limited informal interaction with office-based colleagues can weaken their organisational identification. To address this, organisations should create virtual participation opportunities, ensure equal access to communication tools, and facilitate direct interactions like scheduled check-ins or mentorship programs. These initiatives can help build stronger connections between field- and office-based employees and reinforce organisational identity.

Finally, as organisations increasingly rely on freelancers, such as data installers, it is essential to integrate them into the culture. Providing targeted training and knowledge-sharing opportunities can help bridge gaps between freelancers and permanent staff, fostering better collaboration and improving overall team cohesion (van den Groenendaal et al., 2022). Improving communication between departments is crucial to prevent misunderstandings and enhance collaboration (Gittell, 2002). The regular dissemination of information through newsletters or meetings has been demonstrated to be an effective means of keeping employees informed about organisational changes, fostering trust, and strengthening their commitment to the organisation's goals (Gittell, 2002).

5.4 Conclusion

This study emphasises the significance of relational coordination and social identity in maintaining organisational cohesion during periods of growth. The integration of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Relational Coordination Theory (RCT) in the research reveals the way communication dimensions—such as frequency, timeliness, accuracy, and problem-

solving—interact with relational elements, including shared goals, knowledge, and mutual respect. The findings emphasise that effective interdepartmental communication plays a pivotal role in shaping employees' sense of organisational identity, particularly during periods of transition such as organisational growth. This study deepens our understanding of how relational and communicative processes can either strengthen or undermine employees' feelings of belonging and commitment.

The practical implications for organisations undergoing growth are clear. The maintenance of a cohesive organisational identity is contingent upon the cultivation of robust relational coordination and the facilitation of clear, timely communication between departments. By prioritising these elements, organisations can prevent identity fragmentation, enhance collaboration, and improve employee engagement. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on organisational dynamics during change and offers actionable strategies for leaders to sustain a strong sense of belonging and alignment within their teams.

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Appendix

Appendix A the use of AI

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT, ResearchRabbit, and DeepLwrite to search for relevant articles, enhance formal writing, ensure compliance with APA guidelines, and generate inspiration. Following the use of these tools and services, the author(s) meticulously reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take(s) full responsibility for the final content of the work.

Appendix B Interview scheme

Introduction

Step 1: Descriptive questions

What is your role within the organisation?

How long have you been working here?

What education/job did you have before starting in this role?

Could you provide a brief description of your daily tasks?

Do you enjoy working at this organisation?

- *Follow-up question: What makes your work enjoyable or less enjoyable?*

Step 2: Social identity groups

If you had to describe the organisation in three words that best represent it, which words would you choose?

- *Follow-up question: Could you explain why you choose these words?*

Could you describe the environment you work in within the organisation?

(Think about team size, who you work with, etc.)

How would you best describe your group (office-based employees, field-based employees, freelancers) in three words?

- *Follow-up question: Could you explain why you chose these words?*

What aspects are important to you in an organization you work for?

- *Follow-up question: Do these aspects align with the organisation's culture?*

When you look at the other groups (office-based employees, field-based employees, freelancers), what differences do you see in their work methods or approaches?

- *(So, if I understand correctly...) Summarize. Follow-up question: Are there also similarities or additional differences?*

Do you feel part of the organisation?

- *Follow-up question: Could you explain why you feel this way?*

Distance between individuals and groups

I'd like to understand your perception of the distinct groups within the organization. To do this, I'll ask how close or distant you feel from the various groups (office-based employees, field-based employees, and freelancers). Use a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means "very close" and 10 means "very far."

How close do you feel to the office-based employees?

(1 = "very close," 10 = "very far") Why did you choose this rating?

How close do you feel to the field-based employees?

(1 = "very close," 10 = "very far") Why did you choose this rating?

How close do you feel to the freelancers?

(1 = "very close," 10 = "very far") Why did you choose this rating?

Step 3: Social identity and communication

What does the distance between you and the other groups say about collaboration within the organization?

Can you describe a positive or negative event that influenced your relationship with these groups? *(What happened that brought groups closer or further apart?)*

- What exactly happened?
- Who was involved?
- What do you think caused this to happen?
- What were the consequences?
- Was this event typical, or was it an exception?

How do you experience communication with your colleagues within your own group?

- *Follow-up question: Which communication tools do you usually use? (Face-to-face, email, phone calls).*

How does this differ from communication with colleagues outside your group?

- *Follow-up question: Does this difference in communication affect how you interact with colleagues outside your group? If so, could you provide an example? (Do you feel connected to other groups or not?)*
- *Follow-up question: What do you consider important in communication with colleagues from other groups, and why?*

Do you think the way management communicates affects the distance between your group and other groups within the organization?

Do you think communication can contribute to a sense of connection with other groups in the organization?

- *Follow-up question: Is there anything you would like to change about communication within the organization?*
- *Follow-up question: What would you recommend improving collaboration and connection between the groups?*

Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experiences with communication within the organization and how it affects your social identity?