

# **Beyond The Meeting Room:**

*A Qualitative Study on Employee Perceptions and Experiences in Team Meetings and What They Tell Us*

## **Master Thesis**

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Effective team meetings, marked by active participation and collaboration, are of crucial importance for blue-collar workplaces in achieving organizational success. This thesis investigates the relationship between blue-collar workers' perception of their team meetings and their level of participation and collaboration, while also exploring the significance of fostering a sense of togetherness within this context. By investigating these relationships, the study seeks to identify factors associated with these outcomes to provide insights and practical recommendations for enhancing them.

**Method:** A qualitative study using a mixed-method approach was conducted with participants belonging to one organization, all of whom were shopfloor workers. Six participant observations of team meetings were conducted, followed by 15 semi-structured interviews with team members. The interview data were transcribed and coded inductively, following the principles of grounded theory.

**Result:** The results indicate that perceived impact of meeting contributions and perceived value attributed to them, as well as past meeting experiences, impact motivation for participation and collaboration. Perceived organizational support and responsiveness (and the lack thereof) and supervisor appreciation (and the lack thereof) related to meeting contributions are suggested to impact these perceptions. Sense of togetherness and group psychological safety are associated most strongly with enhanced levels of participation and collaboration.

### **Conclusion:**

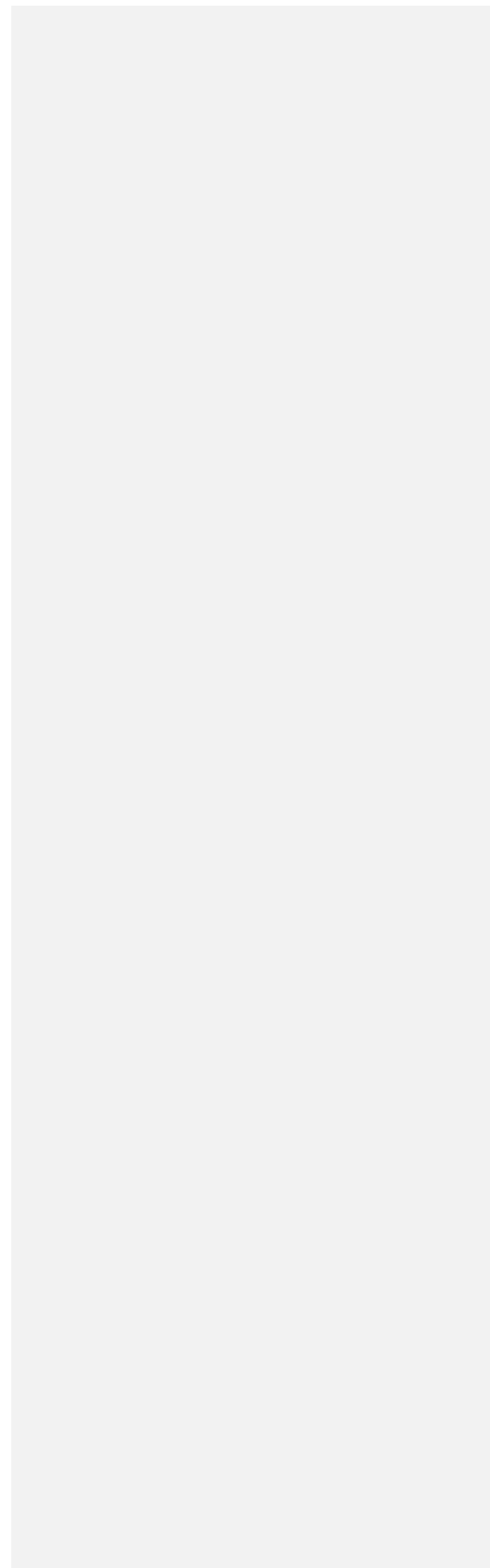
Both team dynamics and broader organizational dynamics play an important role in shaping meeting processes and their effectiveness in blue-collar teams. The contextual factors and challenges unique to the shopfloor context identified in this study play a significant role in shaping meeting perceptions and experiences. This underlines the relevance of studying blue-collar workers, whose perspectives are often neglected in meeting research which focused predominantly on white-collar settings. The implications and recommendations of this study are of value for scholars and practitioners aiming to optimize meeting effectiveness.

**Keywords:** *team meetings, meeting participation, collaboration, sense of togetherness, blue-collar workers*

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## 1 Introduction

Effective team meetings, marked by active participation and effective collaboration, are invaluable for today's organizations in navigating the complexities of today's dynamic business landscape (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2011; Yoerger et al., 2015). Especially for organizations that have implemented continuous improvement processes is the voice of front-line employees in team meetings irreplaceable for managing production environments. Similarly, collaboration in meetings enables teams to harness the collective intelligence of a team and allows for a comprehensive examination of issues, thereby reducing the possibility of overlooking critical factors (Stevens et al., 2009; Stulgiene & Ciutiene, 2014). The success of team meetings depends therefore on the ability of participants to engage actively and collaborate effectively. However, despite their significance are 41.9% of meetings evaluated as poor in quality (Schell, 2010), emphasizing the need for understanding the factors contributing to effective team meetings.

Scholars suggest that the key difference between teams that work effectively together and those that fail at it lies in their level of togetherness (Forsyth, 2021; Salas et al., 2015). It is explained that the strength of a team is derived from the qualitative and supportive relationships among its members (Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Hinsz & Bui, 2023). Teams with a strong sense of togetherness tend to foster an environment where members feel psychologically safe, enabling participation and ultimately enhancing open, effective communication needed for effective collaboration (Fyhn et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2020; Salas et al., 2015). Ineffective and poorly facilitated meetings with a lack of togetherness among team members, on the other hand, can drain attendees over time, lead to less favorable perceptions of the work environment, lower job satisfaction, diminish employees' efforts in participation, and overall decrease the quality of team performance (Leach et al., 2009; Lehmann-Willenbrock et al, 2013; Yoerger et al., 2015). Hence, a strong sense of togetherness in teams is indispensable for facilitating effective team meetings.

While the significance of effective team meetings resonates across contemporary organizations, the nuances embedded in each meeting's unique context and dynamics hinder the straightforward generalization of findings from existing research. While a considerable amount of meeting research has focused on white-collar workers (e.g., Cohen et al., 2011; Moham-edbhai et al., 2021; O'Neill & Allen, 2012), a notable gap persists concerning other occupational groups, such as blue-collar workers. Unlike white-collar counterparts, blue-collar workers might have distinct associations with meetings, as they commonly e.g., have less autonomy, different meeting objectives and team compositions. This difference in context, purpose, and

composition of meeting attendees necessitates a tailored exploration to capture the specific dynamics and challenges faced by this demographic.

Moreover, while team cohesion as a related concept has received substantial attention in group research (e.g., Carron & Brawley, 2003; Lim et al., 2016; Rawlings et al., 2023), the concept of togetherness remains an underexplored territory, especially within the context of blue-collar teams. Existing studies on togetherness have primarily centered around professional sports teams (Bourbousson & Fortes-Bourbousson, 2017; Wann et al., 2017) or virtual meeting settings (Ayashe et al., 2021; Modzelewski, 2013), leaving a substantial void in our understanding of how this concept operates within the intricate dynamics of blue-collar meeting environments.

Given the unexplored context of blue-collar workers' team meetings and the critical role of effective participation and collaboration in reaching meeting objectives, it is imperative to investigate the perceptions of these workers to understand the factors associated with their meeting behavior. Employee perceptions play a significant role in shaping employee behavior, including their level of participation in meetings (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Therefore, studying and understanding blue-collar workers' perceptions can provide valuable insights into the processes and factors that shape the current and future landscape of meetings (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Cohen et al., 2011). Moreover, considering the unique challenges and dynamics associated with blue-collar work environments, together with the recognized relevance of a sense of togetherness in fostering effective teamwork, investigating how perceptions of team meetings contribute to this sense is crucial for optimizing meeting effectiveness.

Followingly, this study aims to explore the relationship between blue-collar workers' perception of their team meetings and their level of participation, collaboration, and sense of togetherness. By investigating these relationships, the study seeks to identify factors associated with these outcomes to provide insights and practical recommendations for enhancing participation, collaboration, and a sense of togetherness and the overall effectiveness of blue-collar workers team meetings. The following research question will be addressed:

*“How do blue-collar workers' perceptions of their team meetings relate to their levels of participation, collaboration, and sense of togetherness?”*

In the following, the theoretical framework will be presented, followed by the methodology section, addressing the research design, case description, study participants, data collection and procedure, data analysis, and intercoder reliability. The subsequent section presents

the findings of the data collection, followed by the discussion section, presenting the main findings and theoretical implications, followed by practical recommendations, study limitations, and an outlook for future research, and ends with a conclusion.

## **2 Theoretical Framework**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for this study. The first section defines team meetings and elaborates on them from a process-oriented perspective and as affect-laden environments, discussing the role of affect and affective transfer processes in shaping the trajectory of meetings. The second section defines and differentiates between participation and collaboration as interaction processes in meetings and discusses their relationship in contributing to the effectiveness of team meetings. The third section explains how participation and collaboration processes depend on group psychological safety and proceeds with a discussion on the role of sense of togetherness and positive affective group tone in facilitating effective interaction processes and the absence thereof and negative affective group tone in inhibiting effectiveness. The framework ends with a summary as the last section.

### **2.1. Team Meetings**

Team meetings are commonly referred to as scheduled gatherings of team members within a workplace or organization on a regular or unregular basis (Allen & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2022). Regular team meetings are strategically aligned with organizational objectives, where the attainment of meeting-specific objectives directly contributes to broader organizational success (Allen & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2022). While the purposes and objectives of meetings can vary, they are commonly used for sharing and attaining information, solving problems, finding consensus, making decisions, coordinating teams, or setting goals (Cohen et al., 2011; Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. 2020; Lehmann-Willenbrock & Kauffeld, 2011; Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2021). Followingly, team meetings can be defined as regular or unregular scheduled gatherings of team members that serve several different purposes and result in different meeting objects.

Nevertheless, while the definition and purposes of team meetings provide a broad understanding of their organizational significance, the interactions and dynamics within these meetings determine their effectiveness in achieving objectives. Therefore, to understand how these interactions unfold in meeting processes and influence meeting outcomes, the next subsection will provide a deeper exploration of the process-oriented perspective on team meetings and their affect-laden environments.



### ***2.1.1 Team Meetings as Interactional Processes***

Within the recent discourse on meeting science, a growing body of literature postulates adopting a process-oriented lens for studying and understanding team meetings (Allen et al., 2015). While meeting purposes can differ, most meetings share the objective that meeting attendees meet to *interact* with each other (Meinecke & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2017). Social interactions in team meetings are needed to reach some form of collaboration, teamwork, and joint achievement (Asmuß & Svennevig 2009; Bittern, 2013; Meinecke & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2017). It is rather impossible to imagine a meeting where problems are discussed, solutions are found, or decisions are made without people interacting with each other in a sequence, making the meeting outcome dependent on interactions between meeting attendees. As Meinecke and Lehmann-Willenbrock (p. 326) argue, “it is this interaction and interdependence between meeting participants that make them a team instead of co-present individuals”. Followingly, the outcome of team meetings can be considered an interactional joint achievement of all involved participants (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2013; Van Praet, 2009). It has been argued that these group interaction processes in meetings are central to predicting meeting outcomes (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015). Moreover, the processual approach to meetings recognizes that team meetings do not occur as isolated episodes of interactions and are instead related to each other as collective (Duffy & O’Rourke, 2015). As team meetings occur in a sequence, each meeting builds upon the outcomes and dynamics of previous meetings, correspondingly shaping the tone, direction, and effectiveness of future meeting processes (Duffy & O’Rourke, 2015; Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2013). Consequently, meetings are not isolated, static events but are an ongoing process that unfolds over time through the dynamic interactions of its members.

### ***2.1.2 Team Meetings as Affect-Laden Environments***

Another emerging perspective on meetings views them as affect-laden environments, subject to a constant ebb and flow of emotions (Beck et al. 2015; Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015). Team meetings offer their attendees the possibility to interact about a variety of topics, which can quickly evolve into a heated discussion in the face of a controversial topic, spark happiness during celebrations of achievements, or cause frustration during arguing over task distributions, underscoring the involvement of affect in these meeting situations (Beck et al., 2015). In that sense, before comprehending how affect shapes the outcomes of these interactions is precedes to understand how affect influences meeting interactions.

Affect is commonly defined as the positive or negative reactions experienced by individuals, including emotions (intense, short-lived feeling states) and moods (long-lasting feeling states) as subcategories of affect (Beck et al. 2015; Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Spoor

& Kelly, 2004). The display of affect and the reactions to it in meetings contribute to the emergence of group affect and group affective tone (Beck et al., 2015). Group affect refers to shared emotional experiences and moods among meeting participants, which are influenced by momentary affective transfer processes such as emotional contagion and convergence (Barsade & Gibson, 2012). Emotional contagion refers to the process where emotions or moods are transferred from one person to another, either consciously or unconsciously (Barsade et al., 2018). The process of emotional convergence takes place gradually through subtle, yet continuous transfer of affective states during interactions, leading to greater similarity in affective states (affective similarity) among group members over time (Tanghe et al., 2010). Whether the resulting group effect of these transfer processes is positive or negative specifies the affective group tone (Tanghe et al., 2010). Importantly, the either positive or negative affective tone of a group can influence individuals' perceptions as well as subsequent interaction processes and, consequently, meeting outcomes (Beck et al., 2015; Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Tanghe et al., 2010). Consequently, affective transfer processes serve as key explanatory mechanisms for how affect influences meeting interactions (Barsade et al., 2018; Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015).

Previous research on meeting dynamics (Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015) and organizational behavior (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Walter & Bruch, 2008) has postulated that the underlying mechanism that shapes group interactions is more accurately captured as affect cycles (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Walter & Bruch, 2008). While emotional contagion and convergence focus on the spread of affect among individuals, the concept of affect cycles involves a recursive and cyclical process of emotional influence and interaction between individuals, particularly in groups (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008). Within a team setting, this suggests that the emotions of one team member influence the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of others, and that others' reactions can subsequently influence their future interactions with the member expressing the original emotion, as well as the members future emotions and behaviors, ultimately forming a 'cycle' (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008). Additionally, team members can draw attributions and extract meaning from other members emotions, which can lead to further interactions and affective cycles within the team (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015). To summarize, the dynamics of affect cycles in teams are complex and involve a continuous interplay of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors among team members, consequently shaping the affective, cognitive, and performance outcomes of a team (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008).

While research is sparse on how affect cycles operate in team meetings, findings from studies focusing on affective processes in team meetings align with the concept of affect cycles (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2011; Liu & Maitlis, 2013). In particular, Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. (2011), studied 52 team meetings and found that complaining cycles were linked to a passive group mood compared to proactive behavioral patterns displayed by meeting attendees, which were correlated with an active group mood. Additionally, findings from a study by Liu & Maitlis (2013), that focused on emotional dynamics and the strategizing process in team meetings suggest that emotional dynamics shape strategizing processes through self-reinforcing cycles. It is explained that positive emotional dynamics can draw team members together, facilitating more positive dynamics and closer relations between team members and enabling longer episodes of collaborative strategizing (Liu & Maitlis, 2013). A new display of emotions, on the contrary, can interrupt a recursive cycle and trigger new dynamics and shifts in meeting discourse (Liu & Maitlis, 2013). The findings of these studies suggest that affect cycles can impact the overall effectiveness of team interaction processes in meetings.

## **2.2 Participation & Collaboration in Team Meetings**

For interactive processes in team meetings, it is essential to differentiate between two fundamental concepts, namely participation and collaboration. These terms are often used interchangeably when discussing team meetings; however, they encapsulate distinct yet interconnected aspects of team dynamics.

Meeting participation focuses on individual contributions and involvement in the meeting process. Considering that circumstances and purposes of meetings vary, it is closer to practice to consider participation as a spectrum of behaviors and actions instead of an either active or passive state (Wellens, 1974). This spectrum ranges from active participatory behaviors to passive behaviors. Active participation in team meetings refers to verbal contributions including voicing ideas or concerns, asking questions, providing suggestions or opinions, and actively engaging in discussions (Morrison, 2014; Paletz & Schunn, 2011). Passive participation in comparison involves non-verbal cues and behaviors that indicate engagement and attentiveness in meetings without verbal expression (Paletz & Schunn, 2011) and is thus not limited to silence. These non-verbal behaviors during meetings include nodding in agreement, attentive listening, or using facial expressions to convey reactions (Meineke & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2017).

While meeting participation refers to an individual act, it ultimately evolves over time as interactions progress throughout a meeting. For example, a team member might actively contribute to a discussion in one phase of a meeting and adopt a more observant role in another

phase while others are speaking (Meineke & Lehman Willenbrock, 2015). Thus, recognizing participation as a spectrum instead of an either-or state acknowledges the fluidity and adaptability of individual contributions throughout the meeting.

Collaboration in team meetings, on the other hand, goes beyond individual contribution and focuses on joint efforts and collective contributions towards a shared task, goal, or objective (Briggs & de Vreede, 2003; Boughzala & de Vreede, 2015), which could otherwise not be achieved by one team member alone (Rux, 2020; Suto & Patitad., 2015). Common objectives of collaborative processes in team meetings include problem-solving, decision-making, or task coordination (Dhenesh et al., 2012; Amon et al, 2019). To reach such objectives, collaborative processes involve cooperation among team members, sharing of resources, coordination of efforts (Dhenesh et al., 2012; Amon et al, 2019) and mutual support among team members (Stulgiene & Ciutiene, 2014). By doing so, teams can explore problems from various angles, identify possible solutions, and evaluate them from a variety of perspectives (Stevens et al., 2009). This process facilitates the amalgamation of diverse knowledge and allows for a comprehensive examination of issues, thereby reducing the possibility of overlooking critical factors (Stevens et al., 2009; Stulgiene & Ciutiene, 2014). Moreover, the synergy of ideas during collaboration among team members can lead to novel ideas and solutions (Rux, 2020; Suto & Patitad., 2015). Collaboration is therefore regraded as outcome-oriented, focusing on achieving a shared objective through collaborative efforts and cooperation, compared to participation, which focuses on individual contributions and involvement in the meeting process (Bruce & Ricketts, 2008; Rux, 2020; Suto & Patitad., 2015).

Nevertheless, collaboration as a process is dependent on participation to achieve its objectives. Collaboration processes unfold as participants build upon the contributions of others, e.g., through group discussion, to create synergistic outcomes (Kocsis et al., 2015). Active participation of all team members ensures the inclusion of diverse viewpoints and perspective in collaborative efforts, reducing the chance of relevant aspects going unnoticed (Morrison, 2014; Paletz & Schunn, 2011). However, effective collaboration also relies on passive participation, where team members contribute through non-verbal cues, e.g., attentive listening (Meineke & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2017). Therefore, a balance between active and passive participation, ensuring discussions remain focused and voices don't overlap, throughout the entire collaboration process contribute to the effectiveness of collaborations and the success in reaching its goals (Meineke & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015).

### 2.3 Factors influencing Participation & Collaboration

For a meeting to realize its potential and reach its objective, team members must feel psychologically safe to participate and interact with their fellow team members (Gorse et al. 2006). Previous studies have emphasized group psychological safety as a key determinant of participation and effective collaboration in team meetings (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012; Stulgiene & Ciutiene, 2014). Previously referred to as the ‘invisible glue’ (Lecher & Mortlock, 2022) or ‘engine’ (Edmondson, 2018; Kim et al., 2020) of high-performing teams, group psychological safety refers to a shared belief by team members that the team is safe to take interpersonal risk without the fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999; Lecher & Mortlock, 2022; Mellor, 2022). Taking risks can refer to expressing ideas or concerns, addressing problems, asking questions, or asking a team for support (Lecher & Mortlock, 2022). Meetings with a high psychological safety climate foster a sense of confidence in team members that their contributions will not be met with embarrassment, rejection, or punishment by their fellow team members (Edmondson, 1999), laying the groundwork for meeting participation (Gorse et al. 2006). For collaboration processes, group psychological safety further enables team members to trust and communicate more openly with each other, crucial components for the effectiveness of collaboration (Stulgiene & Ciutiene, 2014; Edmondson & Roloff, 2009). Conversely, a lack of psychological safety inhibits individual participation and the progression of effective collaboration processes (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012; Stulgiene & Ciutiene, 2014).

Next to group psychological safety, previous studies have argued for the positive effect of a strong sense of togetherness on team processes and team effectiveness (Bourbosson & Fortes-Bourbosson, 2017; Forsyth, 2021; Lin et al., 2016; Paradis & Martin, 2012; Salas et al., 2015). In particular, it has been concluded that the critical differentiation between effective teams and dysfunctional teams lies in the level of togetherness of a team (Forsyth, 2021). Before continuing with the relationship between sense of togetherness and meeting dynamics, the term sense of togetherness itself will be conceptualized.

The sense of togetherness within a team is a group-level construct and refers to the evolving and dynamic emotional connection among team members, fostering the feeling of being part of a unified whole where team members perceive themselves as contributing to and benefiting from the collective identity of the team (Carron et al., 1997; Bourbosson & Fortes-Bourbosson, 2017; Paradis & Martin, 2012; Turaga, 2013). Togetherness involves a feeling of inclusivity, where each member feels valued and shares a sense of mutual support and shared responsibility for the team’s success (Bourbosson & Fortes-Bourbosson, 2017; Paradis & Martin, 2012). It is noteworthy that the term has been used interchangeably in past team and group research with sense of belonging (Ayache et al., 2021; Durakovic et al., 2022), team unity

(Bayraktar, 2017; Davis et al., 2022; Janz, Colquitt & Noe, 1997), and team cohesion (Carron & Brawley, 2012; Hinsz & Bui, 2023). While each term carries its nuances, the central similarities shared by these constructs relate to the shared positive affective tone, affective similarity, and supportive relationships among team members, all of which have been found to have a positive effect on team interactions and team performance (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Walter & Bruch, 2008).

In Particular, a strong sense of togetherness fosters a supportive and inclusive environment where team members feel psychologically safe to express themselves in meetings (Kakar, 2018). Furthermore, the positive affective group tone inherent in teams with a strong sense of togetherness has been shown to lead to greater cooperation among team members, less conflict, and overall better performance (Barsade et al., 2012; Lin et al., 2016; Paulsen et al., 2016; Tanghe et al., 2010). It has been further found to have a consistent positive effect on social integration and task performance (Knights & Eisenkraft, 2014). This positive effect is explained by the fact that positive feelings enable bonding and the creation of supportive social relationships in groups, which promote social integration (Knights & Eisenkraft, 2014). Socially integrated groups are well-coordinated and committed to group tasks, leading to improved group performance (Knights & Eisenkraft, 2014). Moreover, a positive affective group tone has been found to converge stronger in teams with higher levels of group identification (Tanghe et al., 2010), which is inherent in teams characterized by a strong sense of togetherness (Bourbosson & Fortes-Bourbosson, 2017). This increased convergence of positive affect in meeting interactions is suggested to follow a cyclical pattern in which the quality of interpersonal relationships is reciprocally enhanced, creating a cycle that positively influences the overall affective tone of the meetings, enabling positively perceived interactions to be higher in quality (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Walter & Bruch, 2008). In essence, psychological safety, shared positive affect, and supportive relationships in teams with a strong sense of togetherness contribute positively to shaping participation and collaboration processes in team meetings (Barsade et al., 2012; Erdem & Ozen, 2003; Fyhn et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2020; Tekleab et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, in practice, not all teams that gather for meetings have a strong sense of togetherness and are commonly characterized less by a positive affective group tone and supportive relationships. In those cases, a negative affective group tone and negatively perceived interactions are, for example, more likely to emerge during meeting processes (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2016; Paulsen et al., 2018). For example, a study done by Kauffeld and Meyer (2009), investigating interaction patterns in work group discussions found that complaining

statements lead to more complaining, following the pattern of communicative cycles, and at some point, setting a negative affective group tone. The emergence of such negative affect in team interactions can impact the subsequent effectiveness of meeting processes, such as participative and collaborative processes. In particular, negative affective group tone has been associated with reduced perceptions of psychological safety, increased conflict, and overall decreased team performance (Bashshur et al., 2011; Cole et al., 2008; Paulsen et al., 2016). More specifically, teams have been observed to increasingly focus on their difficulties and negative feelings, leading to less cooperation, distraction from actual tasks (Cole et al., 2008), and overall reduced social integration (Knights & Eisenkraft, 2015). Moreover, strong negative emotions such as cynicism, fear, and anger are more likely to decrease team members' attention and openness to new perspectives and ideas (Fredrickson, 2004; Hazy & Boyatzis, 2015; Paulsen et al., 2018). All of these findings indicate a negative influence of a negative affective group tone on the trajectory of participation and collaboration processes in team meetings.

As a note, the choice to use the term 'togetherness' in this study is grounded in its resonance with the commonly used German term "Wir-Gefühl" within the organizational culture of the collaborating organization for this study. While 'togetherness' might not be as commonly used in the existing literature, the choice is deliberate to align with the language and culture of the collaborating organization, as well as to ensure a common understanding of the concept among the participants of this study.

#### **2.4 Summary**

Team meetings are defined as regularly or irregularly scheduled gatherings of team members with different purposes and objectives, in which interactional team processes shape their effectiveness. A process-oriented lens is applied, which views team meetings as dynamic sequences of interactions in which past dynamics influence future outcomes. They are further introduced as affect-laden environments, emphasizing the significant role of affect, specifically affective transfer processes (e.g., emotional contagions, convergence, affect cycles) and the resulting group affective tone, in influencing meeting outcomes. Participation and collaboration as interactive processes are essential in reaching meeting objectives, underscoring the importance of effectiveness in these processes. While participation focuses on individual contributions, collaboration is regarded as more outcome-oriented by focusing on joint efforts and collective contributions towards shared goals. It is emphasized that both active and passive forms of participation contribute to the effectiveness of collaboration efforts, as well as group psychological safety as a crucial precursor to those processes.

However, a sense of togetherness among team members is introduced to influence the effectiveness of meeting processes and their outcomes. A strong sense of togetherness is argued to foster a psychologically safe and inclusive meeting environment and to promote positive group affective tone, cooperation, and task performance. It is suggested that teams characterized by a strong sense of togetherness display higher levels of participation and more effective collaboration, leading to improved team effectiveness and meeting outcomes. On the contrary, the absence of a sense of togetherness is argued to enable the emergence of negative affective group tones, reduce perceptions of psychological safety, and hinder participation and effective collaboration. It is suggested that a lack of a sense of togetherness in teams leads to less cooperation, increased conflict, and reduced task performance, which negatively impacts meeting effectiveness.

Summarizing, the theoretical framework emphasizes the crucial role of affect, and particularly sense of togetherness in shaping the quality of participation, the effectiveness of collaboration, and the overall progression of team meetings.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

To achieve the theoretical aim of exploring the relationship between blue-collar workers' perceptions of team meetings and their levels of participation, collaboration, and sense of togetherness, as well as the practical aim of providing insight and recommendations for the organization, a qualitative approach with mixed data sources was seen as most suitable. As data sources, participant observation of team meetings and semi-structured interviews with team members were chosen and conducted in the same order. This approach allowed for rich, contextually embedded insights that are necessary for understanding the complexities of blue-collar workers' perceptions of team meetings and their implications for theory and practitioners (Saunders et al., 2007). Additionally, the use of multiple data sources increased the credibility and validity of the research findings (Carter et al., 2014).

Participant observations were particularly suitable for this study due to their ability to provide insights into 'what is going on' in specific social situations (Saunders et al., 2007). This method enhanced the researcher's awareness of significant social processes occurring within the team meetings, that might not have been evident through interviews alone (Saunders et al., 2007). Additionally, the observations also served the purpose of establishing rapport between the researcher and the teams prior to conducting the interviews. Building rapport is particularly important when exploring sensitive topics (Guillemin & Heggen, 2008), such as employee



perceptions and experiences with other team members. It helps participants to feel more comfortable and trusting towards the researcher, which makes it easier for them to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences more openly during interviews (Guillemin & Heggen, 2008). Moreso, joining team meetings for observations allowed the researcher to signal genuine interest and commitment to understanding the challenges and experiences of the participants.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to gain insights directly from team members, providing them with the opportunity to express their perceptions, experiences, and perspectives related to team meetings. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in questioning, enabling the participants to elaborate on specific aspects of participation, collaboration, a sense of togetherness, and their overall experiences in meetings (Boeije, 2010). Through this approach, the study gained a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing relevant team dynamics and to formulate recommendations for enhancing levels of participation, collaboration, a sense of togetherness, and the effectiveness of team meetings among blue-collar workers overall.

Regarding ethical considerations, this study underwent several ethical review processes from both the internal committees of the participating organization and the Ethics Committee for the domain Humanities and Social Sciences of the Faculty of Behavioural, Management, and Social Sciences at the University of Twente. This study received ethical approval from both sides ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of both the German Production Facility and its participants.

### **3.2 Case Description**

This research was conducted in collaboration with a large production facility based in Germany. The collaborating organization faced the issue that the engagement of their teams during the weekly team meetings decreased over time, and the general meeting outputs decreased in quality. Therefore, engaging in collaboration for this research presented a reciprocal advantage for both sides. The facility gained insights into operational effectiveness and employee dynamics while providing the research study with valuable data and access to a real-world environment. The collaboration included close engagement from the researcher with the organization on site for a duration of seven months. This close engagement allowed for in-depth access and sightings into the organization's operational dynamics and also offered the opportunity to explore the intricacies of industrial processes and team dynamics.

Among the many production halls within the facility, the newest one served as the setting for this research. The hall was built 1.5 years prior to this research and has since faced a

wide range of challenges. These challenges have ranged from logistical issues, such as delays in the completion of break rooms, to unforeseen costs that have stretched the budget for the facility. Furthermore, interruptions in production have become recurrent issues caused by newly emerging errors with multiple causes. While any newly built facility faces problems and challenges to a certain extent, the ones faced in this particular case are above average in their count and severity, having strained the employees on all levels working there. The entire spectrum of employees, from the workforce on the shopfloor to the management, have felt the strain of these persistent difficulties. Of particular significance to this study is the impact of these challenges on the teams and their ongoing weekly team meetings. These challenges have created an environment where team dynamics, collaboration, and communication play a vital role in addressing and mitigating emerging issues. The only moment where the teams effectively come together to discuss these points is during their weekly team meetings, which last 25 minutes. The teams are composed of 12-15 team members through a random selection. Each team belongs to a master together with two other teams, positioning their master as their direct supervisor.

Additionally, each team votes on one team speaker from among their own team members. The position of the team speaker is unique and pivotal within the organizational structure, where the team chooses a representative who will voice their collective concerns and interests. The team speaker's primary responsibility is to act as an intermediary between the team and the master, the direct supervisor of the team. This position relieves them of the daily production tasks carried out by their team members. However, they are prepared to step into the production line when necessary, for example, during a team member's absence due to illness. Another key function of a team speaker is to facilitate the weekly team meetings, where they play a central role in moderating these sessions and guiding the discussions. Additionally, the team speaker is tasked with communicating the outcomes of the meetings to their supervisor and other relevant interfaces or units within the organization. The team members' primary channel of communication with other departments or units is thereby through the team speaker.

### **3.3 Participants**

The target population was one subdivision consisting of 14 teams within the same production hall, therefore facing a comparable work environment and organizational context. Participant observations were carried out during six different team meetings with the target population. For the semi-structured interviews, all individuals serving as team speakers, responsible for leading and facilitating team meetings, as well as team members who regularly attend team meetings, were included in the sample. The inclusion of both groups ensured the representation of diverse

perspectives and experiences within the teams, which enhanced the applicability of the study's recommendations to the organizational context. Additionally, attempts were made to achieve a balanced representation of perspectives on the same team dynamics and meeting. Followingly, it was considered as important that when a team speaker participated in an interview, at least one additional team member from the same team volunteered to participate. This approach was achieved by the end of the data collection process.

In accordance with the internal policies of the organization, which only allow their employees to participate in studies on a volunteer basis, this study used the volunteer sampling method for selection. Regarding observations, the researcher approached each team speaker to ask their teams themselves for consent. This way, teams could freely choose to consent or decline without feeling obligated to respond directly to the researcher. Teams that provided consent were included in the observational process. Following the initial observations and subsequent visits to the remaining teams within the target populations, the teams were informed about the research study and its objectives, ensuring transparency and openness about the research purpose. Afterwards, volunteers from the teams were invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews.

In total, 17 individuals participated in the interviews, consisting of 7 team members and 10 team speakers. All team members and team speakers who expressed interest in participating were included as potential participants, as they were part of the target group of the study. The search for participants stopped after the point of theoretical saturation (Rowlands et al., 2015) was reached after 17 interviews. However, due to technical errors, two of the interview audio recordings did not capture any audio, resulting in 15 interviews being included in the data analysis process. The demographic information collected from participants in this study was limited to their position within the company, as internal company rules restricted the collection of additional demographic data.

### **3.4 Data Collection Instrument & Procedure**

#### **3.4.1 Observations**

As the researcher lacked prior experience in attending blue-collar team meetings, gaining context and insights through firsthand observations served as crucial steps within the data collection process. The primary focus of the observations was to get an idea of 'what is going on?', which included observing aspects such as the structure and format of the meetings, the facilitation style of the team speaker, interactions between team members, overall participation levels, non-verbal cues and affective reactions displayed during meetings, and the overall atmosphere of the meetings. Due to the limited duration of the team meetings (25 minutes each), not every

aspect could be observed with the same level of detail. Therefore, the researcher prioritized noting those aspects that were most prominent or relevant in each observed meeting.

The participant observations were carried out in the course of six weeks, where the researcher attended one team meeting per week. To ensure an authentic setting during the observed meeting, each team agreed to invite the researcher to their meetings to ensure comfort and consent regarding the researcher's presence. Before each observation, the researcher joined the respective team, introduced herself, and stated the purpose of her presence. After any open questions were addressed and the team reaffirmed their consent, the team speaker proceeded with the meeting as usual. Field notes were taken right after each session (see Appendix A for the field notes). It was avoided to take notes during the team meetings to ensure that the team members did not feel uncomfortable and continued the natural flow of the meeting. Following each meeting, the researcher joined the team members in their break to build rapport.

#### **3.4.2 Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection instrument employed in this study for answering the research question. The interview questions for this research were derived from the research objectives to ensure that they addressed the specific and practical concerns of the participants within the context of the organization under study. The interviews aimed to capture authentic and firsthand insights regarding the participants' experiences, challenges, and perspectives within and around team meetings, thus avoiding the direct influence of preconceived theories and models. Followingly, the questions were tailored to explore the topics and issues identified as central to the research objective and the practical realities of the production facility.

To explore the research themes in-depth, only open-ended and probing questions, as well as follow-up questions, were asked. The use of open-ended and probing questions encouraged participants to express their thoughts freely, while the follow-up questions allowed the researcher to delve deeper into specific topics (Chamlee-Wright, 2010). To further ensure an in-depth exploration of the research themes, a natural flow of conversation was facilitated by a participant-centered approach and a friendly, and at times humorous, tone. The participant-centered approach allowed the researcher to focus on actively listening to participants and allowing them to guide the conversation to some extent (Chamlee-Wright, 2010). The effectiveness of these techniques was additionally supported by the close relationship the researcher had built with the participants prior to the data collection procedure.

Prior to the data collection procedure, a pre-test with the aim of improving the interview questions and their order was conducted. The pre-tests were conducted with two participants

from the target population, who were later excluded from the actual interviews. The first round of pre-tests resulted in small refinements in the wording of some questions to ensure more casual and less scientific phrasing. Additionally, a general opening question was added to guide the participants' attention and recollection towards the first theme of the interview. Lastly, the researcher realized the importance of explaining to the participants at the beginning that their answers are not bound to their current team experiments and instead can be based on any prior team meeting experiences, as these deliver additional and valuable insight. After the adjustments from the first pre-test were incorporated into the interview scheme, the second pre-test resulted in no additional need for adjustments, and the data collection process started.

The data collection process lasted for two weeks and the sessions ranged between 35 and 60 minutes. The interviews took place in a private room within the organization with only the participant and the researcher present, ensuring a quiet and private atmosphere. The interview procedure began with informing the participants about their right to withdraw from the interview at any given moment without consequences, the confidentiality of their data, and the insurance of their anonymity. After the participants provided their written consent and permission to be audio recorded, the interview started, following the interview scheme (see Appendix B).

After engaging in a more casual and social conversation at the beginning to ease up the conversation, general questions regarding weekly meetings were asked. The researcher asked questions such as *'When do you think after a meeting: This was a good one?'*. This question aimed to get the participant in an elaborative mood and recollect positive team meeting experiences. The next theme in the interview focused on factors that influence active participation during team meetings. This implied questions such as *'How do you feel about telling what you think during the meetings?'* or *'What keeps you silent?'*. Afterwards, the questions centered around the theme of sense of togetherness among team members. Here, questions were included such as *'What does a sense of togetherness mean to you in a team?'* or *'To what extent is it of importance to you?'*. The last theme addressed questions regarding collaboration and included the questions like *'What kind of moments can you think of, where collaboration during team meetings is important?'*. Lastly, the participants were asked whether they have any additional questions, feedback, or suggestion they would like to share. The interview was completed when the participant had no more questions. Table 1 provides an overview of the interviews' main themes and additional example questions.

**Table 1***Interview Theme & Example Questions*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Example Question</b>
Weekly Team Meetings	“If you were the chair (Team Speaker) of the meeting, what would you do the same or differently?”
Factors Influencing Participation	“What motivates you to share your contributions, ask questions or speak up during meetings?”
Sense of Togetherness	“What do you think could strengthen the feeling of togetherness?”
Collaboration	“What can you think of, that would help or support more collaboration during those moments?”
Additional Feedback	“Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the topics of participation, collaboration, sense of togetherness in team meetings?”

**3.5. Data Analysis**

Observations were not subject to formal analysis in the traditional sense; rather, the insights gained from observations were used both during the interviews and during the subsequent analysis of the transcribed interviews. During the interviews, the first-hand understanding of the dynamics and interactions observed during team meetings equipped the researcher to better interpret and probe into the participants’ perspectives. This facilitated more in-depth discussion and enabled the gathering of more nuanced responses from the participants, enriching the data collection during the interviews. During the analysis phase of the interview data, the contextual understanding gained through the observations increased the researcher’s ability to contextualize and interpret the interview data more accurately.

For the data analysis process of the interviews, the recorded interviews were transcribed and coded in the program ATLAS.ti according to the principle of grounded theory, following the techniques of inductive analysis (Bowen, 2006). An inductive approach for the analysis of qualitative data was chosen for this study to generate new insights and context-specific recommendations for enhancing the quality and outcomes of the weekly team meetings. In grounded theory research, the coding process follows essential three steps to analyze qualitative data: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). During the open coding process, the data was fractured and as many codes as possible were generated and beginning patterns were labeled. During the axial coding phase, prior derived categories were reviewed and core categories were related to subcategories. Lastly, during the selective coding process, the core themes were identified and related to the other categories from axial coding (Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019). This methodology for analyzing qualitative data is appropriate when little is known about a phenomenon and aims to uncover and explain a process inherent to the substantive field of study (Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019). Even though grounded theory commonly seeks to derive theories from data, this study did not follow this aim and instead used these techniques to systematically explore its data. This enabled the researcher to identify and explore emerging patterns, relationships and themes within the data, enabling a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the subject matter. In total, three core themes, 10 main codes, and 33 sub codes were used during the final data analysis process. Table 3 provides an overview of the detailed coding scheme.

### **3.5. Intercoder Reliability**

In order to enhance the credibility of qualitative data, an inter-coder reliability test was conducted involving a second coder with academic knowledge who was not involved in the research. The researcher of this study and the second coder coded 10% of the transcripts independently from each other using one code book and the same program, ATLAS.ti. Double-coding 10% of the corpus is generally agreed upon as a sufficiently high proportion to calculate the intercoder reliability (MacPhail et al., 2015). In order to measure the agreement between the two coders, Cohen's kappa was used as an indicator value. Cohen's kappa has a value from -1 to 1, where scores closer to 1 indicate better agreement between coders and thus higher reliability between codes. Values between 0 and 0.30 are considered insufficient, values between 0.04 – 0.60 satisfactory; and values above 0.80 are considered perfect agreement (Burgla et al., 2008; MacPhail et al., 2015)

The first round of coding resulted in a rather unsatisfactory Cohen's kappa value of 0.591 for the main code 'Meeting Participation'. After a discussion round between the coders regarding the coding scheme, the disagreement was solved, and the former insufficient code reached a more sufficient value of 0.721. in the second round. Finally, an overall intercoder reliability of 0.813 was reached for the coding scheme. Table 2 below provides an overview of all calculated Cohen's kappa values.

**Table 2**

*Cohen's kappa values of the 10%*

<b>Main Codes</b>	<b>Cohen's Kappa</b>
Production-Oriented Culture	0.92
Appreciation	0.68
Workload	0.77
Communication	0.92
Psychological Safety	0.81
Team Dynamics	0.79
Motivation for Extra-Role Behavior	0.72
Meeting Facilitation Style	0.87
Meeting Participation	0.721
Collaborative Atmosphere	0.917

## **4 Results**

In the following chapter, the outcomes of the data collection will be described. First, the overarching challenges faced by teams, both within and outside the meeting room will be described, followed by the internal dynamics within meetings. Subsequently, the insights provided by participants for improvement will be presented. Table 3 below presents an overview of all codes, their frequencies, and example quotes.



## 4.1 Organizational context & challenges

### 4.1.1 Context of team meetings

The findings from the interviews indicate that the factors associated with meeting dynamics are partly rooted in the broader organizational context. The organizational culture within the production facility is production-oriented, as echoed in the reflections of the participants and the observations of the researcher. Such a culture places a prevailing emphasis on meeting targets and efficiency, ensuing pressure, and an environment where results are eminent. One team member (participant 8) noted:

*"Our culture has always been very results-oriented, and that's great, but sometimes it feels like it's at the expense of employee morale. We're constantly under pressure to meet goals and only goals; nothing else seems to matter."*

This sentiment underscores the dominant focus on achieving production goals, with another team member (participant 14) adding further to the sentiment:

*"When we don't meet our production goals, it's like the end of the world. It affects the whole atmosphere among the team."*

The pressure emanating from the pursuit of targets is indicated to permeate the workplace of the teams, which, in the perceptions of some participants, impacts the overall morale of the workforce. Furthermore, the culture is believed to manifest in a tendency to focus on the negative aspects of the team's work life. One team member (participant 1) remarked:

*"And if something goes wrong, the negative is always written down. Because that's how it works here in production: if something goes well, it should go that way, and when mistakes occur, the pressure is high in all corners and people are looking for someone to blame."*

This sentiment places an emphasis on negatives in the organization, creating an environment where errors become focal points, contributing to a blame-seeking atmosphere. This corresponds well with the observations made by the researcher during her time at the production facility and the interactions with employees from a variety of organizational units. Additionally,

**Table 3**

*Codebook with example quotes and frequencies*

<b>Main Code</b>	<b>Sub Code</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Example</b>
<hr/> Organizational Culture (theme) <hr/>			
Production-Oriented Culture (38)	Pressure to Meet Production Goals (38)	Captures the cultural aspects that create pressure on employees to achieve production-related goals.	It's always about meeting those production targets. I can understand that we are a production plant obviously. And everyone here knows that, so when an error or something occurs, we are all aware of it, but the superiors still directly to the production line and demand an explanation as if looking for someone to blame.
Appreciation (64)	Positive effect (33)	Refers to instances where appreciation within the organization positively impacts employee motivation, collaboration, and meeting participation.	If more appreciation came, people would certainly feel more motivated to do things that they might do extra and not just come here and do their turn.
	Negative effect (9)	Represents situations in which the lack of appreciation or appreciation-related issues negatively affects employee motivation, collaboration, and participation in meetings.	Most of the time, I've noticed over the last 12 years, we're mainly admonished when things aren't going so well. There are actually days when things are going really well, and then of course they are there. For them, it is usually the standard. We always have losses here and there, but as far as quality is concerned, I think I can count on one hand how many times the supervisor has been there, applauding, "hey that was a great day, you did a good job". That happens very rarely. If something is not going so well, they are there immediately. (...) It would be nice if they would also comment on a day were at least nothing goes wrong, and we do our job well.

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**Table 3 (continued)**

	Possibility to demonstrate appreciation (22)		
Organizational Dynamics			
Workload (54)	Team speakers workload (35)	Examines the specific workload of team speakers, considering its impact on their ability to effectively conduct meetings.	I've seen team speakers get overwhelmed with the workload. They have to deal with so much, and it's not always appreciated because most team members don't actually know and understand what that position entails. I underestimated the workload at the beginning as well, now I am quite happy that I am not one.
	Work-Related Frustration (7)	Focuses on work-related frustrations, its effect on employees' motivation and participation in meetings.	The people here are so dissatisfied and frustrated, for far too long, that they just don't have the energy, interest, or motivation, whatever you want to call it, anymore, to engage in anything which does not directly involve their work.
	Impact on Employee Motivation (13)	Investigates how workload, including the team speaker's workload, and work-related frustrations influence employee motivation and engagement.	Honestly, the frustration doesn't come from nothing. There are serious issues that have to be dealt with and until the higher ups don't get involved to solve or even approach some of these issues, I doubt the mood and motivation among the work force will raise.

**Table 3 (continued)**

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Re- sponse Time to Meeting Output (28)	Looks at the time taken for responses or actions following team meetings and how it affects the motivation and participation of team members.	Well, if the team submits something, like an idea, a problem, or a solution, they usually have no idea where their input end up at and what happens to it. (...) The whole process of 'what happens after we discussed something as a team' is very untransparent.
Trans- parency in deci- sion- making (30)	Examines the degree of transparency in the decision-making process and its impact on various aspects, such as motivation and collaboration.	You know, when we rarely to never are properly explained why certain things have been decided on, whether it be something with our work tasks, working time changes, or rejection of ideas, that leaves you left with questions and frustration. And at some point you lose the incentive for asking questions or submitting ideas. This being left in the dark also breeds mistrust which also spreads among the team. Everyone is more on edge in times where we are left in the dark regarding major decisions like right now and then this bad mood also hampers the harmony during meetings, especially group discussions and voting's are affected. (...) they often take longer than.
Psycho- logical Safety (30)	Fear of Judge- ment (6) Addresses concerns team members may have about being judged or criticized in meetings and how these fears affect their willingness to participate.	I think some people are a bit scared of being judged by the other team members. Ideally, you would get there (to the meeting), and everybody would feel comfortable, but unfortunately that's not always the case. Then you also do not like to get involved in discussions and so on.

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**Table 3 (continued)**

Lack of Confidence (7)	Focuses on the presence of low self-confidence among team members in the context of meetings and its influence on participation.	Unfortunately, it is sometimes also so that one sits next to a person in the meeting, or before during the work with the talked, and they made a great suggestion, but do not want to say it in front of the group. Then I also say, come on, you have such a good suggestion, tell the others. But it's also like that, you don't want to push and hurt anyone, how should I put it, you don't want to simply put someone in front of the group, and then they stand there and don't dare say anything.	
Fear of Repercussions (18)	Examines the fear of negative consequences or repercussions for speaking up during meetings and its effects on psychological safety.	It is actually the case that you quickly get the feeling that if you say something now, then everyone will be annoyed again because they can have a smoke three seconds later. I myself have also experienced that it was said that the break is then only from and the time and not before. And if we don't have anything, it's okay. But if we discuss something, then we talk until the last minute. And that's also right... But it's just noticeable that people really don't dare to do it.	
Team Dynamics (171)	Team Cohesion and Unity (17)	Investigates the degree of cohesiveness and unity within teams and its impact on motivation and collaboration.	Having a strong bond as a team and really having the feeling that you are part of a team plays a significant role in my motivation. I feel valued and motivated when my ideas are acknowledged and built upon by my colleagues.
Supportive Dynamics (90)	Explores the presence of supportive team dynamics that encourage active participation in meetings.	You always have to be respectful and friendly with people. Not in a bitchy way or "Hey, you in the corner" or something like that. If you talk to people properly and so on, it works better than if you're passive and rude. Yes, that's my opinion.	

Table 3 (continued)

Unsup- portive Dynam- ics (54)	Examines dynamics that may hinder active participation within teams during meetings.	In meetings where there's a lack of teamwork and trust, it's challenging to participate actively. It's demotivating when you feel your input won't be valued or heard.	
Motiva- tion for Extra-Role Behavior (16)	Motiva- tion Fac- tors (16)	Explores the underlying motivations that drive employees to go beyond their regular roles, considering both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.	Yes, if something bothered me, I was always the person who said so. Because otherwise nothing changes. I can get upset about it as much as I want, as often as I want, as long as I want, but if I don't say anything, then it's hard to complain. Whether it changes in the end is another matter, but at least I have voiced it.
Meeting Dynamics			
Meeting Facilita- tion Style (179)	Facilita- tor's (Team speaker's ) Role (49)	Examines the role and responsibilities of the team speaker as the meeting facilitator.	I also like to talk to a few quiet people in person before the meeting. And then I also get input from the people, which they don't dare to do in public. And that's why I speak for them. At the meeting, I address their topics and also take on their interests in discussions. This gives these people the opportunity to have their issues and interests represented even if they don't dare to address them themselves.
Effective Meeting Tech- niques (134)	Focuses on the techniques and strategies employed during meetings to ensure effectiveness and similar.	I first explain to them the advantages, then the disadvantages that develop from it (a discussion point). Because many of them don't even know what a rat's tail it's going to be. And they simply vote for it and then realize two hours later, oh crap, that's not what I really wanted. That's why I tell them the pros and cons, let them think about it for a while and then we usually vote on it.	

**Table 3 (continued)**

Meeting Participation (60)	Barriers to Participation (29)	Addresses factors that hinder team members' active involvement and participation in meetings.	It demotivates people when nothing happens to their suggestions for improvement. And you want to pass it on to the boss, then it ends up somewhere in a drawer and that's usually it.
	Incentives for Participation (31)	Investigates factors and strategies that motivate team members to actively participate in meetings.	A little recognition can go a long way. When the team speaker acknowledges our input and effort during meetings, it's motivating. It shows that our contributions are valued, and we're more likely to participate actively. And if the master's would do the same, I think that would could be a major step towards a more motivated and participating work force.
Collaborative Atmosphere (59)	Collaboration Techniques (10)	Examines specific techniques and strategies used to promote collaboration within the team during meetings, fostering teamwork, and idea sharing.	I think it's important (for collaboration) to sometimes create a more casual atmosphere in the team room that has nothing directly to do with work. Of course, every team is different, but in my experience having 'Mettbrötchen' (certain type of rolls) together, or everyone brings in turn some cake or cookies or whatever. If everyone sits together and food is always great. I think that is the most effective way to get the people more friendly with each other, which also goes for working together as a team.
	Enhancing Team Unity (49)	Focuses on practices and approaches that enhance team unity and cohesiveness within the team, ultimately influencing the quality of meetings.	So the we-feeling starts with the fact that everyone is on good terms with each other. That everyone is friendly and nice to each other, says good morning, goodbye, have a nice evening, and talks to each other in between, even a bit about private things. In any case, that always loosens things up a bit, it's not quite so dull.

*Note:* Frequencies can be found between ().

in an attempt to get new employees ready to work in production, it was noted that quick operational readiness is prioritized over comprehensive onboarding and understanding. One team speaker (participant 7) observed:

*"These days, people here just want you to be operational as quickly as possible, and important steps are simply left out. You should actually be given a tour at the beginning to build up an understanding of the other areas, but that doesn't happen, and it remains anonymous. This makes it harder for people to work together."*

This focus on immediate functionality is perceived as a potential hindrance to a holistic understanding of the work environment and can contribute to challenges in collaborative efforts. In essence, participants indicated the presence of a production-oriented culture manifesting in a pursuit of production targets, heightened pressure, a tendency to spotlight negatives, and an emphasis on quick operational readiness. These cultural facets, as perceived by the participants, lay the foundation for the experiences and dynamics observed within team meetings, offering a glimpse into external factors shaping the everyday workplace environment.

#### **4.1.2. Lack of Appreciation**

While focusing on achieving specific outcomes, this production-oriented culture appears to lack explicit appreciation for the efforts and contributions of individuals and teams. Some participants expressed a yearning for recognition and value for their contributions. One team speaker (participant 5) emphasized the importance, stating, "Every employee should be appreciated", underlining the fundamental need for acknowledgment. However, the prevailing sentiment found across interviews is that this appreciation is lacking, and how the lack thereof is perceived through workplace interactions and experiences. The sentiment, "Appreciation is almost non-existent" (participant 8, team member), reflects a broader perception of a deficiency in recognizing positive efforts within the work environment of the teams.

Moreover, this sentiment extends beyond individual contributions to team-level dynamics where the absence of appreciation is felt, as expressed in "But overall, there is a lack of appreciation as a team" (participant 7, team speaker). The repercussions of the absence of appreciation for their work resonate in the reflections of participants on demotivation and a potential decline in engagement, as noted by one team speaker (participant 6), "But if employees feel like I'm listening to you, but somehow not, it will end up demotivating". Another participant explained that when the input of employees is ignored and not valued by their supervisors, the willingness to engage in workplace matters declines, as stated by a team speaker (participant 5):



*“Well, when an employee comes up to you (the supervisor) and tells you something and you simply ignore him and don’t work with the input he gave you and simply respond with yeah, yeah, and then turn around, well that won’t reinforce the feeling of appreciation or value for their input. No, instead you will leave him with a negative feeling. Facing this experience again and again leave the people with the impression of keeping their input to themselves instead of facing this reaction again.”*

These sentiments indicate that the lack of appreciation is perceived as a facet of the production-oriented culture, captured through workplace interactions with supervisors.

#### **4.1.3. Information flow**

The metaphorical expression “we are left in the dark” resound through many participants’ reflections and captures a shared sentiment of their challenge with an inadequate flow of information within their organizational context. One team speaker (participant 5) highlighted the issue, stating:

*“But the employees on the production line are hardly ever informed, or only at the last minute. People notice this and feel rather unimportant, which raises the question of why their opinion is suddenly important after all.”*

This sentiment underscores the sense of neglect experienced by their team, which questions the sporadic significance assigned to their perspective. Building on the perceived lack of information, participants emphasized the importance of contextual knowledge in their line of work and expressed frustration due to the lack of understanding across different organizational layers, e.g., between their supervisor and logistics. Echoing this sentiment, another team speaker (participant 6) added:

*“The problem with this, however, is that I think that the management level should also be more informed about logistics and assembly, for example, and realize that the people under them should also work together and be able to exchange relevant information (...). Because it can’t just depend on the team speaker alone, the other levels also have to make sure that we achieve a better overall exchange.”*

This call for comprehensive understanding underscores the interdependence between different hierarchical levels and the wish for an easier exchange of relevant information with other organizational units, which does not solely rely on the team speakers. However, the challenges related to information extend to issues of trust in teams. One team speaker (participant 7) explained:

*“(...) you are always the middleman. And if you don’t have a direct exchange with other levels, I always have to trust what my master says. And then the team has to trust me to*

*pass this on correctly. And if something takes a long time, then some of the teams don't always trust me when I say I'm doing my best, but nothing happens anyway. And then they often think that it's no longer worth saying anything because I'm not doing my job properly."*

This quote emphasizes the perception that prolonged information dissemination strains trust in teams, which nurtures skepticism and inhibits open communication. One team speaker (participant 3) stated that, especially in challenging times with significant organizational uncertainty and changes, he cannot comply with his team's need for more information. They continued to explain:

*"But it's just that there are simply too many salary classes in between, which then block and reject everything somewhere and as a result, there is simply no flow of information, let alone appreciation."*

This perception emphasizes how hierarchal layers are seen as obstructing the flow of information and how team speakers can experience the consequences as challenging. In this exploration of information flow challenges, participants' voices echo a shared struggle for transparency and understanding. The metaphorical darkness perceived by participants refers not just to the absence of information (light) but also to the absence of acknowledgment and appreciation.

#### **4.1.4. Response Time to Meeting Contributions**

Building on the perceived insufficient flow of information among the lower-level workforce, the interviews unraveled the perceived impact of prolonged response times to meeting outputs on team morale, motivation, and overall engagement. One team member (participant 7) captured the essence of the issue, explaining:

*"Yes, I think if you raise problems and they're not dealt with and you don't have any more information about them and then the next team meeting comes and the next problems arise and they fall to the back of the queue, then you always have the feeling, okay, I've raised it now, the problems haven't been fixed now, but now there's a new problem next week, so it doesn't matter."*

This illustrates the situation many participants described where problems are addressed in team meetings, but they are not promptly addressed or reacted upon by the reasonable departments. This point was captured precisely during observations by the researcher as well. It was noticed how several topics discussed during team meetings partly remained unaddressed until the end of the researcher's stay in the organization, even after team speakers frequently reached out for updates on the topic. This reoccurring situation is further associated by some participants with an emotional impact on team members, where the long response times or no feedback at all fuel

the impression that issues discussed in team meetings often fade into oblivion and discourage individuals from bringing up concerns. One team member (participant 10) captured this sentiment by stating:

*“I think many people simply don't dare to address something or think it won't help anyway because it takes ages for something to be implemented.”*

The impact of unaddressed suggestions is further described by team speakers (e.g., participant 6) to diminish motivation among the team over time, arguing that “people are simply demotivated over time if nothing happens with their suggestions”. This illustrates the perception shared by all team speakers that they or their team members do not expect their input to make an impact, which they explain lets them lose trust in the process over time. One team member (participant 14) even called this situation “frustrating”, and another (participant 8) describing it as “disappointing”. The experiences of participants indicate a cyclical nature of demotivation as they described a repetitive pattern of voicing concerns and not seeing results. Another participant (3) vividly captured this experience from the perspective of a team speaker, stating:

*“(…) Because you simply have to wait for ages until something you ask for is implemented. So, you just have a lot of team meetings that are very constructive, where a lot of ideas come from people, which is really good. And then you pass them on. But until it's implemented, you still have four or five team meetings where people look at you every time and think, why isn't this still happening? You then feel a bit like you've been made fun of because it's just being postponed. But nothing happens. Nothing happens. (...) You construct something, that's great, you give the guys great feedback that it all worked out, that it's a great idea, that they're managing it well. Then, waiting. Next team meeting, waiting. Next team meeting, waiting. And then, rejected, without explanation. And of course, that also demotivates them. And then the people say, honestly, I don't have to get involved. Why should I? (...) The problem is simply that if the guys were to get feedback from the respective department on what you work on in the team meeting, that would at least be a step further than leaving them in the dark like this.”*

To summarize, the participants' voices resound with a shared sentiment expressed in all interviews that extended response times and the lack of follow-through on discussed matters diminishes trust in the process and discourages active participation. The narratives shared by team members and team speakers emphasize that they perceived a connection between frustration and delayed problem resolution and how it builds up over time. However, beyond the scope of response times lies another layer of opacity, namely the lack of transparency in decision-making processes. The accounts provided by participants underline their impression that the

perceived issue with the fate of inputs and suggestions from meetings is not solely related to time, but extends to the transparency grading the decisions that follow. Hence, the pattern recognizable within the sentiments and narratives of participants can be summarized as follows: when ideas and concerns raised in team meetings face prolonged response times or opaque decision-making processes, employees perceive that their efforts are either dismissed or inadequately addressed. This, in turn, contributes to a sense of underappreciation and demotivation among teams.

#### **4.1.5. Transparency in Decision-Making**

The current state of transparency regarding meeting outputs is described by one team speaker (participant 9) as “looking through frosted glass”, suggesting that the information and processes are not clearly visible or accessible to team speakers and, consequently, to the entire team. A reoccurring theme in the participant’s narrative is the lack of explanation for decisions. Participants, especially team speakers, repeatedly explained that decisions are handed down without the accompanying narrative that could build an understanding of them. One team speaker (participant 3) explained:

*“But the thing is, you report it to the supervisor; the supervisor reports it to the next person, who then reports it again to the next person, who then reports it to your planner. And then the planner says no. And then you just get the answers. No. Without any further explanation. (...) so, they simply reject requests before they even think about why we would want to change it. They don't even ask why.”*

The same team speaker narrates an incident where a persistent issue affecting the physical well-being of his team was met with a series of unexplained refusals. It was an issue on the production line where employees repeatedly hurt themselves during their tasks and then requested that it be changed. After months of repeatedly asking for a response on this issue, the team speaker received the feedback that the cause could not be changed without further explanation or the possibility to ask for more detail. He explained that, considering the fact that team members already injured themselves and that it could happen anytime again, the team felt disappointment and frustration as a response to the untransparent decision. This reaction is in line with the experience of another team speaker (participant 12) who explained, *“If it is an important topic for the team and there is no real explanation as to why this (the decision) is the case, then most people are annoyed”*.

These accounts and sentiments provided by participants emphasize that when decisions of significance, such as safety concerns, are met with silence regarding their rationale, team members affective reactions entail irritation and annoyance. However, participants also

emphasized the value of even a brief explanation or feedback in the face of rejections or delays, and that it can even be perceived as a form of appreciation. A team member (participant 14) mentioned, *“Just short feedback explaining why something was denied or is still not implemented would be appreciated. This usually already calms down most people”*.

#### **4.1.6. Frustration from Team Members**

Frustration has emerged as a prevalent sentiment among participants, stemming from diverse work-related sources and manifesting in various dimensions of their work experiences. Multiple participants delved into the root causes of their frustration and decreasing motivation while also reflecting similar sentiments within their team. The most common source of frustration is the perceived lack of team needs and concerns by the organization, especially when health and safety concerns are not prioritized or appropriately dealt with. Exemplary team member (participant 8) explained:

*“The constant push for meeting production goals without addressing our work environment's challenges can be incredibly frustrating. We have ongoing problems that affect our health due to the movements that we have to do, which we have addressed over and over again. And we also had instances where we came up with solutions for ourselves, but the people responsible seemingly do not care. And that is really frustrating and even enraging considering that we are talking about damaging our health here.”*

Besides team members, team speakers also noted a palpable increase in frustration among their teams and related it to the unaddressed input shared during team meetings. One team speaker (participant 9) noted:

*“The people here are so dissatisfied and frustrated, for far too long, that they just don't have the energy, interest, or motivation, whatever you want to call it, anymore, to engage in anything which does not directly involve their work.”*

These observations shared by team members and team speakers indicate a shift in sentiment and attitude among team members over time.

#### **4.1.7. Workload of Team Speakers**

Another point of concern was raised by both team speakers and team members, namely the demanding nature of the role of team speakers. The majority of team speakers expressed feeling overwhelmed at times, being insufficiently prepared for the position in the current situation within the organization, and receiving insufficient support along the way, especially as meeting facilitators. One team speaker (participant 2) illustrated:

*“Being a team speaker is tough, and you do not really get prepared or supported for it. There are these basic qualification seminars, which are necessary and needed, but you still have to figure out most things on your own. And you have to deal with the people, which can be a juggle because sometimes you are the social worker, therapist, meeting facilitator, representative, etc. It’s a lot for one position.”*

The demanding and challenging nature of the position was further highlighted by participants, who addressed how team speakers are caught between representing the team to higher-ups and being part of the team at the same time. One team member (participant 17) shared their observation and added how this affects the relationship between team speaker and team:

*“Sometimes, I feel like our team speakers are caught in the middle. They have to represent us to higher-ups, but they’re also part of our team. It’s a tricky position; you are kind to the maid for everything, but I would like for them to have the time to be more there for the team instead of the master.”*

#### **4.1.8. Interactions between Team Members**

Building on the intricate landscape of team challenges shared by participants in the previous section, it becomes apparent that the echoes of external struggles find their way into the interactions in team meetings. Participants reported feeling frustrated by a production-oriented culture, a lack of appreciation, and communication challenges. However, how participants have to deal with these external tribulations and the frustration of their team members extends to the dynamics within team meetings as well. They further shared their perceptions and own explanations on how these external challenges relate to participation, collaboration, and overall team synergy within their weekly team meetings. Team members have expressed in a variety of ways that their interactions with certain team members impact their behavior and attitudes in meetings. One team member (participant 8) explained, *“Respect towards each other is very low currently among the people here. And when you don’t have the feeling that you are being respected, then you tend to address things less.”* This lack of foundational respect shapes discussions, often times turning them into chaotic situations where participants struggle to make their voices heard, as described by another team member (participant 1), *“Well, the discussions are often very chaotic because people keep interrupting each other, letting others not finish or get to their point.”*

Such an unsupportive environment where negative interaction with other team members is believed to hinder participation during meetings was further illustrated by the experiences of other participants. Participants collectively shared experiences where the responses of others during discussion felt like *“they are simply bashing other people’s ideas just because they have*

a bad day or week at work” (participant 6) or “I think some people have the feeling that they might not be taken seriously (...) they might then think, maybe I won't say anything again” (participant 10). This sentiment resonates with the experience of a team member who perceives herself as someone who usually speaks what is on her mind, stating:

*“As for me, who actually has a big mouth and no one wants to believe that I can be shy and reserved, I sometimes don't dare to say things because I know that three or four people are going to laugh it off and twist it in such a way that I'll be standing there saying, “Wow, I should have kept my mouth shut.”. And that's just because they just aren't in the mood for it.”*

These experiences of participants correspond well with the observations made by the researcher. During the visits of team meetings, it was observed how some participants entered the room in a seemingly bad mood and later kept on interrupting others while speaking, attacking their argument, and commenting on suggestions in an unconstructive manner, which reinforced other team members to react in a counterproductive manner as well, causing the entire discussion to stray from its original focus. The remaining meeting was characterized by a shift in meeting atmosphere and interactions towards negativity.

Another team member expressed how dominance in conversation can be demoralizing, noting, *“When some team members dominate the conversation and don't let others speak, it can hinder participation. This unsupportive environment simply demotivates some over time.”*

Participants perceived a connection between a negative atmosphere during some meetings and its impact on teamwork and trust. Participants expressed their reluctance to actively participate when there is a noticeable lack of trust within the team. One team member (participant 10) described the challenge: *“In meetings where there's a lack of teamwork and trust, it's challenging to participate actively. It's demotivating when you feel your input won't be valued or heard”*.

Another layer of complexity is added as participants noted time constraints and perceived pressure to conclude the meeting early by other team members. As one participant explained:

*“And then sometimes there's no time left to say, I've got one more thing. Spontaneously when the other person says it, and sometimes that triggers something in the others because they want to go to the break and glare at everyone who wants to say something at the end.”*

This perceived rush to keep the meeting as short as possible for others to enter their break earlier creates an environment where important contributions might be left unspoken.

Participation barriers extend beyond temporary moments in meetings as the fear of speaking up is rooted in past experiences, becoming substantial obstacles. The accounts provided by participants reveal complex team dynamics that at times threaten the perceived psychological safety of others. Especially the absence of respect, dominance in discussions, time pressure, and the fear of negative responses create a perceived environment that inhibits active participation and collaboration.

#### **4.1.9. Interactions between team speaker and team**

While the dynamic interactions between team members during meetings emerged as a crucial aspect, the importance of the team speaker in shaping meeting dynamics was further addressed by participants. As the facilitator of the meeting, the team speaker is in a position to shape the interaction and atmosphere within meetings. Out of all the participating team speakers, all collectively stressed the crucial role of the team speaker in facilitating effective meetings. Their sentiments were underlined by experiences shared by team members.

Participants shared their belief that the facilitation style of a team speaker can influence their team's motivation to engage in meetings. For example, one team member (participant 7) remarked, *"I think the way a team speaker conducts the meeting can have a big influence on the motivation to participate. But that is not always everything, more like 50-50"*. This sentiment emphasizes the shared belief about the impact a team speaker's approach can have on the team's engagement level during meetings. Building on this, a team speaker (participant 9) highlighted their own responsibility for animating the meeting, stating, *"If I go into the team meeting myself, let's say, with such a 'zero motivation' attitude, then it's clear that the team isn't up for it either"*.

The emotional tone set by the team speaker is believed to further contribute to the team's overall atmosphere, as explained by a team member (participant 14):

*"If the team speaker enters the meeting in a bad mood, then the mood affects the others in the room as well. Similarly, when the team speaker enters in a good mood, it is more likely that the whole mood in the room will be lifted."*

This dynamic was captured in one of the observations as well, where the team speaker entered the room with a smile and a happy mood, which noticeably lifted the whole atmosphere in the room and the mood among the team. This positive atmosphere remained for the rest of the meeting, where the following interactions were positive and constructive without a sign of conflict.



Similarly, it was noted by participants that team speakers should show some degree of resilience to ensure that the emotional state of some team members doesn't impact their own mood. One team member, for instance, explained:

*"It is important for a team speaker to be able to not take things personally or be personally attacked when a team member reacts a bit aggressively, for example. Or that when the mood in the room shifts into a bad one, the mood doesn't affect him or her and instead calms the team down."*

The importance of resilient team speakers corresponds with observations made by the researcher during one visit where the team was criticizing the actions of their team speaker resulting from a discussion from a previous meeting. The team speaker took the critique personally and continued to stay defensive without showing signs of understanding of the points made by the team. This in turn contributed to a very tense and negative atmosphere and led to a heated discussion that ended after the team speaker accepted the critique and closed the discussion. This exemplifies how the attitude and behavior of a team speaker impact the flow and quality of interactions during meetings.

Beyond mood setting, participants recognized the team speaker's role as a mediator during heated debates and discussions. One team speaker explained:

*"It is on us during the meeting to keep calm during an emotionally packed and heated discussion and calm down the opposing sides. Sometimes discussion simply escalates because people are already agitated before the meeting, a controversial topic is addressed, or some opposing opinions clash. In those moments, it is on us team speakers in the room to end the situation, mediate between the sides, and continue the meeting."*

The belief that team speakers are in the position to facilitate constructive dialogues, navigate through discussions, and act as mediators when needed was shared by all participating team speakers. Furthermore, participants recognized another function of team speakers during meetings, namely, to encourage quiet individuals. For example, one team speaker (participants 11) shared:

*"I also like to talk to a few quiet people in person before the meeting. And then I also get input from the people, which they don't dare to do in public. And that's why I speak for them. At the meeting, I address their topics and also take on their interests in discussions. This gives these people the opportunity to have their issues and interests represented, even if they don't dare to address them themselves."*

This further underlines the crucial function of team speakers in facilitating effective meetings where diverse insights and inputs are not left unaddressed.

#### **4.1.10 Summary of Context & Challenges**

Participants vividly described a perceived tense and on negativity-focused work environment where the related challenges extend to team interactions and meeting dynamics. The main challenges that were addressed were a lack of recognition and appreciation for individual and team efforts, an insufficient flow of information, prolonged response times to meeting outputs, and untransparent decision-making processes. The negative emotions stemming from these challenges over time, e.g., frustration, dissatisfaction, and disappointment, were further associated by participants with demotivation and disengagement in team meetings. Two primary factors contributing to this phenomenon were provided by participants. Firstly, participants expressed frustration, disappointment, and dissatisfaction stemming from the perceived lack of impact from meeting output, fostering a diminishing motivation among the workforce to contribute actively. The perceived lack of input was linked to prolonged response times or the absence of feedback, as well as untransparent explanations provided as to why certain requests were denied or not implemented yet. Participants additionally emphasized that frustration is especially high when it is related to unresolved issues related to health or safety concerns. Secondly, these emotions manifested in interpersonal behavior, particularly during meetings, exacerbating negative interactions. This cyclical pattern, in turn, contributed to adverse meeting experiences and fostered a psychologically unsafe environment, discouraging other team members from speaking up.

Having examined the various challenges associated with team dynamics both inside and outside meetings, the following sections will address the participants' reflections on transformative possibilities.

## **4.2. Beliefs & perceptions of enhancement**

### **4.2.1 Importance of a Strong Sense of Togetherness**

The importance of a strong sense of togetherness within a team was collectively agreed upon by all participants (n = 15), both team members and team speakers alike. The reason for its importance is twofold. Firstly, it was argued that a strong sense of togetherness is crucial for the overall well-being of a team and will be visible within the interactions in meetings. Participants have recalled experiences with former or current teams with a strong sense of togetherness and have perceived a correlation in those teams between togetherness, supportive communication, and an overall positive team dynamic. Exemplarily, one team member (participant 7) explained:

*“When there's a strong sense of togetherness in a team, a lot of things are easier. If everyone gets along well, you enjoy going to work, no matter how hard the work is at*

*the time. It's just fun to chat, work, and laugh with the others. It's just that when you feel comfortable, it's much easier to talk about different things as a team. (...). And of course, there are days when you're not in a good mood, but you don't feel that way anymore because you're quickly lifted up by someone else on the team. At least that's how it is with us."*

The impact of a strong sense of togetherness was indirectly noticed by the researcher during the meeting observation of the team by participant 7, who was characterized by a strong sense of togetherness. During the meeting, the researcher did not observe any hesitation in asking questions or voicing input; instead, the discussion remained constructive and dynamic, characterized by empathy for counterarguments and a positive affective group tone in general.

While exploring the impact of a strong sense of togetherness, participants repeatedly highlighted its dual role: not only fostering positive interactions but also creating a psychologically safe space. One team member (participant 1) shared:

*"In my previous team, we had a strong sense of togetherness, and meetings were much more fun and productive because we didn't have unnecessary discussions or fights. Everyone got along and felt comfortable saying what's on their mind; no one was annoyed just because you asked a question."*

This feeling of psychological safety, as perceived by participants, serves as a fundamental precursor to effective collaboration during meetings. One team speaker (participant 13) emphasized this, stating:

*"When a team really views themselves as a team and has a strong sense of togetherness, then they face any situations as a team and also work on finding solutions as a team. Especially when we have discussions or issues during meetings where they collectively have to work together to reach a solution with which everyone's needs are covered and no one is left behind, this is only possible when there is a strong sense of togetherness in a team."*

This sentiment underscores the team speaker's belief that a robust sense of togetherness forms the foundation for constructive teamwork and enables a team to ensure inclusive solutions during collaborative efforts in meetings. Especially for the type of work the participants are practicing, production, a strong sense of togetherness is important, as issues emerge oftentimes which can only be solved if the team works together and has an understanding and empathy for the positions of others.

#### 4.2.2. Building a Sense of Togetherness

When asked about their suggestions as to how a strong sense of togetherness can be built or enhanced, several participants shared their ideas based on past experiences. The most frequently mentioned suggestion refers to team-building activities, e.g., having breakfast together during a break or team sports events outside of work. It was emphasized that these activities should be inclusive and that the aim is to facilitate moments where the team can laugh together. Exemplarily, one team speaker (participant 9) shared what successfully bonded their team during such an activity:

*“It is important that the team members get to know each other in a more casual and relaxed environment outside of work. We once planned an activity where we all split into smaller teams and had to perform funny poses and guess in team what was meant. It was silly and fun, and everyone laughed together. The next day at work, everyone was much more relaxed with each other, and the effect never worn off. It really bonded the team closer together.”*

Another frequently mentioned aspect is communication and interactions between team members. Especially team members strongly emphasized the effectiveness of respectful communication and fun and humorous interactions. One team member (participant 14) captured this shared sentiment, explaining:

*“Simply by making these jokes, because usually a relaxed attitude also helps a lot. Work is much better when people simply have a bit of light-hearted humor with each other. And you usually need two or three relaxed moments with someone, where you laugh a little or see that the person opposite you is just a fellow human being. And then there's usually not so much potential for conflict when things are brought up because you feel more connected than opposed.”*

Other team members (participant 10) continued to stress their belief that the more team members show empathy for each other during discussion, let others finish their point, and avoid causing misunderstandings, the more a team is enabling itself to grow closer together instead of drifting apart. This sentiment was highlighted by a team member (participant 7) stating:

*“I noticed in our team that since the moment we all started showing empathy for each other's standpoints and issue during discussions, the more we let other finish their sentences, and the more people started asking to clarify someone's standpoint instead of misunderstanding and directly attacking them, the more we enabled our team to grow closer together instead of drifting apart further.”*

Furthermore, participants consistently highlighted the importance of recognizing and praising team achievements to foster a strong sense of togetherness. According to their shared

sentiments, celebrating collective successes is crucial after employees effectively collaborate as a team. Drawing from their experiences, participants expressed that overcoming challenges or successfully implementing changes collectively creates a bond within the team. Moreover, they emphasized that when these achievements are acknowledged and praised by supervisors, it not only validates their efforts but also strengthens the team's sense of togetherness. Exemplarily, one team member (participant 8) shared:

*“As a team, when we manage to overcome challenges or implement changes successfully, it's crucial to acknowledge those moments. When our efforts are recognized and praised by our supervisors, it not only boosts our morale but also reinforces the bond within the team. It's like saying, 'We did this together, and it matters.’”*

In essence, participants consistently expressed their belief that positive moments and interactions play a pivotal role in fostering a sense of togetherness. These shared experiences, whether laughing together at a joke, overcoming challenges together, or receiving praise for teamwork, are emphasized by participants to strengthen the sense of togetherness within a team. A strong sense of togetherness within a team is perceived to positively impact meeting effectiveness.

#### **4.2.3. Perceived Positive Effect of Appreciation**

During the interviews, the majority of participants voiced their critique of the lack of appreciation, recognition, and praise in their organization. However, as depicted in Table 3, the code ‘Appreciation: positive effect’ received much more attention compared to a lack of appreciation, with 14/17 participants consistently emphasizing the transformative effects of appreciation on team dynamics and engagement. Their strong belief in the correlation between appreciation and motivation emerged as a recurring theme. One team speaker (participant 7) briefly captured this sentiment, stating, *“It is this appreciation and trust in balance that simply creates a good basis for interaction. And it has contributed immensely to the good cohesion and engagement of every employee.”* The belief in the positive impact of appreciation was repeatedly illustrated by participants as they recalled past experiences of occasional moments, such as when higher-ups praised the teams’ collective achievements. For instance, one team member (participant 17) recalled a specific incident, emphasizing:

*“We once had the situation where the higher-ups came down and praised us for our work during a challenging day and said that they were very satisfied with us. That really made us happy in that moment, and we all applauded for each other. It was a bit silly, but I remember how good everyone felt, and wherever you looked, everyone had a big smile on their face. (...) this small form of recognition and appreciation meant so much for us and triggered so many positive feelings.”*

Furthermore, appreciation was consistently linked to positive behavior reinforcement, especially in the context of active participation during team meetings. One team speaker (participant 5) underlined this, stating, “*Appreciation is the key to get through to employees*”. In particular, participants emphasized that, in their perception, increased appreciation could enhance motivation as it encourages employees to go beyond their standard responsibilities. Exemplarily, one team member (participant 14) expressed this belief by explaining, “*If more appreciation would come, the people would surely feel more motivated to do extra things instead of just coming here and do their turn at the line*”. Another team member (participant 1) added:

*“If an idea that resulted from a meeting was successfully and quickly implemented by the team, or if the same goes for instructions coming from the master, and that worked out well, then that can simply be talked about a little more and appreciated. This then encourages people to continue to take part in meetings and get involved.”*

Moreover, participants associated appreciation with increased employee well-being, underscoring again their belief in the transformative effects of appreciation on employees. One team speaker (participant 13) reflected on the broader impact, noting:

*“And they (the employees) also see themselves differently when they are appreciated and praised for their work. Because if they themselves are treated with respect and appreciation, then you have a completely different self-image of what kind of employee you are. That you're not just a small cog that doesn't matter, but that you're also seen.”*

In summary, participants in a noteworthy majority emphasized their strong belief in the positive impact of appreciation and argued for its role in reinforcing positive behaviors, increasing motivation, and contributing to the overall well-being of employees. Their belief is grounded in tangible experiences and a discernment of the prevailing deficiencies.

#### **4.2.4. Incentives for participation**

Participants consistently emphasized their shared eagerness to witness the tangible impact of their contributions and feel valued and recognized for their engagement. Throughout the interviews, incentives for increased participation were consistently linked with the challenges discussed in Section 4.1.10, highlighting a shared sentiment among team members and team speakers alike. Participants expressed their belief that if teams would receive prompt responses and clearer updates on the status of their input, this could potentially reduce the predominant perception of their efforts going unnoticed. The accounts of participants conveyed a strong desire to perceive a tangible impact, particularly through the implementation of their inputs. They further noted the importance of clear communication, either through implementation, brief

feedback, or explanation for decisions, in shaping their perception of impact. One team member (participant 17) explained:

*“And when you realize, okay, we’ve now addressed it, a week later a solution has been found or something has changed, or we’re in the picture and are trying to change something, then it’s worth the effort. Then you’re happy to keep it up.”*

Beyond structural changes, participants further underlined their perception of the importance of active communication from supervisors. Particularly, team speakers articulated a need from supervisors and organizational leaders regarding the value they place on individual and collective contributions. They explained that, as team speakers, they are aware of how reliant the production environment is on the engagement and contributions coming from the workforce. However, they noted that when leaders express how much they value the contributions of team members and highlight the significance of their efforts for the organization, it would reduce the perception that engagement is not in vain. Exemplarily, one team speaker captured this sentiment, stating:

*“(…) when our higher-ups take a moment to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the team, it sends a powerful message. It’s not just about completing tasks; it’s about being a part of something meaningful. We’re not just cogs in a machine; we’re contributors to the success of the whole. Hearing that recognition from the top makes a difference. It makes you feel that your efforts matter, and that’s a game-changer for motivation and active participation.”*

In summary, participants strongly connect their motivation for increased engagement in team meetings with a desire for clear impact and acknowledgment of their contributions. Key challenges, including delayed responses and opaque decision-making, were perceived to hinder this aspiration. They further emphasized their strong belief in the potential impact of timely communication on enhancing their sense of impact. Moreover, participants perceived a strong connection between expressions of appreciation from supervisors and their belief in the value of their engagement. This synthesis underscores participants' sentiments and perceptions, which emphasize the transformative potential of recognizing and reinforcing active participation in team dynamics.

## **5 Discussion**

This study aimed to explore the relationship between blue-collar workers' perception of their team meetings and their levels of participation, collaboration, and sense of togetherness in it. By investigating these relationships, this study identified factors associated with these outcomes

to provide insights into the dynamics of blue-collar team meetings. In the following, the main findings of this and their theoretical implications will be discussed. Afterwards, the practical recommendations aimed at enhancing participation, collaboration, and sense of togetherness to enhance the overall effectiveness of blue-collar team meetings. Lastly, the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research will be discussed, ending with the conclusion.

## **5.1 Findings & Theoretical Implications**

This study adopted a process-oriented perspective on team meetings, which views them as continuing processes where individuals engage in complex social interactions, influenced by affect, that determine meeting outcomes (Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015). Understanding meetings through this lens enables the exploration of the underlying mechanisms that influence participants' perceptions and experiences in meetings. The findings of this study highlight the processual nature of team meetings as a continuous and dynamic process shaped by affect, team dynamics, perceived support, and responsiveness of the organization to meeting outputs, as well as past experiences. These factors are suggested to contribute to the evolving dynamics of meetings, particularly participation, collaboration, and a sense of togetherness, and subsequently impact meeting outcomes. The findings are organized into three subsections to outline distinct aspects of meeting dynamics. The first section examines findings related to team dynamics within the meeting environment, followed by a discussion on organizational dynamics outside the meeting environment that impact meeting dynamics, and ending with the last section on the impact of past meeting experiences on future meeting dynamics.

### ***5.1.1 Findings Related to Team Dynamics***

Central to understanding the dynamics of team meetings are the dynamics of team interactions and the role of affect in them. The findings suggest that motivation for and level of participation (including participation in collaboration) seem to be subject to the influx of affective group tone and psychological safety within the meeting environment. The influx here describes how the positive or negative affective group tone, resulting from affective similarities among the team, is believed to either foster or inhibit the perception of a psychologically safe environment. Psychological safety was collectively regarded by participants as a fundamental precursor to participation and effective collaboration in meetings. This has been explained by the perceived reduction or absence of conflict among team members, which contributes to team members feeling comfortable and safe to express their thoughts. This view is supported by Fyhn et al. (2022), who emphasize the positive effect of team psychological safety on team performance.



The findings further suggest a perceived relationship between the level of togetherness among a team and effective participation and collaboration in team meetings. Team speakers and team members alike frequently described how the positive affective group tone and cohesion shared by teams with a strong sense of togetherness foster a psychologically safe meeting environment where active participation and collaboration can thrive during team meetings. A strong sense of togetherness was also attributed by participants to positive team interactions, characterized by an increased display of empathy, a collective approach to issues and discussions, and finding solutions that consider everyone's needs. This notion is supported by previous studies arguing that the strength of a team is derived from the qualitative and supportive relationships among its members (Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Hinsz & Bui, 20).

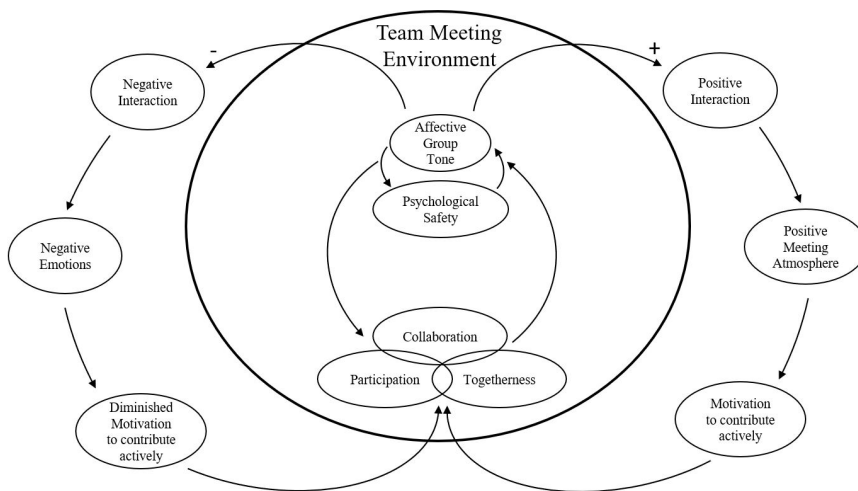
Moreover, these findings suggest the existence of affect cycles within teams, aligning with the theoretical frameworks proposed by Hareli & Rafaeli (2008) and Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock (2015). The accounts shared by participants illustrate how the perceived emotion of one meeting attendee, e.g., a team speaker displaying positive affect upon entering the meeting, can subsequently impact the general affective group tone in the group positively, enabling positively perceived interactions and contributing to a positive meeting atmosphere and motivation to contribute to the meeting process. The positive atmosphere, characterized by constructive interactions and mutual encouragement, then potentially reinforces the positive affective group tone and perceptions of psychological safety among team members in a cyclical pattern. This finds support in the findings of previous research, arguing that feeling psychologically safe can evoke positive emotions while feeling unsafe reduces them (Lei & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015).

Conversely, negative affective cycles are suggested to emerge when meeting attendees enter the meeting in a bad mood, fostering a negative affective group tone and perception of a psychologically unsafe environment, and nurturing the emergence of negatively perceived interactions. Participants highlighted instances where negative interactions, characterized by dominions in conversation and absence of respect, or unresolved conflict further contribute to a perceived psychologically unsafe meeting environment, leading to a down spiral in the overall meeting atmosphere. Such a meeting environment has been strongly associated by participants with reluctance to participate in and engage in group interactions such as collaboration. This association finds support in the findings of Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. (2011), which link patterns of counterproductive meeting behavior, such as complaining cycles, to a negative overall mood in meetings.

Followingly, these findings illustrate how each interactive move within the processual approach has the potential to either reinforce positive dynamics or contribute to negative cycles within team meetings. By promoting a sense of togetherness, positive affective group tone, and psychological safety, teams are believed to be able to cultivate a positive cycle of participation and collaboration, ultimately enhancing team effectiveness and performance. Furthermore, these findings highlight the self-sustaining or self-reinforcing nature of positive cycles (e.g., positive interactions leading to more positive interactions, including participation) and the detrimental impact of negative cycles (e.g., negative interactions contributing to a psychologically unsafe environment and diminished motivation, inhibiting participation). A visual depiction of the processual interplay of meeting dynamics and participation, collaboration, and togetherness, based on the findings outlined above, can be found in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*The Processual Interplay of Participation, Collaboration and Togetherness in Meeting Dynamics*



### 5.1.2 Findings Related to Organizational Dynamics

After focusing on team dynamics, the findings further highlight a dynamic interplay between meeting dynamics, perceived organizational support, and participants perceptions and behaviors. Interestingly, the perceptions of meeting engagement, referring here specifically to active participation and collaboration as a whole, and the motivation for it have not only been

associated with team-dynamics but also with broader organizational-level factors, particularly perceived organizational support. Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to employees' beliefs about the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Throughout the interviews, team members and team speakers alike expressed a desire to see tangible impacts resulting from their contributions during meetings, as well as the need for more timely responses and more transparency in decision-making processes related to meeting outputs. The absence of perceived organizational support and responsiveness and a lack of transparency were associated with feelings of frustration and underappreciation among teams. It was further suggested that the absence of said factors negatively impacts perceptions of the impact of meeting contributions, which were linked to diminished motivation towards meeting participation. Moreover, it is possible that the context of shopfloor workers contributes to the feeling of frustration, as shopfloor teams, due to hierarchical structures and limited autonomy, rely heavily on organizational support for various aspects of their work, including updates on meeting outputs and seeking explanation for decisions. Unlike white-collar teams, shopfloor teams most often do not have access to resources or information outside their immediate team context. The dependency on other organizational members and structures resulting from this underline the importance of perceived support and responsiveness from organizations in facilitating effective meeting engagement.

Additionally, participants strongly believed in the transformative effects of appreciation and support from supervisors on the overall well-being of employees and their sense of self-worth within the organizational context. They argued that, in their perceptions, expressions of appreciation and recognition for meeting contributions can not only reinforce positive behaviors and attitudes but also foster a sense of validation and value among employees. One team speaker (participant 13) argued that "employees see themselves differently when they are appreciated and praised for their work. Because if they themselves are treated with respect and appreciation, then you have a completely different self-image of what kind of employee you are. That you're not just a small cog that doesn't matter, but that you're also seen (...)". The sentiment underscores the suggested impact of appreciation on shaping employees' self-image within the workplace. This finding suggests that when individuals feel recognized and valued by their supervisors, they develop a more positive perception of their own abilities and contributions, influencing their engagement and participation in various organizational activities, including team meetings, which contribute to the suggested relevance of affect in shaping meeting outcomes. While this has only been said by one participant, this finds congruence in the implications of Cooper

and Thatcher (2010), who argue that the role of supervisor recognition influences employee self-concept orientation and identification, which can ultimately impact their performance. On the contrary, a lack of POS over a longer period was associated by participants with frustration and disappointment, decreased motivation, a shift in meeting attitude, and low-level meeting engagement.

These observed phenomena align with the principle of reciprocity within the framework of Theory of Organizational Support (TOS), which states that individuals expect a corresponding level of support or acknowledgement in response to their contributions. The narratives provided by the teams suggest that their perceptions of meeting engagement are linked to their expectations of organizational support. This follows, that when these expectations are not met, it leads to a breakdown in the reciprocity dynamics, resulting in diminished motivation and engagement over time. This proposed implication is supported by previous research which has established a reciprocal relationship between POS and employee engagement (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Yoerger et al., 2015) This is further supported by Liaquat and Mehmood (2017), who stress that employees are more engaged and committed when they feel valued and supported. This finding contributes to our understanding of how TOS, in particular the principle of reciprocity, manifest in the context of blue-collar team meetings and also how organizational dynamics shape employee perceptions and experience related to meetings. This study further underscores that meeting behaviors and dynamics should not be viewed in isolation, rather, they are integral components of the larger framework of organizational support theory and employee engagement.

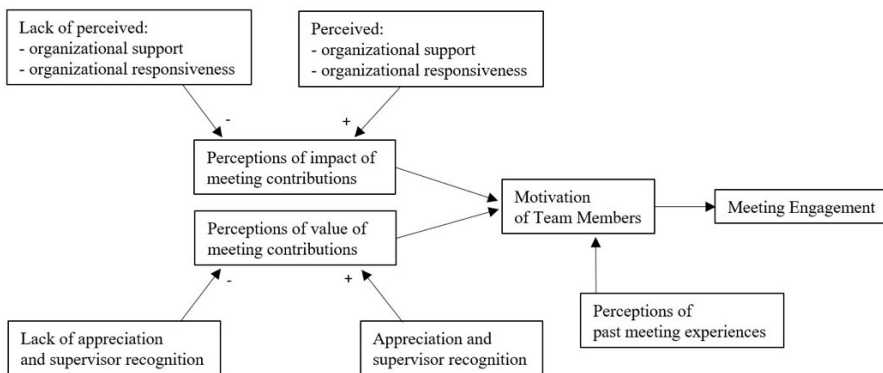
### ***5.1.3 Influence of Past Meeting Experiences and Organizational Interactions***

Furthermore, aligning with the view of team meetings as ongoing processes, the last factor identified in this study impacting participants perceptions and attitudes towards meeting participation relates to past meeting experiences. The perceptions and experiences shared by participants implied a continuous shift in their perceptions and attitudes towards team meetings and their own participation in them. In particular, participants' perceptions of past meeting experiences seemingly influence their attitudes and motivation towards future meetings. This implies the impact of past meeting dynamics on current meeting interactions and outcomes. Nevertheless, past experiences in this case are not limited to in-meeting dynamics (e.g., quality of interactions), and instead also relate to organizational actions towards meeting outcomes. The aforementioned findings related to team interactions during past meetings and perceived organizational support towards past meeting outcomes serve as examples of this notion. This suggests that participants' meeting experiences are not isolated events and instead are linked to past

meeting experiences and ongoing interactions with the organization in between meetings. Therefore, past meeting dynamics and perceived organizational support and responsiveness in-between meetings contribute to the evolving perception and motivation of team members and subsequently hold the potential to influence meeting engagement, and therefore meeting outcomes. A visual depiction of the factors identified in sections 5.1.2 and 5.1.3 to impact meeting participation and collaboration (summarized as meeting engagement) can be found in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Factors impacting Meeting Engagement*



**5.1.4 Significance of Findings**

Overall, this study is significant in its contributions to meeting research by taking into consideration the unique and less explored context of shopfloor teams. It aligns and extends previous findings and the applicability of established theoretical frameworks while contributing new insights into the dynamics of team meetings in a blue-collar work environment. The most prominent alignment with previous findings relates to the role of affect and affect cycles in shaping meeting dynamics. Similar to Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. (2011), who found that different meeting behaviors correlate with distinct group moods, the findings of this study suggest a relationship between affect cycles and the overall affective atmosphere in teams. By highlighting the cyclical nature of affective dynamics in team meetings, this study contributes to our understanding of how these cycles manifest in the context of team meetings on the shopfloor.

Moreover, this research has implications for organizational support and engagement research as well. The findings reveal that meeting behaviors and dynamics should not be viewed

in isolation, rather they are integral part of organizational support theory and employee engagement. This study's insights contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of organizational dynamics by emphasizing the interconnectedness between meeting behaviors and broader organizational processes. In Particular, this study highlights the reciprocal relationship between perceptions of organizational support and meeting dynamics.

In addition to aligning with previous findings, the findings highlights unique challenges and contextual factors that impact the perceptions and experiences of blue-collar teams, specifically the specifically the shopfloor team, during meetings. Examples of these challenges include hierarchical structures, limited autonomy, and the dependency on organizational support for various aspects of work, including meetings. By incorporating these contextual factors of blue-collar teams, a less explored context in the literature, this study also contributes to greater inclusivity in meeting research. Including more diverse organizational settings and team contexts in the scope of meeting research enhances the generalizability of these findings while also promoting a more holistic understanding of meeting dynamics in organizational settings.

Lastly, this study aimed to go beyond subjective interpretations of the perceptions and experiences of employees during team meetings by adopting a critical realist perspective. By recognizing the existence of a reality beyond immediate perceptions (or beyond the confines of a meeting room), these findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the social dynamics within organizational contexts (Fletcher, 2016; Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). The qualitative analysis employed in this study attempts to reveal the more general and underlying mechanisms that impact participants' experiences, acknowledging that these perceptions are not isolated phenomena but are intricately embedded within broader social structures and dynamics (see also Meineke & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015). In contrast to non-foundational epistemologies that might focus solely on an interpretive framework, critical realism provides a stronger foundation for understanding underlying causal relationships (Fletcher, 2016; Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). Moreover, critical realism highlights the importance of context, acknowledging that team meetings are reflections of broader organizational dynamics (Fletcher, 2016; Mukumbang, 2023). This reflection underscores the value of this study in providing a more nuanced understanding of meeting dynamics that extends beyond superficial interpretations to unravel the complex interplay of factors shaping employee's perceptions and behaviors in team meetings.

## 5.2 Practical recommendations

Based on the findings and challenges discussed above, the following practical recommendations aim to enhance levels of participation, collaboration, and a sense of togetherness to overall improve the effectiveness of blue-collar team meetings. The proposed recommendations are of value for practitioners from the cooperating organization as well as organizations within a similar context, most importantly production. These recommendations concern (a) appreciation and recognition, (b) communication and transparency, (c) a sense of togetherness, and (d) supporting team speakers as meeting facilitators.

The first recommendation focuses on cultivating a culture of appreciation and recognition. The aim is to reinforce participative meeting behaviors, increase motivation, and nurture a feeling of validation and value among teams. Therefore, this study recommends supervisors express authentic appreciation in personal interaction with individuals and teams as a group, emphasizing the significance of individual and collective contributions originating from team meetings. Participants mentioned that brief words of praise or appreciation in daily or weekly interactions would be sufficient to measure improvements in their motivation. Another crucial step involves celebrating team achievements. Occurrences where the outcomes of collaboration efforts were successfully implemented or where teams successfully navigated through challenging times were frequently mentioned by participants as moments where they either desired to have received acknowledgement or were suggested as ideal moments to receive acknowledgement. This allows teams to develop a shared sense of pride for their collective achievements, counterbalancing the prevailing sentiment that 'good work' goes unnoticed and instead reinforces positive behaviors. Especially in the challenging shopfloor environment where the focus often leans towards meeting production goals and errors, a shift towards a more appreciative culture and the proactive acknowledgement of team achievement could positively impact team dynamics and contribute to increased motivation towards meeting participation and collaboration. Additionally, this recommendation is cost- and time-efficient, as it does not require additional costs or much time for its implementation in daily practice.

The second recommendation focuses on enhancing communication and transparency regarding the processing of meeting outputs. The aim is to evoke the perception among the teams that their contributions in meetings are taken seriously and are adequately addressed by the people responsible for processing meeting outputs (e.g., suggestions, concerns, request, or proposed solutions). A first step towards improvement involves the establishment of new or reevaluation of current feedback mechanisms. A particular focus should be placed on providing regular timely feedback and transparency in decision-making related to meeting outputs. Participants emphasized their understanding that immediate feedback is not always possible and

instead suggested that brief updates on the processing status and estimated waiting time would be sufficient. This study further encourages to provide brief explanations for decisions made related to meeting outputs, especially related to health and safety concerns. A pivotal role in the communication process can be attributed to team speakers as strategically positioned intermediaries. By consistently involving team speakers in these feedback loops, the teams receive more timely updates throughout the week, while strengthening the position of team speakers by involving them in the process. Such a proactive approach holds the potential to strengthen the team's trust in the process again and to foster a sense of involvement and impact. Over the long run, teams could gain a better understanding of the processes and factors involved in implementation and change processes. This holds the potential that in future meetings, team would ground their requests or solutions in a better understanding of the process that follows, contributing to higher qualities in meeting outputs overall.

The third recommendation focuses on cultivating a sense of togetherness among the teams. The aim is to ensure a psychologically safe meeting environment, enabling effective participation and collaboration. The findings of this study highlight that teams with a strong sense of togetherness provide psychological safety for their members and face fewer challenges as a team in meetings overall. Therefore, this study encourages the organization to support team-building initiatives that focus on strengthening interpersonal connections within teams through positive team experiences that ultimately foster a sense of togetherness among team members. This could include non-work-related team-building activities as well as supporting initiatives by teams themselves, e.g., having breakfast together. It is further recommended for the organization as well as for supervisors to celebrate team achievements and accomplishments with the aim of strengthening the sense of togetherness among teams. Moreover, team members and team speakers both emphasized in the interviews how team speakers are in the best position within the organization to mediate between opposing team members and exemplify respectful communication practices that nurture a sense of togetherness. Followingly, team speakers are encouraged to encourage respectful communication practices in their meetings, e.g., allowing each team member to express their perspectives, letting others take their turn to speak, and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to finish their point in discussions.

Finally, this study recommends the organization to support team speakers as more effective meeting facilitators. Certain challenges identified as hindering participation and effective collaboration in team meetings are related to negative interactions between team members and a psychological unsafe meeting environment. In light of these findings, participants in this study, particularly team speakers, have emphasized the necessity for organizational support in



their training as more effective meeting facilitators. This training should focus on supporting team speakers in facilitating a psychologically safe meeting environment, navigating the team through interactive meeting processes, implementing improved meeting design practices, and empowering them as meeting facilitators. As a result, team speakers would have more influence on the effectiveness of meeting processes and their outcomes.

### **5.3 Limitations & Future Research**

There are several limitations to this study. First, as this study focused specifically on a single organization and its production line workers, the generalizability of the present findings is limited. Furthermore, this study did not collect detailed demographic information about participants, nor did it delve into participants' prior knowledge, belief system, or attitude towards meetings, potentially missing valuable contextual information. The absence of gathered demographic data beyond position limits the analysis regarding the unique contextual aspects of teams. Future research could therefore incorporate demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, personality type) and an assessment of participants' attitudes, beliefs, and prior knowledge to understand the nuances and factors shaping their perceptions and experiences more accurately in team meetings, potentially providing richer insights into team dynamics.

Additionally, there is a potential for selection bias due to voluntary participation. Given the voluntary nature of participation, it is reasonable to assume that individuals who struggle to voice their opinions in team meetings might be underrepresented in the study. This potential bias may have unintentionally resulted in a sample that inadequately captures the experiences and perceptions of those who face challenges in expressing themselves during meetings. To address potential selection bias, future studies might consider implying strategies to encourage participation from individuals who face challenges in contributing to team meetings, e.g., targeted outreach, ensuring a more inclusive representation of voices.

Another crucial limitation of this study revolves around the fact that the investigated teams are working in a dynamic and changing environment, and the shared accounts of participants were to a large degree related to current team and organizational dynamics, indicating that the findings of this study may not necessarily be stable over time.

Next, it might be worth investigating the collaborating organization of this study to allow for additional studies that investigate the same research population. This study could conduct an intervention workshop with the teams focusing on emotional awareness. Emotional awareness has been argued to be an essential ability for teams, explaining that "when team members learn to recognize positive behavior and anticipate their impact, they can reinforce

positive instead of negative behavioral patterns” (Schneider, 2018, p. 67). Followingly, it could be investigated whether the gained awareness of team members positively impacts their interaction processes in future meetings and the overall effect on meeting effectiveness.

Another interesting direction for future research relates to comparative studies across different blue-collar organizations. While previous studies already investigated team meeting factors related to the health care sector (Linberg, Persson, Hörberg, & Ekebergh, 2013; Rossel, Melander, Lindah, Nilbert, & Malmström, 2022), educational institutions (Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008; Martin, Van Dyke, Christensen, Greene, Gardener, & Lovett, 2006), social work (Hall, Slembrouk, 2001; Rockhill, 2020; Wittenberg-Lyles, Olioover, Kruse, Demiris, Gage, & Wagner, 2013), or engineering teams (O’Neil & Allen, 2012; Pillay et al., 2016), the blue-collar sectors remain rather open for further investigation in this regard. The findings of this study, highlighting challenges unique to the blue-collar work experience, could be used to further investigate how industry-specific factors, organizational culture, and structures influence team meeting dynamics and outcomes. The findings of such studies could contribute to our understanding of how differences in occupational groups and distinct work contexts shape the dynamics and resulting outcomes of team meetings.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This study explored the perceptions of blue-collar workers related to their level of participation, collaboration, and sense of togetherness in their team meetings. Additionally, this study is one of the first to explore factors associated with meeting effectiveness, specifically in a blue-collar work setting. It advances knowledge in the field by providing empirical support for theoretical concepts related to the process approach, cycles resulting from interactions, and the role of a sense of togetherness in shaping meeting dynamics. It is argued for the processual nature of team meetings as continuous and dynamic processes shaped by group affect, team dynamics, perceived support, and responsiveness of the organization to meeting outputs, as well as past meeting experiences. These factors are suggested to impact employee perceptions, motivation, and levels of participation and collaboration in meetings. Moreover, this study provides theoretical implications and practical recommendations that can be of value for scholars in the fields of meeting science, organizational support theory, and employee engagement, as well as for practitioners in production facilities. However, since this study was conducted in a single organization, the generalizability of the present findings is limited. Future research is needed to address this limitation and is encouraged to build upon the identified contextual challenges and factors related to team meetings in blue-collar work settings.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A – Field notes from observations

### Appendix B – Interview Scheme

#### Interview Scheme – Team meetings

##### Introduction:

- Introduction of the interviewer and explanation of the purpose of the interview.
- Explanation: participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn; the interview can be stopped at any time; and all this will not have any negative consequences for the participants.
- Explanation that the interview will be recorded by an audio device for evaluation purposes, that the recordings will be stored inaccessible to third parties, and that the anonymity of the participants will be guaranteed.
- If the participants give their written consent to participate and to be recorded, any initial questions will be clarified.

##### Opening questions:

- Do you have anything you would like to address right at the beginning?
- How long have you been participating in team discussions?

##### Main questions:

###### Weekly team talk (general)

- Why do the weekly team talks take place?
- When do you think after a meeting: That was good? That was bad?
- Question: What makes you come to this conclusion?
- Question for team members: If you were the team spokesperson for the conversation, would you do the same or differently?
- Question for team spokesperson: How do you think the team talks could be developed?

###### Factors influencing active participation

- How do you feel about speaking up during the team talk?
  - How comfortable are you with your team asking questions or speaking out about what is on your mind?
  - Can you think of moments or situations when you felt more comfortable speaking up than others?
  - What kind of environment do you wish you had in order to speak your mind openly and honestly?
  - What motivates you to share your contributions, ask questions or speak up during team discussions?
- How do you think participation in the team talks is important for your work and the team?
- What stops you from speaking up?

#### Feeling of togetherness

- Do you think that all team members have the same goals during the team talk?
  - How did you come to this conclusion?
- What do you think about the feeling of community and cohesion within a team?
  - What does this mean to you? Do you think it is important?
- What do you think could strengthen this feeling?

#### Collaboration

- In what moments (during the team talks) can you think of where collaboration within your team is important or necessary?
- What can you think of that might help or support collaboration in these moments?

#### Conclusion:

#### Additional feedback

- Is there anything else you would like to add to the themes of participation, sense of community, and collaboration in the team conversations?
- Do you have any suggestions or recommendations that you think would benefit the team conversations but have not been addressed so far?

#### Farewell:

- Thanking the interview participant for his/her participation and time.
- Offering further information about the study or contact details for queries.
- Ensure that all the interview participant's questions have been answered.

## Interview Scheme – German

### Interviewfragen – Teamgespräche in der Montage

#### Einführung:

- Vorstellung des Interviewers und Erklärung des Zwecks des Interviews
- Erläuterung, dass die Teilnahme freiwillig ist und zurückziehbar ist, dass das Interview jederzeit abgebrochen werden kann und dass all dies keine negativen Folgen für die Teilnehmenden mit sich zieht.
- Erläuterung, dass das Interview für Auswertungszwecke von einem Audiogerät aufgenommen wird und die Aufnahmen für Dritte unzugänglich gespeichert werden, und dass die Anonymität der Teilnehmer gewährleistet wird.
- Wenn die Teilnehmer schriftlich ihr Einverständnis zur Teilnahme und zum Aufzeichnen geben, werden noch ggf. erste Fragen geklärt

#### Eröffnungsfragen:

- Hast du direkt zu Anfang etwas, was du schon mal ansprechen möchtest?
- Wie lange nimmst du schon an Teamgesprächen teil?

#### Hauptfragen:

##### Wöchentliche Team-Gespräch (allgemein)

- Warum finden die wöchentlichen Team-Gespräche statt?

- Wann denkst du nach einem Gespräch: Das war gut? Das war schlecht.
- Nachfrage: Was lässt dich zu diesem Entschluss kommen?
- Frage für Teammitglied: Wenn du der Team-Sprecher des Gespräches wärst, was würdest du genauso oder anders machen?
- Frage für Team-Sprecher: Wie denkst du, könnte man die Team-Gespräche noch ausbauen?

#### Faktoren, die die aktive Teilnahme beeinflussen

- Wie fühlst du dich dabei, während des Team-Gespräches deine Meinung zu sagen?
  - o Wie wohl fühlst du dich in deinem Team, Fragen zu stellen oder das auszusprechen, was dir durch den Kopf geht?
  - o Kannst du an Momente oder Situationen denken, in denen du dich wohler gefühlt hast, dich zu äußern als in anderen?
  - o Was für ein Umfeld wünschst du dir, um deine Meinung offen und ehrlich zu sagen?
  - o Was motiviert dich dazu, deine Beiträge zu teilen, Fragen zu stellen oder dich während der Team-Gesprächen zu Wort zu melden?
- Inwiefern glaubst du, dass die Beteiligung an den Team-Gesprächen wichtig für deine Arbeit und das Team ist?
- Was hält dich davon ab, etwas zu sagen?

#### Wir-Gefühl

- Denkst du, dass alle Teammitglieder die gleichen Ziele während des Team-Gespräches verfolgen?
  - o Wie kommst du zu dieser Feststellung?
- Was denkst du zu dem Gefühl der Gemeinschaft und Zusammenhalt innerhalb eines Teams?
  - o Was bedeutet das für dich? Ist es Deiner Meinung nach wichtig?
- Was denkst du, könnte dieses Gefühl stärken?

#### Zusammenarbeit

- An welche Momente (während der Team-Gespräche) kannst du denken, in denen Zusammenarbeit innerhalb deines Teams wichtig oder erforderlich ist?
- Was fällt dir ein, das in diesen Momenten helfen könnte oder die Zusammenarbeit unterstützen würde?

#### Abschluss:

##### Zusätzliches Feedback

- Gibt es noch etwas, das du zu den Themen Teilnahme, Gemeinschaftsgefühl und Zusammenarbeit in den Team-Gesprächen hinzufügen möchtest?
- Hast du Vorschläge oder Empfehlungen, von denen du denkst, dass sie den Team-Gesprächen zugutekommen würden, aber bisher nicht angesprochen wurden?

#### Verabschiedung:

- Dank des Interviewteilnehmers für seine/ihre Teilnahme und Zeit.
- Anbieten von weiteren Informationen zur Studie oder Kontaktdaten für Rückfragen.
- Sicherstellen, dass alle Fragen des Interviewteilnehmers beantwortet wurden.

