

**THE ROLE OF TELEWORK CONFIGURATIONS IN ORGANIZACIONAL IDENTIFICATION: A STUDY IN LIGHT OF SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY**

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## 1. Introduction

Interest in telework (TT) predates the pandemic: Raghuram et al. (2019) reported that, by 2016, 43% of the American workforce had already experienced this work modality. In Brazil, Sobratt (2018) showed that 45% of companies had adopted telework. During the pandemic, this arrangement gained even more traction, with 85% of the organizations surveyed by Korn Ferry (2021) incorporating it into their practices. In Brazil, the use of this work format is still relatively recent. The legislation supporting these decisions is less than a decade old, which may explain ongoing uncertainties around the subject. In the private sector, Law No. 13,467/2017 introduced telework into the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), while in the Federal Public Administration, its regulation was established by Normative Instruction No. 65/2020 and later by Decree No. 11,072/2022.

The literature points to various possible telework configurations, such as its intensity (Bailey & Kurland, 2002), the nature of tasks (Allen et al., 2015), work location (Hill et al., 2003), organizational support (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014), and technological infrastructure (Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008), among others. These organizational choices may affect organizational identification (OID), which is defined as the degree of affective and cognitive connection between the employee and the organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Wiesenfeld et al. (1999) already suggested that physical distance could weaken this connection, a concern later reinforced by subsequent studies (Golden, 2006; Kossen & Berg, 2022).

Using Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), this research investigates how telework configurations relate to elements of organizational identification and help explain different levels of identification among teleworkers. The analytical focus is on the teleworkers themselves and the meanings they attribute to this phenomenon.

Given the growth of telework and the diversity of configurations adopted by public and private organizations, this study is relevant both theoretically and practically. From a theoretical standpoint, it contributes by addressing a gap in the literature through a systematic examination of how different telework configurations influence the core elements of organizational identification, linking the phenomenon to Social Identity Theory. While some studies associate physical distance with a weakened bond between employee and organization (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001; Golden et al., 2008), no analyses have been identified that detail the role of organizational decisions regarding telework formats in mediating this relationship. From a practical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights, allowing managers to understand how specific decisions—such as the intensity of telework, organizational support, and socialization strategies—can strengthen or weaken employees' identification with the organization.

This study focuses on the relationship between telework configurations and the elements of organizational identification, within the context of the Brazilian Federal Public Administration. It includes only teleworkers from direct administration bodies, public foundations, and autarchies governed by Law No. 8,112/1990.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Telework Configurations

Telework configurations refer to the set of characteristics defined by organizations to make this work arrangement viable (Greer & Payne, 2014), indicating that telework does not follow a

single model. Among these configurations, intensity stands out, which may be full-time (entire workday) or part-time (some work hours), varying in context (Allen et al., 2015; Golden, 2006; Lautsch & Kossek, 2009; Madsen, 2003; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). Research has shown that high intensity may increase social isolation (Kossen & Van Der Berg, 2022), although it can also enhance performance (Podolsky et al., 2022). Recent studies indicate a preference for the hybrid model, especially due to its ability to mitigate the negative effects of isolation (Asmussen et al., 2023; Dimian et al., 2023).

Another key aspect is the nature of the work. Tasks requiring less supervision, lower social interaction, and greater autonomy are more compatible with telework (Allen et al., 2015; Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Golden & Veiga, 2005). Also noteworthy are tasks with high complexity and discretion, typical of knowledge work (Cascio, 2000; Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Managerial roles tend to be less compatible with remote models due to the need for stronger organizational presence (Belanger, 1999), while well-defined tasks with adequate resources and low interdependence yield better results (Leonardi et al., 2024). Sectoral contexts are also observed: healthcare and retail often require physical presence, whereas analytical and autonomous activities favor remote arrangements (Asmussen et al., 2023). The type of task also moderates the relationship between isolation and telework intensity (Kossen & Van Der Berg, 2022).

Work location also varies. Beyond home offices, contexts include virtual offices, satellite offices, telecenters, and mobile work settings (Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Hill et al., 2003). Morganson et al. (2010) add the possibility of working at the context's site, especially in outsourcing contexts. The home environment is cited as the most common location and may offer context and convenience advantages (Leonardi et al., 2024).

Organizational and technological support can be divided into three types: material (resources and infrastructure), social (psychological support), and symbolic (cultural validation of remote work) (Leonardi et al., 2024). These supports are fundamental for helping employees adapt to the demands of remote models. Various studies emphasize the importance of managerial and peer support, as well as the availability of technological tools (Allen et al., 2015; Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Rosen, 2007). Some organizations also provide clear policies, training, and explanatory guidelines to meet expected support standards (Cascio, 2000; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001).

The worker profile is another context. Traits such as self-motivation, discipline, autonomy, effective communication, and technological competence are essential for success in telework (Baruch, 2000; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). As for managers, they are expected to be results-oriented and capable of delegating tasks (Cascio, 2000). Less frequent, yet relevant elements include voluntary participation in telework (Belanger, 1999), regular in-person meetings (Cooper & Kurland, 2002), and schedule control (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001).

## **2.2 Elements of Organizational Identification**

Organizational identification is defined as a specific context social identification in which an individual perceives themselves in relation to their association with a particular organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1992). According to Bergami and Bagozzi (2000), the most common definition of the context the social identification process through which an individual describes themselves based on their belonging to the organization. This definition encompasses two processes of social identity construction: self-categorization and depersonalization (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Lousão, 2010). Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) define organizational

identification as the extent to which a member sees themselves as possessing the same 3ontexto3 they believe define the organization.

This type of identification plays a fundamental role in organizational management, as it 3ontexto3s a deep psychological connection between individual and organization—one that is not captured by 3onte constructs but has 3ontexto3 implications for organizational life (Ashforth & Mael, 1992; Ashforth et al., 2008; Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002; Pratt, 1998; Van Knippenberg & Van Schie, 2000). The need for identification with a 3ontexto understood as a human need and 3ontext functional in predicting 3ontexto and behaviors in the workplace (Ashforth et al., 2008; Smidts, Pruyn, & Van Riel, 2001; Van Knippenberg & Van Schie, 2000). Identification is therefore the 3ontexto3 creating a social identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1992; Ashforth et al., 2008; Pratt, 1998), establishing a cognitive connection between the identity of the organization and that of the member (Ashforth & Mael, 1992; Dukerich et al., 2002; Pratt, 1998). Identification occurs 3ont na individual defines themselves, at least in part, based on what the organization 3ontexto3s (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Organizational identification is considered 3ontex 3ont the 3ontexto3 used by the individual to define the organization are similar to those used to define themselves (Ashforth & Mael, 1992; Dutton et al., 1994). The strength of identification may also be associated with the member's perception of organizational identity and how they believe the organization is perceived by others (Dukerich et al., 2002; Dutton et al., 1994).

Mael and Ashforth (1992) operationalized the concept using a scale they had developed in na earlier study (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), combining it with 3onte measures to assess what they considered to be the core 3ontexto3s of organizational identification: (1) perceived 3ontexto3; (2) competition, at both interorganizational and intraorganizational levels; and (3) sentimentality, which involves the employee's feelings toward the organization, colleagues, and supervisor.

Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) developed a simpler, visual scale focused on the cognitive 3ontexto3 self-categorization, consisting of two items. This measure was tested with over 2,700 employees, showing a Cronbach's alpha of 0.8, and yielded results similar to those of the Mael and Ashforth (1992) scale. The visual scale developed by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) has been 3ontext in numerous empirical studies, and Faller (2017) translated and validated it for use in qualitative interviews in her doctoral research in Brazil.

### **2.3 Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (SIT), proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1986), aims to explain intergroup processes and relations from a social psychology perspective. According to Hogg, Terry, and White (1995), its central 3ontexto3 that a social category—such as nationality, political affiliation, or sports team—offers a definition of who na individual is based on the characteristics of that category. This occurs through self-categorization, in which each group affiliation 3ontexto3s a social identity.

Tajfel (1982) defined social identity as the self-concept derived from knowledge 3ontex's membership in a social group, along with the emotional significance and value attached to that membership. Three 3ontexto3s structure this identity: cognitive (awareness of group membership), evaluative (value assigned to the group), and emotional (involvement with the group). Individuals seek to maintain a positive social identity (Lousão, 2010).

According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), intergroup behavior is influenced by the social 3ontexto, and social identity is heightened in situations of group conflict (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995).

Thus, individuals tend to behave in ways that align with the norms and expectations of their group (Brown, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2000). Experiments conducted by Tajfel et al. (1971) demonstrated that intergroup behavior arises even under minimal group conditions, highlighting the human tendency to act according to group norms—even in the absence of personal ties. These studies showed that even with minimal identification cues, such as arbitrary group assignments, individuals exhibited ingroup favoritism (Tajfel, Billig, & Bundy, 1971). SIT is grounded in three principles: (1) individuals strive for positive social identities; (2) positivity is derived through intergroup comparisons; and (3) if social identity is negative, individuals will seek to leave or change groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1971). Later, Tajfel (1972) defined social identity as the awareness of belonging to specific social groups, with emotional significance and shared values.

SIT is based on two cognitive processes: categorization and self-enhancement (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Categorization refers to distinguishing groups based on shared characteristics (Tajfel, 1982), while self-enhancement involves seeking positive evaluations through intergroup comparison. Group formation involves both external social categorization and internal self-categorization, with the latter being fundamental for the perception of belonging (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Social identity can therefore be understood as a product of the social context, activated through interactions, rather than as a fixed structure (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Individual behavior is shaped by group relationships, and social identity is a dynamic reflection of intergroup relations (Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

### **3. Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative approach and a post-positivist epistemological context, aligned with the objective of understanding the meanings attributed by individuals to the investigated phenomenon—organizational identification in the context of telework. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) was used as the theoretical framework, and the unit of analysis was the individual.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 22 workers, based on a protocol developed by the researchers using relevant literature and Social Identity Theory, following Creswell's (2007) model. The interview protocol allowed for some flexibility, enabling the researchers to include unplanned questions when necessary, depending on the participants' narratives. Since all interviewees worked under a telework regime, interviews were conducted via videoconference in the same environment where they experienced the studied phenomenon. The Webex platform was used, and all interviews were recorded and securely stored, both locally and in the cloud, and subsequently transcribed.

The interview protocol was based on the proposals of Ashforth and Mael (1989), the graphical scale of Bergami and Bagozzi (2000)—ranging from A to F (low to high identification level)—and the key elements of Social Identity Theory. The final version included 14 questions: five about telework configurations, five about organizational identification, and four about the context of social identity, in addition to the graphical scale presentation by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000). A pilot test was conducted with three participants who matched the study profile.

Participant information was obtained verbally at the beginning of each interview, along with explanations regarding the confidentiality of information and the purpose of the research. Interviewees were also informed that the study's results would be shared with them upon completion.

The research setting was the Brazilian Federal Public Administration, including direct administration bodies, public foundations, and autonomous agencies governed by public law. This setting was selected based on two main factors: the 5ontex presence of telework and the researchers' ease of access to participants. Participant selection was conducted through referrals.

Data analysis followed Bardin's (2021) categorical 5ontexto analysis method, using na inductive logic to categorize the meanings emerging from the interviewees' responses. The study was conducted within a post-positivist epistemological 5ontexto5, and source triangulation strategies were adopted, involving participants from 5ontexto5 organizations to verify the recurrence of emerging themes.

#### 4. Discussion of Results

Personal characteristics cannot be directly associated with the level of organizational identification in telework, as this relationship is influenced by multiple factors. Interviewees with 5ontexto5 levels of identification expressed opposing meanings regarding their organizational ties. Those with low identification reported negative feelings toward the organization, while those with high identification expressed positive feelings toward the organization and their teams. None of the organizations represented in the study selected 5ontext based on predefined profiles for telework; 5ontex, the characteristics mentioned emerged from individual perceptions. The reviewed literature also does not point to organizational practices of this nature, but merely describes ideal characteristics such as self-motivation, self-management, organization, flexibility, and technological competence (Baruch, 2000; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Leonardi et al., 2024). This 5ontexto led to the formulation of Proposition 1:

**P1: The level of teleworker identification with their organization influences the personal characteristics they describe as ideal for telework. These characteristics, however, do not influence identification.**

Regarding regular meetings, this study echoes the work of Wiesenfeld et al. (1999) in reinforcing that remote work models tend to weaken the bonds between organizations and their members. This was evident in the results: interviewees with low levels of organizational identification (levels A, C, and D on the graphic scale) reported an absence or infrequency of in-person meetings. In contrast, those with high levels of identification (levels E, F, and G) reported regular meetings (weekly, biweekly, monthly, or semiannual). Among those who chose level G—the highest on the scale—all reported periodic in-person meetings, as exemplified by interviewee E10:

Most of the units follow this model. Why? Because the goal is integration, to catch up, gossip, vent, laugh, play, and gain a bit of insight, because behavioral training also brings people together. (E10)

The literature already recognizes in-person interaction as central to building organizational bonds (Golden, 2006; Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008; Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 1999, 2001). The absence of these moments may intensify professional isolation, negatively impacting organizational identification (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Golden et al., 2008). Golden (2006) noted that the greater the intensity of remote work, the greater the sense of isolation—an element that directly affects identification (Thatcher, 2006; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). From the perspective of organizational decisions, the data suggest that isolation mainly affects

intraorganizational competition and emotional attachment to the organization. The following statement illustrates this dynamic:

At the same time that I feel joy, pleasure, satisfaction from being closer and more integrated with people [...], I feel frustration and disappointment seeing that the same old mistakes keep happening. (E20)

Conversely, respondents with high levels of identification (E, F, and G) mentioned feelings of belonging, team spirit, and healthy internal competition:

Management has promoted meetings since the beginning of remote work, although not on a fixed schedule. (E3)

For events or inaugurations, there's a hybrid format with encouragement for in-person attendance. (E4)

In-person contact made all the difference. (E7)

The responses from those at level G highlight the central role of regular in-person meetings:

It's mandatory to be in-person once a month. We have weekly team meetings and biweekly coordination meetings. (E11)

The literature has addressed the absence of in-person meetings through the lens of social isolation caused by physical distance at work (Mosquera et al., 2022). This isolation may reduce engagement (Becker et al., 2022; Dimian, 2023; Jamal et al., 2021), negatively impact job satisfaction (Mosquera et al., 2022), and lead to emotional exhaustion (Becker et al., 2022; Lyndon et al., 2024).

Orlandi et al. (2024) argue that isolation can be mitigated by regular meetings and frequent feedback, preferably in person. Min Ha et al. (2023) highlight the role of social presence as a mediator between virtuality and engagement. However, Abendroth and Reimann (2024) observe that flexible workers are not always interested in in-person interaction, and that mandatory physical presence may negatively affect their satisfaction.

The findings of this study indicate that regular in-person meetings positively influence organizational identification. The regularity of such meetings promotes **depersonalization** (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008), reinforcing the worker's social identity through the alignment of personal and organizational identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1992; Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002; Pratt, 1998). While the mere existence of in-person encounters does not, by itself, guarantee high levels of identification, their role in building organizational bonds is significant (Orlandi et al., 2024; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). This led to the formulation of the second proposition:

**P2: Regular meetings—preferably in person—positively influence organizational identification by fostering depersonalization and contributing to the construction of a social identity within the organization through elements such as intraorganizational competition and emotional attachment.**

Work schedule flexibility also significantly influences organizational identification, particularly among workers with high identification. Interestingly, workers with low identification (levels A and C) reported having flexible schedules, as did some with high identification (levels F and G), suggesting that flexibility alone does not guarantee stronger organizational ties. For example, E5 noted that flexibility enables greater autonomy:

Personally, I like it. I think it's a good freedom to have. (...) I don't need to ask my boss for everything. I like that. (E5)

Interviewee E15 aligns her work schedule with family needs, reinforcing Madsen's (2003) observation that flexibility helps reduce work-family conflict. However, Sullivan and Lewis

(2001) caution that this may pose specific challenges for women. Autonomy also appears tied to identification in E10's statement:

Some days I need to work 10 hours. Other days I work 4. (E10)

Leonardi et al. (2024) indicate that flexibility is a decisive factor for telework but introduces coordination challenges among coworkers with different routines. This concern was raised by highly identified workers, such as E16:

(...) it's very important to have that team contact. (E16)

Nevertheless, there was a consensus on the benefits of schedule flexibility in aligning personal and professional life, reinforcing autonomy, as discussed by Cascio (2000) and Hoch and Kozlowski (2014). This led to the third proposition:

**P3: Schedule flexibility positively affects organizational identification by reinforcing autonomy and supporting the balance between personal and professional activities through elements such as perceived prestige and emotional connection with the organization.**

The intensity of telework (total or partial) has been widely discussed in the literature (Allen et al., 2015; Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Studies indicate that higher telework intensity is often associated with social isolation (Kossen & Van der Berg, 2022; Van Zoonen & Sivunen, 2022), although scholars such as Podolsky et al. (2022) acknowledge that, despite the isolation, high-intensity telework may still support the remote work model effectively.

Interviewee accounts revealed that organizational identification is not exclusively linked to telework intensity. Among participants with low identification, half worked in a partial regime and half in full-time remote mode. Among those with high identification, most emphasized the importance of in-person interactions. As stated by E13 and E4:

Telework distances people [...] a closer, more personal kind of contact is missing. (E13)

Work relationships continue, but there's a loss of that corporate feeling. (E4)

Nevertheless, fully remote workers also reported high levels of identification, highlighting institutional prestige and a sense of belonging. Dimian et al. (2023) emphasize that isolation tends to impact workers in high-intensity remote settings more acutely, which explains why 62% of employees prefer hybrid models (Asmussen et al., 2023; Dimian et al., 2023). Sun et al. (2023) reinforce that intensity must be analyzed alongside organizational culture, remote management practices, and shared norms.

Low identification was frequently attributed to other factors such as work overload (E9), pre-existing organizational issues (E3), or personal preferences (E17). On the other hand, some interviewees viewed telework as a positive factor for relationship-building, as it reduced negative interactions found in physical environments (E1).

Organizations have increasingly opted for hybrid work arrangements to avoid isolation and promote work-life balance, while also cutting operational costs (Arunprasad et al., 2022; Daniels et al., 2001). Telework advantages include flexibility, autonomy, reduced commuting, and productivity gains (Baruch, 2000; Hill et al., 2003). Gajendran and Harrison (2007) identified associations between telework and variables such as performance, stress, and turnover intention. This leads us to the fourth proposition:

**P4: The intensity of telework affects the level of organizational identification, depending on the meanings the teleworker attributes to the organization's practices. This relationship is not direct and mainly influences perceived prestige and emotional connection to the organization.**

The rules governing telework play a central role in organizational identification. According to Podolsky (2024), the clarity with which rules are communicated is more important than the rules themselves. This clarity also emerges as significant in the literature on organizational bonding (Smidts, Pruyn, & Van Riel, 2001; Van Dick, 2004). Requirements such as managerial authorization and a formal work plan were common among participants, in line with Leonardi et al. (2024) and the Brazilian federal service regulations.

Availability during business hours and the possibility of exclusion from the program due to noncompliance were especially noted by those with high organizational identification. Conversely, flexibility-related norms emphasized in Abendroth and Reimann (2024) and Jamal et al. (2021) were not observed. Instead, a control- and productivity-oriented logic predominated in the studied organizations, as highlighted by one respondent:

[The organization] set a performance target of at least 30% above the expected 100% output for an employee to qualify for full-time telework. (E6)

Workers with low identification described perceptions of constant monitoring and centralized decision-making:

It ends up being mostly up to the manager whether the employee can join the program or not. (E1)

Those with high identification, however, cited trust and autonomy:

We had a lot of autonomy. (E8)

The literature indicates that control-oriented rules tend to reduce organizational identification, while trust-oriented practices increase it (Allen et al., 2015; Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Kossek et al., 2006; Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Rosen, 2007; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). This study's findings suggest that clear norms enhance the perception of prestige and strengthen emotional ties to the organization.

Regarding organizational support, three main dimensions stand out: material, social, and symbolic support (Leonardi et al., 2024). Although the provision of technological equipment is widely documented (Allen et al., 2015; Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014), this alone is insufficient for fostering identification. Interviewees with weaker organizational ties reported a lack of proper guidance:

There was no specific training for any tool. (E5)

We're learning by doing. (E17)

The absence of clear institutional communication was also a distancing factor:

[The organization] institutionally didn't act appropriately, I think. (E6)

Conversely, workers with higher levels of identification described positive experiences with guidance, communication, and leadership support:

There was a whole effort to disseminate internal communications. (E22)

These elements represent social and symbolic support, which, according to Hafermalz and Riemer (2021), can foster a sense of belonging through the effective use of technology. Even in the absence of material resources, symbolic and social support can compensate, as described by E18 and E4. Concern for well-being also emerged, such as providing furniture (E11), although no formal well-being programs were mentioned.

According to Dimian (2023), training and development initiatives are essential components of organizational support. These findings reinforce the importance of organizational actions that promote trust and recognition, contributing to belonging and perceived prestige, thus leading to the fifth proposition:

**P5: Telework configurations involving clear rules and adequate organizational support positively influence organizational identification by fostering trust and strengthening perceived prestige and emotional attachment.**

Remote work presents distinct challenges for management, as supervisor–subordinate relationships mediated by technology demand adaptation. Studies suggest that traditional hierarchical leadership is ill-suited for virtual teams, and that shared leadership is more effective for performance (Cascio, 2000; Holch & Kozlowski, 2014; Kurland & Bailey, 2000).

In this study, nearly all participants reported a positive relationship with their managers, characterized by trust, respect, and fairness—regardless of their level of organizational identification. However, this positive relationship appears to be a differentiating factor only among those with high levels of identification, who describe flexibility, open communication, and even friendship with their supervisors:

Great, I have no problems at all... I'm free to speak up, and have already invited my manager for a talk to realign expectations. (E3)

My manager is extremely competent... wonderful. (E4)

In contrast, participants with low identification expressed dissatisfaction with bureaucracy, lack of autonomy, and institutional problems such as harassment or informality. Still, when speaking specifically about their managers, they maintained a positive tone—revealing a kind of cognitive dissonance:

The structure is very rigid... everything is too vertical. (E5)

There's a lot of harassment, informality, and precariousness. (E19)

The relationship with my manager remains strong—it works well. (E22)

For workers with low identification, dissatisfaction stems from the institution itself, not their direct manager. For those with high identification, however, the manager relationship directly influences elements such as intraorganizational competition, perceived prestige, and team sentiment. High identification was also associated with other telework features: partial telework intensity, effective organizational support, schedule flexibility, and regular in-person meetings. This finding aligns with earlier research emphasizing the importance of results-oriented leadership and managerial recognition (Cascio, 2000; Holch & Kozlowski, 2014).

Trust in the manager–employee relationship is central to both satisfaction and identification, whereas excessive control undermines this connection (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Becker et al., 2022; Yang & Lin, 2023). The psychological distance introduced by remote work presents real challenges for effective leadership (Leonardi et al., 2024; Orlandi et al., 2024). Hence, positive relationships with managers foster organizational identification by reinforcing fairness, clear communication, recognition, and autonomy (Jamal et al., 2021; Lott & Abendroth, 2023; Mehta & Sharma, 2022; Min Ha et al., 2023). This leads to the sixth proposition:

**P6: A positive relationship between teleworker and manager—characterized by high trust and low control—positively affects organizational identification through intraorganizational competition, perceived prestige, and emotional attachment.**

Analyzing the relationship between telework configurations and organizational identification through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT) requires an understanding of how workers affiliate with organizational groups or categories (Brown, 2000; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner & Reynolds, 2010). According to SIT, activating social identity in organizational contexts triggers depersonalization and group belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In telework, multiple social identities may be

simultaneously activated (e.g., professional, mother, spouse), in contrast to traditional work, which tends to prioritize professional identity (Stets & Burke, 2000; Hogg et al., 1995).

Because social identity is constructed in group interactions—which can be disrupted by telework—it becomes crucial to examine these dynamics (Wiesenfeld et al., 1999, 2001). Additionally, SIT proposes that intergroup comparisons—whether across or within organizations—shape behavior and strengthen identification (Tajfel, 1982; Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Findings reveal that the extremes of the identification scale (levels A and G) are closely related to intraorganizational competition, perceived prestige, and a sense of belonging. Intermediate levels (D and E) show less influence from these factors. Participants with low identification often mentioned a lack of in-person meetings, unclear policies, and insufficient support, while those with high identification referred to flexibility, good relationships with managers, and strong organizational support. These findings suggest that the cognitive and evaluative components of identification (Tajfel, 1982) are influenced by telework configurations.

**P7: Telework configurations that promote relationships among individuals and groups contribute to the construction of social identity related to the organization, thus increasing the strength of organizational identification.**

However, such configurations alone do not fully explain the development of organizational identification. For instance, interviewee E5, despite working in a partial telework model (which should favor identification), did not know their manager, lacked organizational support, and reported unclear policies—reflecting the lowest level of identification. Conversely, interviewee E11, working in full-time telework, reported regular team meetings, a strong relationship with the manager, robust support, and clear telework policies—resulting in the highest level of identification.

**P8: Telework configurations related to the work arrangement and remote relationships are mediated by the organization's positioning strategies, influencing the development of organizational identification.**

According to Stets and Burke (2000), social identity is consolidated through group-level comparisons rather than interpersonal ones. This self-categorization explains why a good relationship with a manager can exist independently of identification, as it is perceived interpersonally. It also underscores the importance of organizational support and clear policies, which foster self-categorization and depersonalization (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987).

Social identity operates within a hierarchical structure based on intergroup comparisons (Brown, 2000; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner & Reynolds, 2010). Participants with moderate identification (levels D and E) emphasized organizational policies and support rather than in-person interactions. Conversely, those at the highest and lowest levels highlighted the relevance of in-person meetings, telework intensity, and schedule flexibility.

The emotional component of social identity (Tajfel, 1982) also plays a critical role. Most participants with low identification expressed a desire to leave the organization, signaling group rejection. Among those with high identification, even those considering leaving attributed it to external reasons (e.g., salary, career), further indicating that identification is more related to group belonging than to individual factors (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

The findings suggest two effective configurations for fostering strong organizational identification: (1) in-person interactions, even with limited support, and (2) virtual relationships reinforced by clear policies and sufficient organizational support. These enable workers to recognize themselves as part of a social category, reinforcing their organizational identity (Hogg et al., 1995). This leads to the final proposition:

**P9: Telework configurations that reflect the organization's positioning strategies indirectly influence the construction of social identity within the organization, thereby affecting the strength of organizational identification.**

## 5. Conclusion

This study investigated how telework configurations influence the elements of organizational identification (OID). OID was analyzed based on four elements proposed by Mael and Ashforth (1992): interorganizational competition, intraorganizational competition, perceived prestige, and sentimentalism. Three variables were excluded from the analysis (nature of work, location, and voluntary entry) due to lack of variation or empirical relevance. From the analysis, nine propositions were formulated and presented in the discussion. The key findings include:

- **P1:** Personal characteristics do not influence OID but are shaped by the worker's level of identification.
- **P2–P4:** Schedule flexibility, telework intensity, and in-person meetings favor perceived prestige and sentimentalism.
- **P5–P6:** Clear norms, organizational support, and good manager relationships strengthen identification by promoting trust and emotional bonds.
- **P7–P9:** The construction of social identity is impacted by interpersonal interactions and mediated by institutional positioning.

The most influential elements of OID among the interviewees were perceived prestige and sentimentalism, highlighting the combination of organizational configurations as a key factor. Manager relationships and in-person meetings also affect intraorganizational competition, whereas interorganizational competition appeared less relevant. Social Identity Theory guided the analysis, suggesting that telework practices directly influence self-categorization and depersonalization processes, which are pillars of collective identity formation. Thus, telework configurations impact OID primarily through relational and institutional perception elements. This study confirms findings by Wiesenfeld et al. (2001), emphasizing the importance of affiliation and social support for organizational identification in virtual contexts. Moreover, it expands understanding by highlighting the role of general telework characteristics (such as intensity and schedule) in mediating relationships with OID, emphasizing meetings and management as channels for fulfilling the need for belonging.

The main contributions of this research include a detailed mapping of how each telework element impacts different aspects of organizational identification, enriching the literature on identity management (Dutton et al., 1994; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Additionally, it stands out by analyzing OID through the lens of Social Identity Theory, focusing on how context and relationships influence organizational belonging (Stets & Burke, 2000; Lousão, 2010). From a practical standpoint, it offers insights for managers to design telework configurations aligned with organizational strategy, fostering greater employee identification.

For future research, it is recommended to broaden the sample to include workers with different employment contracts, such as formal labor law employees and professionals in non-governmental organizations. Exploring cultural and generational differences that may influence

organizational identification in telework contexts is also relevant. Diverse methodological approaches are suggested, including interpretative studies and quantitative research to test the propositions developed in this study as hypotheses. Finally, it is important to deepen the understanding of organizational positioning as a mediating variable and analyze how social bonds influence individuals' need for affiliation with organizations.

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