It is said that remote work is here to stay as a genuine substitute for office work (Robinson, 2022). Existing and emerging digital technologies allowing workers to cooperate by sharing content and interacting via text, video, and audio in real time are enabling this move. Deep structural changes to the social and technical side of work are now happening (Fischer & Baskerville, 2022) and workers are re-examining how to live, think and work (Robinson, 2022). This has spiked a variety of new trends of a contradictory nature in the workplace (Edelman, 2021) framed as the hybrid work paradox (HWP). The first trend is that employees want the best of both worlds when it comes to deciding whether to work remotely or on-premises. This highlights that hybrid work and extreme flexibility will be defining the future workplace and that we need solutions that can offer compliance to the needs for in-person relationship building. The second trend is that high productivity leads to digital overload, rendering the workforce exhausted. Self-assessed productivity remains the same, but it comes at a human cost, with remote work intensifying employees’ workdays, with a steady increase in online meetings and chats. The third trend is authenticity, as employees cannot anonymize their homely settings and situations. Experiencing and interacting with coworkers in new ways helps foster a work culture, where people become more closely knit. Studies strongly correlate authenticity with productivity and overall well-being (Edelman, 2021). Being aware of these trends is important for organizations as they might differ from the well-established understanding of what organizational routines entail. The nature of the three trends presents paradoxes, that lead to various combinations and individual choices that are then subject to change on the level of the individual worker. How it alters routines and assumptions around work greatly interests workplace researchers and practitioners. To uncover the ongoing and opaque nature of these choices, and how they affect organizational routines and stability we asked: how are knowledge workers' routines changing in a hybrid workplace?

The study reported in this abstract applies a grounded theory (GT) approach to uncover how individual workers change their routines in workplaces impacted by HWP. Thereafter we theorize how routines are changing continuously due to new allowances in digital technologies and along human dimensions of reflexivity, socialization, and performance. Consequently, we discuss how preliminary findings contribute to the field of organizational routines that are now more flexible and self-organizing.

Research method and analysis

GT methods promote systematic methodological techniques for social researchers to embrace and advocate for developing theories from research grounded in data instead of deriving testable hypotheses from existing assumptions (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In
Table 1, we elaborate on our methodological choices. As GT entails, we identified three distinct categories that are all related to HWP and presented in Table 2. The different categories are assigned the related codes, supported by a quote that intends to provide an elaboration of what the code represents.

**Field Site:** Our research site is a community workspace that is in Copenhagen. The community is considered very trendy and has a very laid-back atmosphere. It houses small and medium-sized companies as well as housing satellite offices for multinational corporations (MNCs).

**Study Design:** We investigated nine individuals from different companies. We collected data from workers who were working for MNCs in the domain of technology/software. This group of people is particularly interesting for three reasons; (1) they are seeking to have similar mindsets, (2) they are all knowledge workers who perform work that essentially can be conducted anywhere, and (3) they are to some degree forced to work remotely with their colleagues as part of an MNC with offices abroad. This focus creates a trivial coherence between the companies and thereby the employees.

**Data Collection:** We followed qualitative research methods by conducting semi-structured interviews. A variety of roles were selected to participate to achieve a rounded perspective within the narrow group of employees working in the workspace community. The interviews lasted approximately 15-20 minutes on average. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. We asked questions to cover three main areas of interest: (1) flexibility in work-life: e.g. what is your perception of flexibility in work, and has it been changing?; (2) high productivity and work from home: e.g. what is your perception of being able to take work home with you?; (3) questions related to authenticity, well-being, and social life at work: e.g. what is your perception of relationships and friendships at work?

**Data analysis:** In line with the GT approach, we followed the constant-comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) as soon as we had collected some data. As interviews were transcribed, they were coded. We were then able to formulate new questions and identify additional or new subjects for later interviews. The data analysis follows a very specific three-part coding approach: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The codes and concepts identified were then grouped into categories. Lastly, utilizing selective coding we were able to connect all the categories and create one core category see Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1</th>
<th>Category 2</th>
<th>Category 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Structure and Company Policies</td>
<td>Creativity and socializing with WFO</td>
<td>Performance and newly emerged opportunities of WFH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code 1.1: Digital technologies</td>
<td>Code 2.1: WFO opportunities</td>
<td>Code 3.1: WFH opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We did always use Zoom for our international slash Copenhagen meetings”. (P6)</td>
<td>“Maybe the productivity even went down from work in the office because you socialize more”. (P7)</td>
<td>“We have a lot of people that have realized the life of WFH is much easier. Some commuted long distances before”. (P5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“As of next week, we have a global roll-out that demands that 50% of the time needs to be spent in the office”. (P5)</td>
<td>“There is actually no need for meeting face-to-face. However, we want to be face-to-face, it is about the human side of it”. (P8)</td>
<td>“I believe that the fact that you are only ‘close’ with your colleague until you press that red button in the corner, does something”. (P4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code 1.3: Normalization</td>
<td>Code 2.3: Meetings</td>
<td>Code 3.3: Individuality and Productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think that we have learned a lot. I believe that it has been a wake-up call for many. There has always been a perception ‘oh, you work from home today, so you are not really doing anything’”. (P9)</td>
<td>“Small meetings - I am not going to waste my time, and that is what it is now. We are realizing, ‘you know what’ - let’s do it over Zoom, let’s do it over Teams or whatever you use”. (P5)</td>
<td>“From talking to colleagues in the company, especially more technical people like sales engineers or programmers, they’re saying they were more productive at home” (P7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Categories, codes, and quotes
Results

Overall, we see three interdependent dimensions of human behavior when dealing with HWP. First, is the dimension of reflexivity. This entails observation of increased self-examination of change motives and how this influence what one is doing and thinking when experiencing HPW. We detected increased reflexivity towards digital technologies, organizational structures and policies, and normalization. The dimension is from Category 1, table 2. Second, is the dimension of socialization. This entails the opportunities that have been gained by WFO, the reflection on physical relations, and the approach toward meetings. The dimension is derived from Category 2, table 2. Lastly, we describe the dimension of performance, which in turn reflects upon the opportunities gained in connection with WFH, and describe the relevance of virtual relations, and the ambidextrous nature between individuality and productivity. The dimension is derived from Category 3, table 2. The dimensions are presented alongside grounded examples and numbered quotes from the extracted data. A general feature throughout the three dimensions is that digital technologies have been the enabler for the identified change of work processes of the knowledge workers. All identified thought patterns have been dictated by the allowances of digital technologies. Meanwhile, these newly emerged allowances have in addition resulted in more reflectivity regarding the pros and cons of WFO and WFH. This reflectivity combined with the continuously changing norms of the organizations regarding physical presence in the office has led to an increment in self-organization among the participants. The increasing tendency of self-organization seems to have become a synonym for flexibility or ‘being flexible’. As highlighted throughout the section, there seems to be an overarching coherence in the change of organizational routines and the thought patterns regarding ‘flexibility’. However, findings suggest that the participants have been adapting in different ways and paces.

Discussion

In line with the grounded theory approach, we now break the wall to existent theory and discuss the results. The concept of organizational routines has frequently been discussed and re-conceptualized, resulting in an ambiguous understanding of the concept (March & Simon in Feldman & Pentland, 2003). However, there is a general commonality and agreement within the literature that routines consist of regularly repetitive actions performed in recognizable patterns and influence multiple actors (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). In the understanding of organizational change within organizations, Feldman & Pentland (2008) argue that a tendency to overestimate the importance of the ideal and schematic understanding of organizational routines exists and that organizational routines often are associated with a source of inertia and inflexibility. They dispute this understanding of organizational routines and uncover how organizational routines are neither fixed nor stable, but rather a source of flexibility and change. Thus, they find two aspects of routines, one being ostensive and the other performative. They explain the coherence of the two aspects by noting: “The ostensive aspect of the routine is the idea; the performative aspect, the enactment. Both aspects are necessary to constitute what we understand to be the routine” (p. 102). Each routine is partly constrained/enabled by the
ostensive aspect and is influenced by the individual improvisation of the performative aspect that constantly incorporates new variations to create a new abstract, generalized idea of a particular routine. For this reason, organizational routines can essentially have endless variations. Robey et al. (2013) argue that IT artifacts can be embedded in organizational routines. From an ostensive aspect, the embedded artifacts can affect, guide, and provide a schematic form of the routines. From the performative aspect, the human actors may work improvisational with embedded IT artifacts i.e., workarounds, and differentiate for the ostensive routine. We subscribe to this point of view from Robey et al. (2013) that IT artifacts are embedded in organizational routines and change routines, while also being changed by routines.

In our study, we see how digital technologies enable the identified changes in routines. We highlight the performative aspect of the routines, to emphasize the individual and improvisational action of the routines. The knowledge workers differentiate and work around the ostensive aspect of the routine, which is supported by Feldman and Pentland (2003) who explain that the relationship between the ostensive and performative aspects of routines creates continuous opportunities for variation, selection, and retention of new routines and high variance of outcomes. Hence, this intertwined relation between the ostensive- and performative aspects and the embedded IT artifacts continuously change the organizational routines for knowledge workers. Thus, generating new emerging organizational routines, when realizing and experiencing HWP.

Figure 1. Reconstruction of Feldman & Pentland Organizational Routines

This ability and the emerging indispensability of digital technologies influence the organizational routines and highlight the emergent change in the participants’ work processes and routines as a continuous interplay between the ostensive and performative aspects. To capture the inevitable role of digital technologies we extend Feldman & Pentland’s original illustration and include IT artifacts as an embedded part of the generative system of organizational routines as stated by Robey et al., (2013). As new technology is brought in and while updates are frequent, it speeds up the change cycles and thus makes routines much more unstable. Based on the radical change from emerged possibilities of work shifting between WFO/WFH we contribute to the theory and introduce ‘flexibility’ as a salient element of organizational routines influencing both the ostensive-
and performative aspects. Hence, we find the existing theory of organizational routines in need of being adjusted to emphasize the contemporaries and instabilities at work because of the HWP. Digital technologies likewise extend organizational routines theory in areas that potentially heighten its explanatory power. Introducing flexibility as a salient element of the generative system of routines emphasizes the emergent possibilities of self-organization in settings conditioned by HWP. It emphasizes the fluid nature of routines as described in Rydén & El Sawy (2022) and the unstable nature of sociotechnical change as described in Fischer & Baskerville (2022). In addition, we found that human actors can follow diverse ostensive routines, as the possibilities of these evolved according to temporal and physical flexibility. Hence, it leads to organizational change over time by continuously influencing organizational routines intertwined with the emerged assumption of flexibility. Subsequently, it contributes to the theory by elaborating on the importance and coherence of organizational routines and flexibility including self-organizing based on the emerging possibilities of WFO and WFH. Conclusively it challenges the general commonality and agreement within the literature of organizational routines, as being regularly repetitive actions performed in recognizable patterns. On the contrary, when faced with paradoxes in hybrid work settings, individuals change routines frequently along the dimensions of reflexivity, socialization, and performance.

Limitations & Future Work

Our study is limited to a GT study of 9 respondents. A larger data set is needed to corroborate and elaborate on the findings. Future work and theorizing must be extended to discuss the influence of flexibility and self-organization on routines and how to cope with the variations and instabilities, these paradoxical trends represent in modern workplaces. More paradoxical trends might exist along the dimensions of reflexivity, socialization, and performance, and more dimensions might exist. Our future research agenda is thus revealing the paradoxical nature of routines in hybrid workplaces, and through GT develops the concept of organizational routines.

References


