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Digital workplace transformation triggers a shift in the HR function: From resource manager to growth catalyst

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DIGITAL WORKPLACE TRANSFORMATION TRIGGERS A SHIFT IN THE HR IDENTITY: FROM RESOURCE MANAGER TO GROWTH CATALYST

Research Paper

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Abstract

Digital workplace technologies and changing demands of the workforce drive digital workplace transformation (DWT). In response, the human resources (HR) function implements people analytics (PA), which can either enable traditional HR reporting or facilitate novel personalized employee experiences. This either/or in leveraging PA induces a shift in the HR function's identity. Building upon paradox theory and using the concept of identity, we investigate the occurring tensions due to the implementation of PA. We use a two-staged qualitative research approach, consisting of an ethnography at a company undergoing DWT, extended to insights from 18 expert interviews from the field of PA for theoretical generalization. We make two contributions. First, our findings suggest two HR identity archetypes: HR as resource managers vs. HR as growth catalyst. Second, we extend the paradoxical tension between these two archetypes to DWT literature questioning the pertinent view of identity metamorphosis.

Keywords: Digital workplace transformation, Digital transformation, identity shift, people analytics, qualitative research.

1 Introduction

Human resources (HR) functions observe a critical role in organizations' digital workplace transformation (DWT). DWT captures the organizational efforts to change workplaces into digital workplaces (Jensen and Stein, 2021, Zimmer et al., 2023, Zimmer et al., 2020) to which we refer as "the physical, cultural and digital arrangements that simplify working life in complex, dynamic and often unstructured working environments." (Dery et al. 2017, p. 136). Practitioners and scholars consider two rationales as driving DWT. First, digital workplace technologies offer new ways of organizing that can support organizations' digital transformation (DT) (Tursunbayeva et al., 2018, McCartney and Fu, 2022, Baptista et al., 2020). Second, the workforce has changing demands toward their workplaces. Particularly, generation Y and digital natives seek workplaces that provide purpose and support their growth (Colbert et al., 2016, Jensen and Stein, 2021). Consequently, HR functions face a workforce that increasingly demands individualized and personal HR services. A demand that they seek to tackle by adopting people analytics (PA) systems (DiClaudio, 2019, Khatri and Samuel, 2019).

PA systems store, process, and analyze data on organizational resources, processes, people, and their performance (Gal et al., 2020). They support HR and managerial tasks including operative recruiting, demographic management, and skill management but also developing employees' career paths (Tursunbayeva et al., 2018, Hüllmann et al., 2021). Thus, PA systems can assist the HR function in responding to the workforce's changing demands towards their workplace. Despite this premise, HR functions struggle to fully utilize PA systems since employees adopt respective systems reluctantly and

express privacy concerns (Teebken and Hess, 2021, Giermindl et al., 2021, Bhave et al., 2020). Contrarily, they share their data (e.g., on completed trainings, qualifications, and career aspirations) with professional social media networks (Van Dijck, 2013). Existing studies have investigated this contradicting data-sharing behavior through the privacy paradox (Awad and Krishnan, 2006, Stock-Homburg and Hannig, 2020).

The privacy paradox provides explanations when an individual's data-sharing behavior is incongruent with their privacy concerns. This occurs when the benefits of data-sharing outweigh its risks (Dinev and Hart, 2006). For PA systems' reluctant adoption, this means that employees consider the risks higher than the benefits. However, what if employees cannot conceive the benefits of sharing data with their employer because of a changing HR identity? Indeed, DT entails identity changes that can occur at the organizational, group, and individual level (Wessel et al., 2021, Utesheva et al., 2016, Tripsas, 2009, Horlach et al., 2017). In the HR function, we can observe how the changing demands in the workforce and the possibilities that come with PA systems engender emergence of a new identity. While the function has considered itself as a resource manager, studies suggest a new self-understanding as a growth catalyst (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2017, Dinh et al., 2014). This reflects in the premise that PA systems enable employee benefits in the form of personalized HR services. The crux, however, how shall HR functions leverage PA systems, if employees refuse data-sharing?

While the privacy paradox grounds this crux in a risk/benefit ratio, the identity perspective underlying DWT suggests an explanation within the changing HR identity. We thus posit that DWT and the involved demand on HR engenders emergence of a new identity that can entail paradoxical tensions within HR functions' identity, which can contribute to the explanation of employees' paradoxical data-sharing behavior. We ask the research question of *how the digital workplace transformation alters the identity of organizations' HR functions?*

To answer this question, we conducted a two-staged research process. The first stage comprises an ethnography of a large car manufacturer's HR function, which revealed five dimensions along which a new identity emerged. For theoretical generalization, the second stage involved interviews with external experts in the field on the design and adoption of PA systems. In this article, we present the analysis and discussion of this data, which presents grounds for two contributions. First, we argue that the paradoxical nature of the two HR identity types can explain employees' data-sharing behavior. Second, we contribute to DWT literature conceptualizing the identity change in HR functions as paradoxical.

2 Digital workplace transformation and the HR function

2.1 People analytics and emergence of a new HR identity

DT changes the nature of work and impacts all organizational functions (Baptista et al., 2020, Hanelt et al., 2020). While prior research has focused on digital innovation in the forms of digital products and services, digital business models, and digital processes (Nambisan et al., 2017), some studies have shown that the adoption of digital workplace technologies also changes organizational support functions like HR (Johnson et al., 2016, Tursunbayeva et al., 2018). Starting in the early 1940s, basic payroll systems supported operative HR tasks, evolving into more sophisticated decision support systems (DSS) in the 1980s and later into dedicated cloud-based HR information systems (HRIS) (Johnson et al., 2016). Synonyms for HRIS are HR analytics or PA (Hüllmann et al., 2021), and in the following, we will refer to them as "people analytics". "[These tools] analyze data from many organizational areas for patterns and present decision makers with more granular views of organizational resources, processes, people, and their performance" (Gal et al., 2020, p. 100301). PA support HR and managerial tasks, ranging from operative recruiting activities to strategic leadership aspects, and are no longer limited to descriptive statistics (Gal et al. 2017).

PA, as one specific form of digital workplace technology, comes with certain benefits and risks. Prior studies have highlighted how PA increases transparency in organizations as more data are collected and analyzed and how it supports objective, less error-prone decision-making (Tursunbayeva et al., 2018,

Gal et al., 2017). HR functions can work more efficiently using PA (Giermindl et al., 2021). Employees can benefit from PA as they can be empowered via the tools (Giermindl et al., 2021, Gierlich-Joas et al., 2021). However, the rising datafication, unintended nudging, and algorithm opacity are among the most discussed challenges of PA (Gal et al., 2020). Employees are afraid to get monitored and data accessed in unauthorized manners (Marabelli et al., 2021). The risk of PA algorithms discriminating against certain employees cannot yet be overcome (Gal et al., 2020, Giermindl et al., 2021).

These tensions of PA impose conflicts for HR functions. Stemming from the initial understanding of HR as an operative support function taking care of application processes, benefit programs, performance monitoring, and workforce planning (Dulebohn and Johnson, 2013), the function moves towards an *IT identity*. Carter & Grover (2015) studied IT identity on the individual level defining it "as the extent to which an individual views the use of IT as integral to his or her sense of self" (Carter and Grover, 2015, p. 931). While originating from the individual level, scholars translated the concept into organizational contexts (Utesheva et al., 2016, Wessel et al., 2021, Tripsas, 2009). For example, Wessel et al. (2021) draw on organizational identity when distinguishing between IT-enabled organizational transformation and DT. For IT-enabled organizational transformation, the IT artifact supports the existing value proposition and core functions, such that the organizational identity is reinforced. In contrast, DT redefines the identity of organizations. (Wessel et al., 2021). Applying this conceptualization to our context of PA use in the HR function, the question is, if the function's identity is reinforced, or if a new understanding emerges. An emergent identity can mean work to accomplish congruence between the internal identity (how the HR function sees herself) and external identity (how others see the HR function) (Tripsas, 2009). However, congruence between identities is not always possible. In some occasions, emergent identities produce unresolvable – i.e., paradoxical – tensions among multiple co-existing identities. We argue that DWT can produce such co-existing and paradoxical identities.

2.2 The nature of paradoxes

Paradoxes consist of "contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time." (Smith and Lewis, 2011, p. 382). When paradoxical, these interrelated elements coexist in tension. This means, they appear logical when viewed individually but inconsistent when juxtaposed. While some tensions can be resolved, e.g., by choosing one option over another, the nature of paradoxical tensions is that they persist (Putnam et al., 2016). Consequently, choosing or emphasizing one element over another within a paradox can merely render the underlying tension latent. Over time, however, paradoxical tensions re-emerge as salient.

The inception of paradox theory lies in the study of organizational transformation (Putnam et al., 2016, Van de Ven and Poole, 1995, Quinn and Cameron, 1988). Transforming, organizations introduce or face new activities or elements, e.g., goals, values, knowledge, or processes. This reflects in DWT studies investigating the removal of workplace elements contradicting aspired goals (e.g., Zimmer et al. (2023)), or studies into DT requiring identity change and the management of multiple concerns (Svahn et al., 2017, Tripsas, 2009). However, beyond the research theme of transformation, scholars have studied paradoxes in contexts of innovation, leadership as well as communication, and rhetoric (for an extensive review see Smith and Lewis (2011)). These studies share that paradox theory can explain organizations' confrontation with conflicting organizational processes, activities, and elements (Smith and Lewis, 2011). While some theories (e.g., contingency theory or ambidexterity) posit that organizations align these elements or develop capabilities to master them simultaneously, paradox theory conceptualizes them as relating to unresolvable tensions (Papachroni et al., 2015, Lewis and Smith, 2014). Thus, paradox theory builds on a both/and thinking rather than either/or toward conflicting activities and elements (Smith et al., 2010, Smith et al., 2016). However, the nature of paradoxes differs.

Existing studies identified different paradoxes (e.g. Awad and Krishnan, 2006, Bernstein, 2012). Reviewing this body of work, Smith and Lewis (2011) categorized these paradoxes and traced their emergence to different organizational activities and elements. In total, they outline four different paradox categories: learning, organizing, performing, and belonging. Since the last category roots in tensions of identity, we focus on the category of belonging paradoxes. Belonging paradoxes emerge

between the individual and the collective or between competing values, goals, and memberships. These tensions can stem from competing demands. If we translate this to the context of DWT, PA systems, and the HR function, the literature suggests that DWT confronts HR functions with competing demands (Johnson et al., 2016). While their strategic role demands HR functions to treat humans as resources, the changes in the workforce demand HR functions to engage in individualized and personal HR services. Paradox theory and existing work on identity (e.g. Tripsas, 2009, Wessel et al., 2021) suggest that these competing demands can entail identity tensions, which can engender inefficient interactions within HR functions but also with employees. Thus, we consider paradox theory an adequate lens to explore the HR functions' identity change and its relation to employees' data-sharing behavior.

3 Two-staged qualitative research approach

Studying the DWT-induced identity change in HR functions, we take a two-staged research approach. The first stage is an ethnography of a large cooperation and the second stage is an interview study with HR experts with different perspectives on the role of PA in changes in HR work. This two-staged approach followed our conceptualization of the observed phenomenon (i.e., emergence of a new identity in organizations' HR function) and the notion to generalize this conception theoretically (Lee and Baskerville, 2003).

3.1 Setting the scene and two-staged data collection

We first stumbled upon the observed identity change in organizations' HR functions in an ethnography (Eberle and Maeder, 2016, Klein and Myers, 1999, van Maanen, 2011) of a large European car manufacturer employing more than 100,000 employees. We refer to the car manufacturer as Auto. One author studied Auto's DWT between July 2017 and June 2020. During this time, he conducted participant observations, which he recorded in field notes (Myers, 2009, Emerson et al., 2001, Ingold, 2014), held formal and informal interviews (Silverman, 2014, van Maanen, 2011), and collected archival data (e.g., internal and external documents, enterprise social media posts, or employee forum discussions) (Akemu and Abdelnour, 2020). The author gained this field access through an employment contract as internal consultant for organizational development within Auto's HR function. This contract comprised part-time consultancy work and part-time (50:50) field research. The focus of this field research was Auto's DT process, which involved the DT of the company's HR function in support of the organization-wide DWT. In October 2017, the HR function established a central digital transformation office (DTOHR). The DTOHR set out to establish a new mindset within the function but also to transform the function's digital infrastructure. The observation that drove the DTOHR was that employees, when acting as consumers, enjoy better HR services outside Auto, e.g., with professional social media networks. Addressing this observation, the DTOHR's activities and the organization's responses foregrounded that DWT meant emergence of a new HR identity.

Intrigued by this emergence of a new identity, we decided to extend our insights from the ethnography to other organizations to incorporate different perspectives. That is, we wondered if and how HR functions in other companies experience this identity change. Thus, as a basis for theoretically generalizing the identity change observed at Auto (c.f. Utesheva et al., 2016), we conducted 18 semi-structured interviews (Myers, 2007) between September and October 2021. The interviewees were HR staff using PA applications in their companies (9), developers of respective PA applications (4), and consultants who assisted firms in implementing and utilizing PA (5). This interviewee pool allowed us to investigate the HR identity change from different perspectives and at different evolvement stages across multiple organizations. We recruited these interviewees via LinkedIn screening their profiles for a set of inclusion criteria. These criteria were: more than three years of experience in the field, and observation of a leading position (e.g., head of people analytics, CEO of developing firm, head of people and organization). The interviews lasted on average 29 minutes without taking personal chats before and after the core interview questions into account. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized (Miles et al., 2013). Table 1 provides an overview of our data collection, data usage and outcome through the research approach's two stages.

Research stage	Data collection	Data usage	Outcome
Stage 1: Ethnography on large car manufacturer's HR function (Jul17-Jun20)	- Participant observations on the digital transformation of Auto's HR function - Formal and informal interviews with HR managers, HR experts, members of the HR function's digital transformation office, business unit managers, and employees - Archival records on Auto's DWT in general and the HR function's transformation in particular	- Narrative analysis of the observations, interviews and archival records to unpack the HR function's transformation process with NVivo - Gain an initial understanding of the emergent HR identity and arising tensions in the context of Auto - Displayed in the form of narratives and quotes	Organizational context of Auto 5 initial dimensions capturing the emergent HR identity (*mindset, organizational structure, data, capabilities,* and *digital infrastructure)* Theoretical generalization
Stage 2: Expert interviews with HR managers, PA developers, and consultants (Sep21-Oct21)	- 9 HR managers using PA (4-10 years of experience, Heads of PA, Managers HR, Heads of Personnel Controlling, VP HR IT Strategy, IDs: U1-U9) - 4 developers of PA (2-25 years of experience, CEOs of PA firms, developers, IDs: D1-D4) - 5 consultants of PA (3-9 years of experience, Senior consultants, partners & CEOs, IDs: C1-C5)	- Deductive qualitative coding with Atlas.ti - Enhance initial insights on paradoxical tensions and the five dimensions from the ethnography with the perspective of different stakeholders (users, developers, and consultants) to theoretically generalize the findings and conceptualize the identity change - Displayed in the form of quotes	Conceptualization of HR identity changes along the 5 dimensions and deriving of archetypes (*resource manager and growth catalyst)*

Table 1. Overview of data collection and usage within the two-stages research approach

3.2 Data analysis and dimensions of HR identities

Analyzing the data from the ethnography, we employed a narrative analysis supported by the use of Nvivo (Czarniawska, 1998, van Maanen, 2011). We read the field notes, interviews and archival records to identify actors, actions, and outcomes in the contained stories. Moreover, we highlighted interesting and surprising observations on Auto's DWT and in particular, its meaning for the company's HR function. Relating these notes, we found that Auto created a sub-structure within the HR function comprising, e.g., the DTOHR. This sub-structure took on actions that enacted a transformation process in support of Auto's DWT. Juxtaposing observations on the HR function's actions, the sub-structure's actions as well as interactions between the two, we realized that these outlined a narrative of an emergent identity. Unpacking this emergent identity, we identified five dimensions along which the HR function's transformation process unfolded: *mindset*, *organizational structure*, *data*, *capabilities*, and *digital infrastructure*. Our observations suggested tensions between organizational elements of these dimensions. Seeking to conceptualize these tensions, we engaged with literature and found that paradox theory provides an interesting lens. For further insights and theoretical generalization, we then extended our study of the emergent identity to other organizations for different perspectives.

The analysis of the interviews followed a qualitative coding approach for which we used the software Atlas.ti. The coding scheme was discussed within the researchers' team and multiple rounds of coding were conducted (Saldaña, 2016). We started with a descriptive coding cycle, but moved to deductive

theoretical coding in the second coding cycle, as a coding scheme could be derived based on the insights from the narrative analysis of the ethnography. More specifically, the second order codes consisted of the five dimensions on the emergent HR identity that we discovered in the ethnography. Grouping the codes to these five dimensions, two identity archetypes of *resource manager* and *growth catalyst* emerged which distinct characteristics per dimension. The analysis of the additional interview data thus helped us to generalize the emergent identity at Auto not as a transformation along five dimensions but the emergence of co-existing archetypes of HR identity.

4 The identity change in organizations' HR functions

In this section, we first present observations on Auto that illustrate the emergence of a new identity within the automaker's HR function along the five dimensions. We then extend our perspectives on this emergent identity outlining the findings from the interviews and illustrating the two archetypes. This extension provides a theoretical generalization of the identity change noticed at Auto's HR function revealing not a change but shift towards co-existing HR identities.

4.1 Digital workplace transformation producing an emergent HR identity

Auto is a large European car manufacturer that employs more than 100,000 people and operates globally. After the financial crisis from 2008 to 2012, the company entered a span of successful business years. In 2017, their annual report announced that the automaker had exceeded its unit sales for the third time in a row. Similarly, revenue and profit margin rose. The senior managers considered this success in the company's core business a confirmation of the strategic focus on producing premium vehicles. Instead of resting on this success, they launched a strategic change program.

The strategic change program focused on Auto as a workplace. The automaker decided that to retain its market position, it must complete a transformation from a premium car manufacturer to a mobility service provider. In support of this identity change, the strategic change program aimed at turning Auto's workplace into a digital workplace. This digital workplace should support digital innovation activities and be attractive to a new workforce generation. Hence, Auto's management decided for the need of a DWT to support its transformation and remain an attractive employer for the new workforce generation. In a document on the strategic change program, Auto wrote:

[…] the world is changing rapidly, we can no longer use the same leadership and management approaches that we used in the past and expect them to work today. […]. New employees have different expectations for their employers compared to previous generations. We are transforming from an automobile manufacturer to a mobility service provider. (Auto document).

The HR function had a pivotal role in Auto's DWT. It supported the DWT process through workshops but also changes in HR processes and policies. In workshops, the HR function described or explained changes that had been implemented or were upcoming. Simultaneously, they leveraged the workshops to obtain feedback from managers and employees on the DWT program. Second, the function decided that in support of the company's DWT, it must focus on its own DT. In this vein, the HR function founded the DTOHR in October 2017. The DTOHR comprised three employees tasked with transforming the HR function digitally: *"Automating routine work and outsourcing of HR services. The employee shall move back into the center of HR work. We must create a new workplace in which we conduct HR work with employees and not in front of computers producing management reports."* (DTOHR Member).

To accomplish this goal, the DTOHR started with a focus on nurturing a **novel mindset** within the HR function. The first respective major event was an internal hackathon; a two-day event at which HR employees met, exchanged, and developed ideas for digital HR innovations, which they afterwards pitched to the function's senior management. In an email to HR employees, the DTOHR wrote: *"We are convinced that our approach towards digital transformation will encourage digital innovation – from HR products & services to processes & tools as well as cooperation, leadership and culture. This*

approach goes beyond technology transfer but rather concerns the HR process as a whole." (DTOHR document). This highlights a turn in the function's mindset.

After the first hackathon, they also organized innovation weeks and journeys to European startup hubs (e.g., Tallinn and Berlin). These events produced a multitude of ideas for digital innovations. However, HR managers and employees expressed contradicting views about the efficiency of this approach. While some stated excitement, others found: *"All this talk about innovation and transforming HR is nice but what have we accomplished so far? Shouldn't we be acting rather than talking?"* (HR employee). Listening to HR employees, the DTOHR conceived that acting requires a different structural setting. Employees shared that within their existing structure, possibilities for ideating or implementing ideas was limited. Addressing this observation, the DTOHR founded an HR think tank at which employees can apply for access to rooms and resources. This means the think tank provided a workshop space and innovation coaches to assist HR employees in developing ideas. This shows the building of a new **structure** within HR to support employees in ideation and implementing ideas. With this new structure, the number of realized ideas rose.

The realized ideas were small HR apps but the existing **digital infrastructure** remained. These apps enabled business managers to self-organize parts of the HR work for their employees. Moreover, employees received access to basic HR services (e.g., submitting a sick notice or vacation form). HR employees and business partners questioned whether this transformed HR meaningfully. Business partners complained that the development of new HR apps often adds to their workload: *"They [HR] release a new app and tell us it will improve things.. for them maybe. These apps usually feature HR self-service, which means they offload actual HR business to us, the business managers."* (Auto employee). Similarly, during a journey to a European startup hub, HR employees discussed the function's transformation trajectory based on small apps. One participant, an HR manager, argued: *"We speak of a digital transformation within HR, meet HR startups, go to these innovation workshops and develop small business apps for this and that but what we need is not yet another app; we already have enough apps. We must transform the big application systems."* (HR manager). Indeed, the central HR applications dated back to the millennium but still remained at the core of the ecosystem. That is, they provide the data basis and interfaces for all subsequent HR applications. However, since these systems and their requirements had grown over time, the HR function was left with legacy systems that lacked interfaces to new systems. The digital infrastructure thus limited the HR function's ability to utilize already existing data.

The fragmentation of HR **data** across multiple systems was indeed a key issue. The siloed nature of the digital infrastructure required that employees provide and update their data in multiple systems. While this presented a nuisance in their HR experience, it had dire repercussions for the HR function. They missed the data basis to run analytics and offer superior HR services (e.g., for career development, applicant selection). The head of the DTOHR stated: *"We have to pay money to professional networks to obtain information on our employees, meaning, our employees rather share their data with these networks than with us. We talk with headhunting platforms to provide us with applicants; we don't talk to applicants directly. We don't even know who's out there."* (Head of DTOHR). This highlights that data can provide grounds for personalized HR services. In contradiction, one HR employee questioned whether the focus on data entails better HR work: *"When you do actual HR work, you quickly see the difference between data analytics and HR. It's easy to say that someone has X sick days, has been reported for misbehavior, or completed trainings on a specific topic but when you actually have the meeting in which you tell a person or suggest a career path, then it becomes relational and real and that's people business, actual HR work and not data science."* (HR employee). The employee highlights that data can provide an overview for operational management but actual HR work requires soft-skills and experience, which highlights the issue of capabilities.

The tension in the meaning of data for HR work reflects also in the aspired **capabilities**. For example, the HR function's excitement in PA systems is grounded in their potential to automate mundane and repetitive HR work such as reports for operational management. These required transferring data from different systems into one report. An HR manager mentioned: *"If we can automate these repetitive reporting tasks, we can return to what we actually do, talk to and work with employees."* (HR manager).

This suggests two things. First, reporting and working with data is outside the HR function's core capability of working with people. Second, HR holds the capability to apply technology to automate reporting tasks. Contrarily, the DTOHR noticed a lack of technology capabilities. They organized technology days to which they invited HR employees to work with a specific technology over the course of one (or two) days. The goal was that HR employees learn what a specific technology can do, how it can be developed, and what is required to utilize a technology within an HR context. One hyped technology for task automation was robotic process automation (RPA): *"Everyone talked about RPA and how it can quickly automate all our processes, so we organized a technology day on RPA. We prepared everything in advance, invited employees, set-up an RPA environment, and told them to start developing. They quickly realized that RPA is still quite dumb. It can automate but if you've many process exceptions, well you've to program every single one of them. These technology days thus help develop their skills with these tools but also what they [tools] can actually do and that a process standardization is still required."* (Head of DTOHR). This highlights that besides soft-skills for HR work, HR employees require technology capabilities to utilize new HR applications (e.g., data analytics) but also develop them.

The above observations suggest emergence of a new identity within Auto's HR function. Auto's DWT triggered a transformation process within the HR function. Along this process, the function faces emergence of a new identity. We found that this identity seems to emerge along five dimensions: mindset, organizational structure, meaning of data, capabilities, and digital infrastructure. While the ethnography reveals that these dimensions contain tensional elements, we asked ourselves whether and how a new HR identity emerges along these five dimensions in other organizations. Moreover, we wondered whether we observed an identity change, meaning the tensions between elements are temporary and change-related; or the emergence of paradoxical identity tensions. To answer these analytical questions, we next present the findings from the 18 interviews which we conducted with companies at different DWT stages to extend our insights to different perspectives for theoretical generalization.

4.2 Conceptualizing tensional HR identities

Building on the identified dimensions, we analyzed the interview material to theoretically generalize the emergent identity. Thereby, we gained clarity on the pronunciation of the five dimensions across organizational contexts. Furthermore, this analysis produced two identity archetypes, namely, *HR as resource manager* and *HR as growth catalyst*, which can be characterized along the five dimensions.

4.2.1 HR as resource manager

The HR identity archetype of resource manager is characterized by the shared mindset of HR work as people business based on experience and gut feeling. They view HR as a rigid, long-established structure of its own with reporting goals toward the management, and therefore, see data as information aggregates that form HR KPIs. Within the resource manager identity, people-oriented soft skills are a defining HR trait. When using digital workplace technologies, it is for the purpose to facilitate the former HR value proposition of reporting. In the following, we elaborate on the five distinguishing dimensions.

Operation mindset. HR representatives that understand themselves as resource managers share a mindset of keeping up the traditional value proposition of the HR function. The traditional value proposition of HR is reflected in the key HR activities of *"reporting being the core of each HR function"* (U5), e.g. *"tracking employee absence and the development of sickness rates"* (U6). The actual wish *"[of] HR people, they want to do 'something with humans'[cannot be fulfilled] as business people are interested in fact-based and number-based approaches"* (D1). Thus, the identity type of resource managers faces a tension: *"The problem is, I don't have the time [for value-adding people work] as I have many things on my plate. […] I have to keep all the data in the system up-to-date"* (D4). Even though digital workplace technologies could ease this tension, the representatives are sceptical about their implementation: *"If people are presuming that intuitive decisions led by gut feeling are better than*

data-based decisions, it takes many persuasive arguments" (U6). Finally, HR functions with the identity of resource managers are reluctant to change: *"HR people working by themselves usually don't feel like they need a change"* (D3). Some interviewees even took this argument a step further, stating it is not only missing interest but *"pure fear. What are big data, what is AI, what work routines do I need, which people are necessary, which jobs get lost, what are we actually doing here?"* (D1). This mindset leads to a closing-in effect for the HR function, trying to encapsulate their traditional mindset.

Rigid structural HR understanding. The closing-in effect of the resource manager archetype is reflected in the rigid structural understanding of this function. We can distinguish between HR functions with dedicated PA teams and those which integrate PA topics into the daily HR routines. We observed that for many companies without a dedicated PA department, the traditional HR function did not identify with the PA solution as much as dedicated PA teams: *"It really depends on the organization's structure: If it is very decentral, if HR is far away from the IT department, they do not identify with the technology"* (C1). Hence, a key question is if HR is forced to take the role of implementing PA, or if there are dedicated (people) analytics teams. In the case of traditional HR departments, the structures are rigid and have evolved over years: *"There are a lot of challenges especially with the big companies because they have been setting up their structures for a very long time and get trapped in their own legacy"* (D3). Thus, the structural understanding is rigid and does not encourage digital innovation.

Data for reporting. Resource managers see the meaning of data in fulfilling reporting functions for managerial tasks. Hence, resource managers are mainly investigating *"basic personal data, [and] master data"* (U6). When aiming to enhance their analysis with further data, many functions struggle with data silos being built up: *"Are finance people allowed to access HR data and are HR people allowed to see finance data? This burden sounds trivial but actually is not"* (C1). For some of the interviewed company representatives, data-sharing with the HR function was very restrictive. *"With German data protection and regulation, especially in a big company, the idea of PA which is combining different data pools is hard to realize"* (C2). To release the potential of digital workplace technologies, data silos need to be broken down. Otherwise, the HR function is limited to basic reporting functions which contribute to their identity of resource manager controlling employees based on basic HR data.

People capabilities. The HR workforce's identity-defining capabilities are grouped along the 'soft sides' of HR. We observed that interviewees describing the identity archetype of resource managers followed the narrative 'we are not capable of becoming a growth catalyst'. For example, an interviewee outlined: *"The question is: Is HR capable [of these data-related tasks] since so many diverse competencies are needed? Many employees have a background in psychology which is far from Informatics. And we need people speaking both languages"* (D4). A consultant agrees, stating *"if we aim to do more complex things apart from reporting, this is not necessarily within the core competencies of HR departments"* (C5). So even if the aforementioned data regulations can be overcome *"it does not help […] to make data accessible if the receivers do not know how to work with them"* (U7). Interpreting these quotes, we derive that the resource manager identity seeks a sense of belonging via people-related capabilities instead of digital savviness.

PA to execute traditional value proposition. Summarizing the described dimensions results in a restrictive use of PA. PA is used with the purpose of *"letting top managers access data in a nice, standardized, digital manner"* (C2). Even if some HR functions aimed to develop towards a growth catalyst, provide personalized services, and leverage the opportunities of PA, they experienced organizational burdens: *"Performance feedback talks, goal setting talks […] we have cut down these initiatives as many employees see them as a waste of time as they are not creating a direct impact"* (U5). In these cases, the use of PA is often limited, as one user outlined: *"We order software-as-a-service or cloud solutions which are ready to use and we only slightly adjust some levers"* (U5). This quote matches the observed critical perception of the HR functions' capabilities. If employees do not trust themselves in becoming a growth catalyst, digital workplace technologies can only be used with the aim to increase HR efficiency instead of facilitating novel value propositions for the HR function.

4.2.2 HR as growth catalyst

In contrast to the identity archetype of resource manager, growth catalysts approach HR work as delivering personalized services based on data. They see HR as a service provider for employees that has flexible structures. Growth catalysts share the understanding of data as an enabler for personalized employee experiences. They create a sense of belonging via digital savviness. When this archetype uses digital workplace technologies like PA, it is for developing novel HR value propositions.

Innovation mindset. In contrast to the archetype of resource manager, HR as growth catalyst opens up to novel challenges and strives to contribute to DT initiatives. The transformed mindset is key to this identity type: *"One very important aspect before starting to work with data is the way of thinking about data; the data mindset. How do I think about these data?"* (C2). HR functions have realized the potential of individualized HR services and employee growth programs as employees demand it: *"Employees have higher expectations and therefore, we have to make sure we actually generate added value with these systems [PA]"* (U6). Thus, PA can be used as a strategic competitive advantage in a contested labor market: *"It's a war for talents which won't be over soon. Having realized that, we started a big HR analytics project because we strongly believe we have to move towards this direction"* (U5). Certain interview partners, especially those working in dedicated PA departments, highlighted the benefits of their new data mindset, e.g. *"as leader of an HR analytics team, I have a new philosophy: I want to make the data accessible for as many employees as possible […] because only if they are aware of the available data, they can use them"* (C2). Data usage is democratized with the help of PA. Moreover, data-sharing is perceived as a new norm: *"I have a relationship based on loyalty towards my employer. If I am part of the firm's processes, it's just normal that my data can be processed and used in anonymous manners to improve my experience"* (U8). This novel mindset leads to an opening up of the HR function and the willingness to take over responsibility beyond their traditional tasks.

Structural HR understanding of service provider. The opening up of the growth catalyst HR type requires novel business structures. Hereby, the relationship between HR and IT is frequently discussed: *"The interesting question is: who is taking care of the PA discipline? This will be a challenging discussion: who is taking over the responsibility?"* (C2). The fact of the HR function being open towards wide-ranging IT tasks is fundamentally different from the resource manager identity. Consequently, roles and interfaces have to be redefined. For the growth catalyst identity, we observed the founding of dedicated PA roles in established HR teams or the rise of new PA teams. These novel structures facilitate digital innovation and a growth mindset. However, they can lead to identity tensions: *"Currently I find myself wearing two different hats at the same time. One of them is being responsible for HR systems that support our daily tasks. The other one is PA and workforce planning*" (U6). As the quote indicates, individuals do not only share the understanding of the traditional HR identity but also the emerging one. Separating these conflicting identities by changing business structures and opening up a dedicated PA team strengthens the sense of belonging in the respective function. However, in the long term, it may lead to inefficiencies and only postpone the necessity to deal with tensions instead of resolving them.

Data for empowerment. As described for the mindset, HR functions see themselves as responsible for sharing data and leveraging value from them. Their mentality of 'opening-up' is reflected in their data approach. Growth catalysts are eager to gather more data and break down data silos. An ambitious goal, as PA users point out: *"We need more data from different departments we currently don't have. Therefore, we are building up a data lake to be able to use AI and fulfil this dream"* (U5). Being responsible for a data lake would empower the HR function and raises the function to a new level, being able to meet with the IT function on equal footage. However, we have to distinguish carefully between data collection and data analysis on the one hand, and actual data usage on the other hand: *"Even if HR is sharing the data, responsible persons from other fields have to act upon the data and this is not within the scope of HR. This is something we have to consider, talking about improving the employee experience"* (C4). The purpose of the data collection is to empower employees and to democratize data: *"I don't want to track [anyone], I want to understand patterns to improve things for employees"* (U1).

Digital capabilities. The growth catalyst identity of HR functions comes with novel capabilities. The function understands itself as a data specialist. Interviewees feel comfortable taking over IT roles and moving towards more technical tasks. One interviewee explains: *"The other field we are working on is data science and engineering. In this field, we are not only working on descriptive topics, but we conduct diagnostic and predictive analytics. Using Python, R, and SQL, we seek opportunities to leverage the value of data. […] Excel and Power BI for reporting have been replaced with data warehouses and direct gateway connections"* (U2). This quote highlights the transformed self-awareness of the function that enables digital innovation.

PA to trigger novel value propositions. PA is used for the purpose to enable digital innovation. Due to the growth catalyst's changed self-perception, extended capabilities, and increased amount of data, digital workplace technologies can not only be used to optimize daily HR processes but lay the basis for novel value propositions for the HR function. The purpose of using PA is to *"save time and money"* (U4) which can be attributed to the value-adding HR tasks. For example, the employee journey can be personalized and individual growth is supported: *"We can look at thousands of dimensions to understand what individuals need to be successful. […] That's a great added value, not only for the individual employee but for the whole organization"* (D1). Hence, the purpose of using digital workplace technologies is to enable novel HR value propositions.

5 Discussion

At the outset, we posed the RQ of *how the digital workplace transformation alters the identity of organizations' HR functions?* Answering this RQ, we present a two-fold contribution. First, we discuss the identity archetypes in light of employees' data-sharing with HR functions. Second, we embed our findings in the broader context of identity change and DWT.

5.1 HR identity archetypes and employee data-sharing

Studying the transformation of Auto's HR function and extending our insights to the perspectives from 18 expert interviews, we identified two HR identity archetypes, namely, *resource manager* and *growth catalyst*. These identities can be distinguished using the dimensions of *mindset*, *structural understanding*, *meaning of data*, *identity-defining capabilities*, and *purpose of PA*. Table 2 presents an illustration of the two identity archetypes.

	Identity of resource manager 'human as a knowledge resource to be exploited'	**Identity of growth catalyst** 'human as individuals to be honed'
Mindset	Operation mindset: Approaches HR work as people business based on experience and gut feeling	Innovation mindset: Approaches HR work as personalized services based on data
Structural understanding	Rigid structural HR understanding: Views HR as a structure of its own with reporting goals toward organizational management and rigid structures	Structural HR understanding of service provider: Views HR as a service provider towards employees with flexible structures
Meaning of data	Data for reporting: Interprets data as aggregations of information forming HR KPIs for operational management	Data for empowerment: Interprets data as an enabler of personalized HR experiences
Identity-defining capabilities	People capabilities: Creates a sense of belonging in soft skills that differentiate HR from IT	Digital capabilities: Creates a sense of belonging in digital savviness to meet IT on equal footage
Purpose of people analytics	PA to execute traditional value proposition: Uses PA to support the value proposition of reporting	PA to trigger novel value propositions: Uses PA to develop novel value proposition of employee empowerment

Table 2. Conceptualizing the HR identity archetypes along the identified dimensions

Besides the identity archetypes, our findings suggest an explanation for the contradictory data-sharing behavior of employees reported in prior literature (Van Dijck, 2013). According to prior studies, employees tend to share their data with professional social networks (e.g., LinkedIn) but not – or only reluctantly – with their HR function. These studies introduced the privacy paradox to explain the counterintuitive data-sharing behavior. The core notion, employees share their data despite privacy concerns when the perceived benefits outweigh the risks (Awad and Krishnan, 2006). However, the privacy paradox stems from research in consumer contexts. Therefore, scholars utter caution regarding its translation to the workplace context because of its indifference to power asymmetries, the nature of data shared, and the organizational context (Teebken & Hess 2021). This questions the explanation power of the privacy paradox for employee data-sharing behavior. We argue that existing studies on organizational identity and the two identity archetypes provide grounds for another explanation.

We propose that employees' willingness to data-sharing depends on the perceived HR identity. The perceived internal and external identity affect how stakeholders interact with the HR function (Tripsas 2009). This underpins the importance of congruence between internal and external identity. Building on Tripsas's (2009) findings, we argue that the two identity archetypes reflect, e.g., different understandings and usage of data and PA systems, which can affect employees' data-sharing behavior. Put differently, the as dominant perceived HR identity archetype may provide an explanation for employees' data sharing behavior. Based on the conceptualized HR identity archetypes, we posit that the resource manager identity may amplify fears of data exploitation for workforce optimization or to improve the traditional HR value proposition (i.e., reporting for operational management). Contrarily, the nature of the growth catalyst identity may encourage data sharing for the prospect of personalized HR services. After all, the dominant identity archetype indicates whether HR functions aim to capture data for efficient management of human resources or to democratize and share them with employees for improve HR services. Hence, drawing on Tripsas (2009), we argue that the HR identity archetypes may provide an alternative explanation to the paradox theory that can explain employees' data-sharing behavior.

5.2 Questioning identity change as identity shift through paradox theory

The findings suggest that the identity archetypes are paradoxical. While the ethnography on Auto's HR transformation indicated tensional tendencies within the function's changing identity, the interview material underpinned this tensional nature. While organizations require reporting and operational management of their human resources, they must also address the demands of the changing workforce (Gierlich-Joas, 2021, Cortellazzo et al., 2019). This brings forth a paradoxical nature of the identity archetypes (Smith and Lewis, 2011). That is, they are a matter of both/and rather than an either/or (Smith et al., 2016). Besides the practical challenge this holds for HR functions to acknowledge both identities as co-existing, we argue that this observation holds wider implications for our understanding of the emergence of new identities in the context of DWT, and DT in general.

Existing work has highlighted the conceptual centricity of organizational identity for DT (Wessel et al., 2021, Tripsas, 2009, Utesheva et al., 2016, Carter and Grover, 2015). For example, Wessel et al. (2021) found that the emergence of a new identity is a key differentiator between DT and IT-enabled transformation. Similarly, Tripsas (2009) highlighted the importance of identity work when transforming an organization toward a new identity. While these two studies focused on the organizational level identity, Utesheva et al. (2016) as well as Carter and Grover (2015) emphasized the individual level. They showed how the individual identity influences how people see and use IT; or how IT changes the identity of professions (Utesheva et al. 2016). Despite their different level of analysis, these studies share the interpretation that DT involves identity change in the form of metamorphosis. This means they postulate that the transformation process involves changing from a former identity to a new identity with little (if at all) tensional residue. Put differently, the new identity replaces the old.

Compared to existing studies, we focused on identity change at the group level (i.e., the HR function). While our findings share the aspect of identity, we found that the emergence of a new HR identity resulted in a shift not metamorphosis. The difference: a shift suggests re-orientation towards co-existing identities. Our findings illustrate that the HR function's activities shift in part towards the new identity

(i.e., growth catalyst), but in part also support the existing identity (i.e., resource manager). We argue that this results in co-existing but paradoxical identities producing a paradox of belonging (Smith and Lewis, 2011). This observation provides grounds for new explanations on why organizations face challenges when engaging in their DWT, and DT in general. Our view suggests that incumbent organizations' struggles to reconcile their core and digital business may ground in the notion of having to accomplish one congruent organizational identity. In contrast, if we understand identity in the context of DWT not as metamorphotic but shifting, the objective is not congruence but acknowledging the resulting incongruence by accepting multiple identities' co-existence (Smith and Lewis, 2011, Putnam et al., 2016). Hence, we argue that the paradox view on emergent identity within the context of DWT, and by extension DT, opens up a new line of inquiry into identity as shifting and related phenomena as organizational inertia.

5.3 Limitations and outlook

Despite being thoroughly conducted, our research comes with certain limitations. When analyzing the changing identity of the HR function and its influence on employee data-sharing, we predominately take the perspective of HR functionaries and leading experts in the field. While the ethnography provided insights into the employee and manager perspective, the interviews focused on the latter. Hence, the provided identity types reflect the internal HR identity but lack in reflecting this against the external identity; how employees see the HR function's identity. Hence, future studies might extend our work by integrating the employee perspective.

Second, the scope of our study is limited to identifying the paradoxical co-existence of different identities. However, previous studies point towards handling strategies (Putnam et al., 2016). As the nature of paradoxes implies, they are salient, and choosing one element over the other does not solve the tension (Smith and Lewis, 2011). However, Putnam et al. (2016) have outlined different coping mechanisms for paradoxes (Putnam et al., 2016) and we encourage future work to investigate these, not only for the HR function but in the broader context of DT.

6 Conclusion

DT heavily impacts the nature of work and the HR function: Digital workplace technologies are implemented and changing demands of the workforce need to be met. Thus, we asked the RQ: *How does the digital workplace transformation alter the identity of organizations' HR functions?* Answering this RQ, we present a two-fold contribution.

First, we contribute to the understanding of employee data-sharing and the changing identity of the HR function. We derive two identity archetypes of the HR function that are driven by the implementation of digital workplace technologies. We argue that these identity types provide a stepping stone for potentially explaining the data-sharing behavior of employees. Thereby, we add to literature on the changing nature of work and examine the socio-technical nature of digital workplace technologies.

Second, and beyond the observed phenomenon of HR transformation, we contribute to the discussion on identity change in DT literature. Next to research on the organizational level or the individual level, we add the perspective of analyzing identity at the group level. Furthermore, we challenge the assumption of metamorphotic identity change but argue for an identity shift entailing belonging paradoxes. This may serve as a stepping-stone for future works on identity in the context of D(W)T.

Furthermore, the study holds valuable insights for practice. We highlight the importance of the HR function's identity for DWT which can be harmed by HR identity paradoxes. Hence, companies are advised to thoroughly analyze and shape their HR functions, provide guidance in DT initiatives, and be aware of potential paradoxical tensions.

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