

Article type:
Original Research

Article history:
Received 01 November 2024
Revised 28 January 2025
Accepted 04 February 2025
Published online 30 March 2025

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How to cite this article:
Mohammadi, M., & Jayrondi, S. (2025). Exploring the Formation Process of Professional Identity in Hybrid Organizations (Remote and On-Site Work): A Qualitative Study on the Role of Flexibility and Psychological Challenges in the New Work Environment. *Future of Work and Digital Management Journal*, 3(1), 1-12.
<https://doi.org/10.61838/fwdmj.3.1.7>



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Exploring the Formation Process of Professional Identity in Hybrid Organizations (Remote and On-Site Work): A Qualitative Study on the Role of Flexibility and Psychological Challenges in the New Work Environment

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how employees in hybrid organizations form and reconstruct their professional identity, with a particular focus on the dual roles of flexibility and psychological challenges in shaping this process. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study involved semi-structured interviews with 22 participants working in hybrid organizational settings in Tehran, Iran. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis within the NVivo 14 software. The analysis proceeded through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to uncover patterns and core categories related to professional identity development in the hybrid work context. The findings revealed six main themes: (1) hybrid work-induced identity transformation, (2) psychological and emotional regulation, (3) structural ambiguity and organizational gaps, (4) relational disconnection in the digital era, (5) flexibility as a double-edged sword, and (6) technology-mediated work dependency. Participants reported identity fragmentation, emotional fatigue, inconsistent organizational messaging, and social isolation, but also described strategies of self-directed growth and adaptive role reconstruction. While flexibility offered autonomy, it also contributed to blurred boundaries and reduced recognition. The presence or absence of social and technological support structures significantly influenced how participants negotiated their evolving professional identities. Professional identity formation in hybrid organizations is a dynamic, multi-layered process shaped by personal agency, organizational structure, emotional adaptation, and technological mediation. While hybrid work offers opportunities for autonomy and growth, it also presents risks of identity disruption and emotional strain. Effective organizational strategies are needed to support identity development in increasingly flexible and decentralized workplaces.

Keywords: Professional identity, hybrid organizations, flexibility, psychological challenges, qualitative research, identity transformation, remote work, work-life boundaries.

Introduction

The concept of *professional identity* has become increasingly central in contemporary discussions of work, especially within rapidly changing organizational contexts such as hybrid workplaces. Professional identity refers to an individual's self-concept derived from their occupation, encompassing values, beliefs, motivations, and perceived roles in a professional context [1]. It is shaped through an ongoing interaction between personal experiences and institutional structures [2]. In hybrid work settings—characterized by a combination of remote and in-person modalities—the formation and maintenance

of professional identity presents novel challenges and opportunities. While hybridization affords flexibility and autonomy, it also poses structural ambiguities, social disconnection, and identity-related tensions that may profoundly impact workers' psychological well-being and sense of purpose [3, 4].

The rise of hybrid organizations has intensified the need to revisit and critically analyze the processes through which employees form, develop, and reconstruct their professional identities. In such settings, traditional markers of professionalism—such as physical presence, dress codes, and face-to-face interactions—are disrupted, demanding new forms of identity negotiation and validation [2]. Identity construction becomes a reflexive, dynamic process often fraught with emotional strain, as individuals adapt to evolving expectations and organizational norms [5, 6]. Scholars have noted that professional identity in such contexts cannot be understood merely as a static label or role definition but must be examined as a multidimensional, socially constructed process embedded in practice and context [7, 8].

Emerging research suggests that flexibility—while frequently cited as a benefit of hybrid work—can function as a double-edged sword in the context of identity formation. On the one hand, flexible scheduling and remote capabilities offer individuals a sense of empowerment, autonomy, and better work-life balance [9, 10]. On the other hand, this same flexibility may blur the boundaries between professional and personal domains, reduce perceived legitimacy, and increase ambiguity regarding role expectations and performance standards [11, 12]. These tensions can generate emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and a fragmented sense of identity, especially in the absence of strong organizational support systems [13, 14].

Moreover, hybrid work environments frequently disrupt the interpersonal dimensions of professional identity. Interactions with colleagues, mentors, and supervisors are essential in the process of identity validation and feedback [9, 15]. In remote or semi-remote settings, these interactions become sporadic, formalized, or mediated through technology, weakening opportunities for informal learning, modeling, and community-building [16, 17]. Consequently, the socio-relational fabric that supports professional identity formation becomes frayed, increasing feelings of isolation and professional uncertainty. The erosion of social connectedness is further intensified when organizational identity and communication are inconsistent or fragmented, often exacerbating identity conflict among employees [18, 19].

In parallel, psychological resources such as emotional intelligence, grit, and self-efficacy have been shown to mediate the effects of hybrid work on identity development. Research demonstrates that professionals with stronger self-regulation and emotional competence are better equipped to navigate identity challenges in volatile work environments [20, 21]. For example, nursing students with higher psychological capital are more likely to maintain a stable sense of professional identity despite elevated stress levels during clinical rotations [17]. These findings emphasize the interplay between individual agency and contextual variables in shaping identity outcomes, especially under non-traditional working conditions.

Recent inquiries have also explored the role of institutional interventions—such as mentoring, coaching, and structured reflection—in supporting identity formation in hybrid or digital contexts [9, 22]. While some programs have demonstrated limited efficacy, especially in preclinical or early-career settings, others have revealed promising outcomes when tailored to address the complexities of remote interaction and cognitive-emotional needs [23]. Still, many interventions overlook the existential and psychosocial aspects of identity formation, focusing instead on performance or compliance metrics. This underscores the necessity for a more holistic understanding of professional identity as a lived, dynamic, and context-sensitive construct [10, 24].

In hybrid organizations, these dynamics are further complicated by the integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence into routine work practices. For instance, AI-driven decision support systems can alter professionals' sense of autonomy, legitimacy, and accountability—factors directly tied to identity perception [19, 23]. When employees perceive these systems as threatening their expertise or diminishing their role, identity conflicts may arise. Conversely, when AI is integrated in a transparent and collaborative way, it may reinforce a sense of competence and future-readiness [12]. Therefore, the design and implementation of technological infrastructure in hybrid settings is not only a logistical issue but a deeply identity-relevant one.

Furthermore, organizational silence and suppressed voice behaviors—common in hybrid teams—can also impact the formation of identity by reducing opportunities for recognition, feedback, and personal growth [11, 18]. Employees who feel unheard or undervalued may disengage from their professional roles or reconstruct their identity based on self-preservation rather than contribution. This dynamic becomes particularly salient for those in marginalized or less visible roles, as physical absence from the office can reinforce perceived peripheral status [4, 25]. These experiences underscore the importance of visibility and validation in the professional identity ecosystem of hybrid organizations.

Importantly, the process of identity formation in hybrid work environments should not be viewed solely through the lens of pathology or conflict. It also opens avenues for personal growth, innovation, and the redefinition of professional values. As noted by Slutsky (2024), the reframing of social philosophy in education allows for more inclusive and reflective forms of identity development. Similarly, Tomo (2022) documents how professionals engage in online communities to renegotiate identity in the face of disillusionment and institutional failure. These findings point to the potential of hybrid contexts to foster adaptive, self-authored identities that transcend traditional hierarchies and rigid norms [6, 26].

Despite the expanding body of literature, there remains a significant gap in understanding how employees in hybrid organizations actively navigate the psychological challenges and flexibility demands of their work environments to shape their professional identities. Most studies have focused on pre-service teachers, healthcare workers, or students in training settings, with limited exploration of full-time employees embedded in real-world hybrid structures [5, 14]. There is also a scarcity of research grounded in participants' lived experiences that captures the nuanced emotional and cognitive processes involved in identity work under hybrid models [16, 27]. Additionally, the cultural context in which identity formation occurs—such as organizational culture, national work norms, or local psychological coping mechanisms—remains under-explored [24, 28].

This study addresses these gaps by exploring the formation process of professional identity among employees working in hybrid organizational structures in Tehran, Iran.

Methods and Materials

This research employed a qualitative approach with a content analysis strategy to explore the process of professional identity formation among employees in hybrid organizations—those that integrate both remote and on-site work modalities. The qualitative design was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of individual experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes related to the evolving workplace context.

Participants were purposefully selected from various hybrid organizations based in Tehran, Iran. Inclusion criteria included current employment in a hybrid work setting (combining remote and in-person work) and at least one year of experience in

such a setting. A total of 22 individuals participated in the study, representing diverse occupational backgrounds, including technology, education, administration, and customer services. The sample size was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation—interviews continued until no new conceptual themes emerged.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, conducted either face-to-face or virtually, depending on participant preference and availability. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. The interviews were guided by a flexible interview protocol designed to probe participants' experiences with hybrid work, perceived challenges and advantages, role transitions, flexibility requirements, and the development of their professional identity within the new work structure.

With participant consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation, were strictly observed throughout the research process.

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and underlying meanings within the participants' narratives. The analysis was carried out using NVivo 14 qualitative data analysis software to facilitate systematic coding, categorization, and theme development. An inductive approach was adopted, with codes emerging directly from the data rather than being pre-imposed.

The coding process involved multiple stages: initial open coding, axial coding to connect related categories, and selective coding to define core themes. To ensure credibility and reliability, coding consistency was maintained through repeated readings, peer debriefing with qualitative research experts, and memo-writing to document analytical insights and reflexivity.

Findings and Results

The study included 22 participants (12 women and 10 men) currently employed in hybrid work settings (combining remote and on-site modalities) across various sectors in Tehran, Iran. Participants ranged in age from 26 to 54 years, with the majority falling within the 31–40 age group ($n = 9$), followed by the 41–50 age group ($n = 7$), the 26–30 age group ($n = 4$), and the 51–54 group ($n = 2$). Regarding educational background, 14 participants held a master's degree, 5 had a bachelor's degree, and 3 possessed doctoral degrees. In terms of job roles, participants represented diverse professional domains including administration ($n = 6$), IT and software ($n = 5$), education and training ($n = 4$), customer support ($n = 3$), HR and organizational development ($n = 2$), and media/communications ($n = 2$). The average length of hybrid work experience was 2.6 years, with 13 participants having more than 2 years of experience, and the remaining 9 between 1 and 2 years. This demographic diversity contributed to the richness and complexity of the qualitative data, allowing the study to capture a broad range of perspectives on professional identity formation in hybrid environments.

In the initial phase of data analysis, open coding was conducted to break down the interview transcripts into discrete concepts by examining the participants' words, expressions, and narratives line by line. This process allowed for the identification of significant experiences, emotions, challenges, and perspectives related to hybrid work and professional identity development. Using NVivo 14, a total of 74 unique open codes emerged from the data, capturing both explicit statements and implicit meanings. These open codes reflected participants' reflections on work boundaries, role ambiguity, emotional fatigue, autonomy, professional growth, and social isolation, among others. The codes were grounded in the

participants' language, allowing for a faithful representation of their lived experiences. Interview references are included to ensure traceability and authenticity of the data.

Table 1.

Open Coding

Open Code	Interview(s)
Blurred boundaries between work and home	P2, P5, P8, P14
Increased autonomy in task execution	P1, P3, P6, P11, P18
Uncertainty about role expectations	P4, P10, P13, P15
Isolation from coworkers	P3, P7, P12, P17, P21
Dependence on technology	P2, P4, P9, P16
Enhanced time flexibility	P1, P5, P6, P14, P19
Anxiety about job performance visibility	P8, P10, P13, P20
Lack of managerial feedback	P7, P9, P12, P18
Difficulty separating personal and work identity	P4, P11, P13, P22
Fear of being forgotten by the organization	P6, P8, P15, P21
Need for self-discipline	P1, P3, P5, P9
Motivation linked to task ownership	P2, P6, P12, P17
Workplace loneliness	P3, P7, P14, P21
Conflict in managing family and work roles	P4, P8, P10, P19
Desire for hybrid structure permanency	P2, P5, P11, P16, P20
Emotional exhaustion from constant adaptation	P7, P13, P15, P18
Reduced opportunities for informal learning	P3, P10, P12, P19
Empowerment through flexible scheduling	P1, P6, P14, P17, P22
Difficulty focusing at home	P2, P4, P7, P13
Rebuilding professional identity	P5, P8, P11, P16, P20
Increased family engagement	P1, P9, P12, P18
Ambiguity in promotion criteria	P3, P10, P14, P21
Trust issues in remote supervision	P4, P7, P11, P19
Lack of organizational support structures	P6, P8, P15, P22
Recalibration of career goals	P2, P5, P13, P20
Digital fatigue	P3, P7, P12, P18, P21
Flexible work as motivator	P1, P4, P6, P14
Feeling disconnected from team culture	P8, P10, P11, P17
Work encroachment on private time	P5, P9, P13, P16
Struggles with work prioritization	P2, P4, P10, P15
Self-learning through online resources	P3, P6, P12, P19
Perceived inequality in hybrid roles	P7, P11, P14, P20
Productivity concerns in remote setting	P1, P5, P8, P17
Need for personal growth	P2, P9, P13, P21
Missing face-to-face mentorship	P4, P10, P15, P18
Development of adaptive coping strategies	P3, P6, P12, P22
Identity crisis due to shifting expectations	P5, P7, P11, P14
Reliance on digital communication tools	P2, P8, P10, P19
Desire for recognition despite remote status	P1, P9, P13, P16
Mixed feelings about hybrid norm	P3, P4, P6, P20
Strained peer collaboration	P7, P10, P14, P21
Inconsistency in team leadership	P5, P8, P15, P19
Reduced work satisfaction	P2, P6, P12, P22
Reinvention of professional roles	P1, P4, P11, P17
Coping through routines	P3, P9, P13, P18
Changing perception of success	P5, P7, P14, P20
Motivation through autonomy	P2, P6, P10, P21
Tension from unclear goals	P4, P8, P11, P19
Improved work-life synergy	P1, P9, P13, P22
Search for purpose in work	P3, P5, P12, P17
Feelings of depersonalization	P7, P10, P14, P18
Learning through trial and error	P2, P6, P11, P16
Changes in identity due to remote work	P4, P8, P15, P20
Internal conflict over professional standards	P5, P9, P13, P19
Efforts to redefine self in hybrid context	P3, P7, P12, P22
Need for boundary-setting strategies	P1, P4, P10, P14
Adjustment fatigue	P6, P8, P11, P21

Over-reliance on self-validation	P2, P5, P13, P17
Compromised team belongingness	P3, P7, P15, P19
Perception of unequal treatment	P4, P10, P14, P20
Feeling over-monitored digitally	P6, P9, P11, P16
Conflicting organizational messages	P2, P8, P12, P22
Evolving definitions of productivity	P1, P5, P10, P18
Organizational identity conflict	P3, P7, P13, P20
Flexibility-induced empowerment	P2, P6, P9, P14
Loss of informal support networks	P4, P8, P12, P21
Reassessing long-term career path	P5, P10, P15, P19
Need for structured hybrid policies	P1, P3, P6, P22
Skepticism about fairness in evaluations	P7, P9, P11, P18
Perceived loss of influence in remote setting	P2, P4, P10, P14
Self-initiative as survival tool	P3, P5, P12, P20
Transition fatigue	P6, P8, P13, P17
Rethinking employee value	P1, P9, P11, P16
Resistance to hybrid norm	P4, P7, P10, P21
Increased psychological self-awareness	P2, P6, P12, P22

In the axial coding phase, the initial open codes were organized into more abstract and conceptually integrated categories to identify relationships among them. This phase involved grouping the open codes under broader, more explanatory categories—known as axial codes—based on thematic similarity, causal relationships, or shared dimensions of meaning. Each axial code served as a conceptual hub around which related open codes clustered, reflecting patterns in participants' experiences of hybrid work environments, identity formation, and adaptive responses. This step allowed for deeper theoretical ordering of the data by connecting phenomena such as emotional strain, identity reconstruction, flexibility, and perceptions of organizational justice.

Table 2.

Axial Coding

Axial Code	Corresponding Open Codes
Work-Life Boundary Challenges	Blurred boundaries between work and home; Conflict in managing family and work roles; Difficulty focusing at home; Work encroachment on private time; Need for boundary-setting strategies
Role Ambiguity and Expectation Confusion	Uncertainty about role expectations; Ambiguity in promotion criteria; Conflicting organizational messages; Inconsistency in team leadership; Tension from unclear goals
Emotional and Cognitive Fatigue	Emotional exhaustion from constant adaptation; Digital fatigue; Adjustment fatigue; Transition fatigue; Anxiety about job performance visibility; Fear of being forgotten by the organization
Social Disconnection and Isolation	Isolation from coworkers; Workplace loneliness; Feeling disconnected from team culture; Loss of informal support networks; Compromised team belongingness
Autonomy and Self-Directedness	Increased autonomy in task execution; Motivation linked to task ownership; Empowerment through flexible scheduling; Self-initiative as survival tool; Need for self-discipline
Identity Disruption and Reinvention	Rebuilding professional identity; Changes in identity due to remote work; Reinvention of professional roles; Identity crisis due to shifting expectations; Efforts to redefine self in hybrid context
Trust and Supervision Tensions	Lack of managerial feedback; Trust issues in remote supervision; Feeling over-monitored digitally; Perceived loss of influence in remote setting
Technological Dependence	Dependence on technology; Reliance on digital communication tools; Self-learning through online resources; Learning through trial and error
Redefined Professional Values	Changing perception of success; Reassessing long-term career path; Rethinking employee value; Search for purpose in work
Inequity in Hybrid Experience	Perceived inequality in hybrid roles; Perception of unequal treatment; Skepticism about fairness in evaluations; Resistance to hybrid norm
Motivation through Flexibility	Enhanced time flexibility; Flexible work as motivator; Flexibility-induced empowerment; Improved work-life synergy
Career Path Uncertainty	Recalibration of career goals; Ambiguity in promotion criteria; Organizational identity conflict; Loss of influence in remote setting
Psychological Adaptation Strategies	Coping through routines; Development of adaptive coping strategies; Increased psychological self-awareness; Over-reliance on self-validation
Communication Breakdown	Strained peer collaboration; Lack of managerial feedback; Reduced opportunities for informal learning; Missing face-to-face mentorship
Organizational Structure Gaps	Lack of organizational support structures; Need for structured hybrid policies; Conflicting organizational messages
Disempowerment and Visibility Concerns	Desire for recognition despite remote status; Feeling forgotten by the organization; Feeling over-monitored digitally; Skepticism about fairness in evaluations

This phase clarified how scattered individual experiences (open codes) coalesce into dominant themes (axial codes), reflecting deeper organizational and psychological mechanisms in the hybrid workplace. For example, “Work-Life Boundary Challenges” emerged as a major axis due to recurrent mentions of time conflict and spatial blending, while “Identity Disruption and Reinvention” represented the emotional and existential challenges participants faced as their roles and sense of self shifted. The “Technological Dependence” and “Communication Breakdown” categories highlighted how digital tools simultaneously facilitated and impeded interaction, learning, and cohesion. Ultimately, axial coding structured the foundational categories necessary for selective coding and theoretical model development.

In the selective coding phase, the analytical process culminated in identifying core categories—thematic constructs that serve as the central storyline of the study. These selective codes integrate and explain the axial codes by revealing their interrelationships and offering a coherent theoretical narrative. Each selective code represents a major domain of experience in the formation of professional identity within hybrid work environments, encompassing structural, psychological, social, and behavioral dimensions. These main categories were extracted through a continuous process of comparative analysis, returning to the data, theoretical memos, and code interconnections to ensure conceptual saturation and theoretical integration. The outcome of this phase is a grounded conceptual model that maps how hybrid work conditions shape identity development through challenges, coping, and adaptation.

Table 3.

Selective Coding

Selective Code (Main Category)	Corresponding Axial Codes
Hybrid Work-Induced Identity Transformation	Identity Disruption and Reinvention; Redefined Professional Values; Career Path Uncertainty
Psychological and Emotional Regulation	Emotional and Cognitive Fatigue; Psychological Adaptation Strategies; Disempowerment and Visibility Concerns
Structural Ambiguity and Organizational Gaps	Role Ambiguity and Expectation Confusion; Organizational Structure Gaps; Trust and Supervision Tensions
Relational Disconnection in the Digital Era	Social Disconnection and Isolation; Communication Breakdown; Inequity in Hybrid Experience
Flexibility as a Double-Edged Sword	Autonomy and Self-Directedness; Motivation through Flexibility; Work-Life Boundary Challenges
Technology-Mediated Work Dependency	Technological Dependence; Communication Breakdown

This final phase of selective coding resulted in six overarching categories that form the foundation of a grounded theory of professional identity formation in hybrid work contexts. The first category, Hybrid Work-Induced Identity Transformation, captures how employees undergo redefinition of their professional selves as roles, values, and career trajectories shift under hybrid norms. Psychological and Emotional Regulation reflects the emotional toll and the emergence of self-management strategies to cope with uncertainty, isolation, and performance pressure. The category Structural Ambiguity and Organizational Gaps reveals how misaligned expectations, unclear leadership, and absent support systems hinder identity consolidation.

Meanwhile, Relational Disconnection in the Digital Era addresses how the loss of informal interactions and unequal hybrid experiences weaken team cohesion and shared purpose. The category Flexibility as a Double-Edged Sword highlights the paradox of hybrid work: while autonomy and flexible schedules empower some employees, they simultaneously blur work-life boundaries and erode structure. Finally, Technology-Mediated Work Dependency captures the profound reliance on digital tools, which shape not only daily operations but also how employees perceive presence, learning, and collaboration.

Together, these categories articulate a nuanced understanding of how hybrid work reconfigures the process of professional identity formation, driven by a mix of adaptive flexibility, emotional labor, organizational voids, and socio-technical dynamics.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the formation of professional identity among employees in hybrid organizations, focusing on the dual influences of flexibility and psychological challenges in the evolving work environment. Through in-depth qualitative interviews with 22 professionals, six main categories emerged: hybrid work-induced identity transformation, psychological and emotional regulation, structural ambiguity and organizational gaps, relational disconnection in the digital era, flexibility as a double-edged sword, and technology-mediated work dependency. These findings reveal a multidimensional and often paradoxical identity formation process shaped by conflicting expectations, disrupted social norms, and self-regulatory demands.

A central finding of the study was the experience of identity disruption and reinvention among hybrid employees. Many participants reported a destabilization of their professional self-concept due to the breakdown of traditional role markers and organizational structures. This aligns with research emphasizing that hybrid and digital environments challenge conventional definitions of professional identity by altering the meaning of presence, performance, and legitimacy [2, 18]. Participants described feelings of fragmentation, liminality, and uncertainty, often expressing a need to “rebuild” or “redefine” who they are professionally. These narratives are echoed in studies showing that professionals in hybrid contexts must actively engage in identity work to reconcile personal values with changing institutional norms [1, 10].

At the same time, the study highlighted the dual role of flexibility in identity formation. For some, flexibility—manifested in the form of remote scheduling, autonomy in task execution, and self-paced work—served as a source of empowerment, allowing them to cultivate a stronger sense of ownership over their roles. This finding supports previous research that portrays flexibility as a facilitator of motivation, self-efficacy, and engagement [9, 10]. However, for others, the very same flexibility was experienced as destabilizing. Participants frequently mentioned that the absence of fixed schedules, unclear work boundaries, and reduced supervision contributed to performance anxiety and identity fragmentation. This is consistent with Zhang’s (2024) findings on the paradoxical relationship between flexibility and perceived organizational silence, where unstructured autonomy may reduce opportunities for recognition and identity reinforcement [11].

One of the most prominent challenges described by participants was emotional and psychological fatigue, triggered by continuous adaptation and ambiguity. Many spoke of digital exhaustion, decision fatigue, and a constant internal negotiation of professional values and self-worth. These psychological responses mirror findings from Matsuyama et al. (2021), who identified emotional depletion as a barrier to professional identity consolidation in preclinical educational settings [22]. Similarly, the phenomenon of *anticipated shame*—the fear of not meeting self-imposed or organizational standards in a virtual context—was frequently alluded to in participant narratives, in line with Lusk’s (2023) work on shame and identity tension [27]. These findings reinforce the view that hybrid work requires not only cognitive but also emotional adaptation, often in the absence of clear social cues and support systems.

A further critical dimension of professional identity formation in hybrid settings is social disconnection and relational detachment. Participants often lamented the absence of informal interactions, spontaneous mentorship, and peer validation—elements that are foundational in identity shaping processes. This aligns with research by Sarraf-Yazdi et al. (2021) and Toh et al. (2022), who emphasized the role of mentorship, coaching, and situated social learning in reinforcing professional identity in clinical and educational settings [9, 15]. In hybrid structures, however, such relational scaffolding is diminished, leading to feelings of loneliness, marginalization, and professional invisibility. As Rozina et al. (2024) note,

tolerance to uncertainty becomes a critical psychological asset in such scenarios, enabling individuals to navigate identity-threatening environments more resiliently [16].

Technological dependency emerged as both a mediator and disruptor of identity processes. Participants acknowledged that reliance on digital platforms facilitated task completion, communication, and flexibility. However, they also reported that the overuse of technological systems created distance, depersonalization, and surveillance anxiety—especially when performance was being monitored without context. This reflects Ackerhans et al.'s (2025) findings that AI-mediated work processes can threaten professional identity when perceived as controlling or depersonalizing [19]. Mohamed Abd El-Monem et al. (2023) similarly observed that nurses working with AI technologies experienced identity strain when their clinical judgment was replaced or questioned by automated systems [12]. These insights suggest that while technology enables hybrid work, it also transforms the nature of professional agency and recognition, reshaping how identity is affirmed or invalidated.

Another significant theme was the inconsistency in organizational communication and leadership, which left employees uncertain about their roles, goals, and long-term relevance. Participants described frequent contradictions in policies, feedback processes, and managerial expectations—especially when transitioning between remote and in-person modalities. This resonates with Tomo's (2022) observation that organizational incoherence can exacerbate identity crises and create spaces where professionals turn to informal online communities for meaning and belonging [26]. Such inconsistency also impairs the capacity of professionals to internalize a cohesive identity aligned with institutional values, further complicating their adaptive strategies [13, 14].

Yet, despite these challenges, the study revealed notable adaptive strategies and identity reconstruction mechanisms employed by participants. Many reported engaging in self-reflection, self-learning, and redefinition of career goals. Some found meaning in redefining their purpose, focusing on autonomy, or enhancing personal resilience. These findings align with Wu et al. (2024), who argued that career calling and internal motivation can buffer identity strain and lead to greater satisfaction in hybrid contexts [4]. Likewise, Slutsky (2024) emphasized that adopting inclusive and philosophical approaches to one's work identity—grounded in self-awareness and societal contribution—can foster deeper, more authentic professional selves [6].

In essence, this study supports the growing recognition that professional identity in hybrid organizations is an ongoing negotiation rather than a stable construct. It is shaped by continuous interaction between the individual, the organization, and the technological environment. As Wang et al. (2024) and Deng et al. (2018) underscore, emotional exhaustion, self-efficacy, and evolving perceptions of work meaning are all entangled in identity trajectories [5, 24]. Hybrid employees are not passive recipients of institutional structures but active agents of identity construction, often improvising pathways of validation, coherence, and emotional balance in the absence of traditional supports.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the sample was limited to employees in Tehran, which may reduce the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or organizational contexts. Cultural attitudes toward flexibility, authority, and professionalism may differ substantially across regions and sectors. Second, although the study included diverse industries, it did not account for hierarchy or organizational role, which may mediate identity experiences. Additionally, the use of self-reported interviews may introduce social desirability bias, as participants might underreport

vulnerability or emotional distress. Finally, the study was conducted at a single point in time, whereas identity formation is inherently longitudinal and may evolve with changing organizational or societal conditions.

Future research should explore professional identity formation in hybrid organizations through longitudinal designs to better capture the temporal evolution of identity construction. Comparative studies across cultures, industries, or organizational roles would also offer richer insights into how contextual variables influence identity dynamics. In addition, integrating mixed methods—such as diary studies, ethnographies, or network analysis—could enhance understanding of relational identity mechanisms. Researchers might also focus on the impact of emerging technologies such as AI, VR, and real-time analytics on identity formation, particularly in remote-heavy professions. Lastly, studies that incorporate psychological constructs such as resilience, mindfulness, and grit may illuminate coping strategies that support positive identity outcomes.

Organizations should proactively support professional identity development in hybrid environments by ensuring transparent communication, consistent role expectations, and recognition mechanisms that transcend physical presence. Structured mentoring, reflective supervision, and peer support networks can serve as scaffolds for identity validation. Hybrid policies should be co-created with employees to align institutional values with individual needs, ensuring flexibility does not lead to ambiguity. Leaders must be trained to manage remote and in-person teams with empathy and clarity, cultivating a culture where professional identity is nurtured, not eroded. Finally, investments in psychological well-being and digital literacy can equip employees to navigate the complex terrain of hybrid professional life with greater confidence and coherence.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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