

Engagement in Hybrid Project Teams

A Comparative Case Study of Project Managers' Experiences in Denmark and the US

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Abstract – This study is intended to create new practitioner-focused knowledge on hybrid work in project teams to be consumed and applied by project management professionals and others who manage or work in virtual/hybrid teams. The study focused on the low levels of engagement among employees worldwide, particularly in Denmark and the U.S. The purpose of the qualitative comparative case study was to explore how project managers in Denmark and the U.S. perceive the impact of hybrid work on team member engagement and to understand the strategies used to enhance and sustain team member engagement in hybrid project teams. This research was framed according to Matthews et al.'s model of employee engagement in project-based organizations. Data were collected by interviewing 15 Danish project managers and nine U.S. project managers who participated in three focus groups. Thematic analysis and NVivo were used to code and analyze the data. The findings revealed that while Danish project managers were less enthusiastic about hybrid work than their American counterparts, their strategies for enhancing hybrid team member engagement were similar. This comparative case study produced a series of insights into project managers' experiences with hybrid work and effective practices and strategies that help foster engagement in hybrid teams. More research is needed on why engagement levels are very low in different cultural contexts to clarify contributing factors and propose solutions.

Keywords – Employee Engagement, Hybrid Work, Project Management, Scandinavian Project Management, US Project Management

1 Introduction

Although remote working is not a new phenomenon, many companies and office workers across the globe were forced to quickly adapt to virtual work when the Covid-19 pandemic prompted lockdowns in the spring of 2020. Few

had a plan but managed to sustain work through a spirit of “you do what you have to do in this situation” (Jevnaker & Olaisen, 2022, p. 142). By the end of 2020, studies started to emerge on the benefits and challenges of working remotely. Research firms in Europe and the United States (U.S.) reported that a surprising benefit from widespread remote work during the Covid-19 pandemic was a perceived increase in productivity (KPMG, 2022; PwC, 2021). In addition, workers enjoyed the flexibility and control over their workday that working from home allowed (Ipsen et al., 2021; Morawski, 2022). Teleworking during the pandemic revealed that current communication and collaboration technologies, coupled with hastily put-together remote working policies, enabled a functional and green alternative to daily commuting (EEA, 2023).

Results from large-scale surveys administered during the pandemic also revealed challenges associated with virtual work, extending decades of research on the topic. A consistent finding across respondents in Europe and the U.S. was that managers found motivating and engaging remote employees difficult (Fuglsang Bach, 2022; Kirchner et al., 2021). Employees themselves expressed concerns about isolation, loss of collegial relations, and disengagement (CFL, 2022; Stich, 2020).

After the pandemic eased its grip on society, some companies demanded all employees return to the office (RTO), whereas many others accepted hybrid work realities as the new normal. Differing viewpoints on remote work has led some organizations such as Amazon and Google to issue RTO policies based on the idea that productivity is higher when employees work in the office, but many employees refuse to comply in order to retain the benefits of remote work (Mortensen, 2023). More than 90% of European companies and up to 80% of U.S. companies now accept and support hybrid work arrangements (Business World, 2022; DI, 2022; Harter, 2023; OWL Labs, 2022). Hybrid work is “a flexible working model where employees work partly in the physical workplace, and partly remotely – at home or from another workspace” (Qualtrics, 2022, para 2). Companies that organize work around projects with employees and collaborators in different locations are particularly suitable for hybrid working arrangements (Degerli, 2022; Foundry, 2022). For example, it is common to organize projects with a core group of team members in one or a few locations, with clusters of employees and stakeholders located elsewhere.

Per definition, projects exist only for a limited period and often involve staff dedicated only part time to project tasks. As a result, projects are prone to team member disengagement, which can be exacerbated by the fact that project managers often lack direct supervisory control of team members and the ability to reward employees for work contributions (Ahmed et al., 2022). With hybrid working arrangements becoming increasingly common, project managers face additional challenges to adopt effective strategies to ensure team members stay engaged and committed to project work and goals, regardless of their physical location and frequency of in-office meetings and in-person encounters. Engagement has been found to be a critical driver of project and organizational success (Henkel & Haley, 2020), and advice on how to keep employees engaged in hybrid teams is aplenty (e.g., Asp-Poulsen, 2022; Gratton, 2021; Knøss & Hansen, 2023; Rampton, 2022; Scharf & Weerda, 2022).

However, little empirical research exists on how project managers perceive the impact of hybrid work on team member engagement after the Covid-19 pandemic, and which strategies they use to enhance and sustain team member engagement in hybrid project teams. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. *How do project managers perceive the impact of hybrid work on team member engagement?*
2. *What project management strategies can help increase and sustain team member engagement in hybrid projects?*

As the researchers represent two different cultural traditions and locations, we designed the inquiry as a comparative case study to seek project management practitioner input from both Scandinavia and the U.S. This approach allowed for the discovery of global best practices, while considering different cultural norms and traditions that may qualify experiences about hybrid worker engagement. Participants from Denmark and the U.S. were project managers with project management experience from before, during, and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The comparative case study allowed the discovery of insights into effective project management strategies and evidenced the adoption of effective hybrid project management approaches for keeping team members engaged.

This paper begins with a presentation of the conceptual framework that guided the inquiry, followed by a summary of recently published literature on engaging hybrid employees. For context, a brief overview of project management practices in the U.S. and Scandinavia is included. The results emerging from the study are then presented and discussed, followed by conclusions and recommendations.

2 Literature Review

This literature review covers articles published since the end of the pandemic to capture and synthesize the most current knowledge of hybrid project work and employee engagement from 2022 and onwards. Slightly older articles on relevant cultural project management norms and practices in Scandinavia, and literature on employee engagement frameworks were also included.

2.1 Project Engagement Framework

To capture project managers' experiences with engaging hybrid work teams, we selected Matthews et al. (2018)'s model of employee engagement in project-based organizations as our conceptual framework. Henceforth, we define engagement as "the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations of an employee's consistent level of effort, commitment, and connection to their job" (Matthews et al, 2018, p. 2). This definition encompasses the

various aspects of engagement as an attribute of individuals' work. To allow for the study of engagement from an organizational angle, Matthew et al. developed a model based on the engagement construct, to help identify the factors contributing to a person's work engagement in projects. The basic premise of this framework is that project member employee engagement is influenced by four drivers, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Employee engagement drivers in hybrid projects (adapted from Matthews et al., 2018)

Engagement Driver	Definition
Project manager behaviors	Perceived efforts of the project manager in terms of providing recognition, motivation, support, displaying trust, and fostering teamwork virtually and in person.
Team culture	Perceived strength of team culture in terms of values and norms, shared identity and goals, opportunities for sparring with colleagues, quality of informal and formal meetings in-office and virtually.
Work quality	Perceived challenge of work tasks, opportunities for learning and growth, providing a sense of accomplishment, using team member's strengths.
Physical environment	Perceived quality of workspaces, both in-office and remotely, in terms of space for collaboration and facilitating concentration.

The above engagement drivers informed the literature review and were used to structure participant interviews and focus group dittos. In addition, the above framework informed the data analysis for RQ2 and enabled a meaningful comparison of results from the U.S. and Danish cases.

2.2 Employee Engagement in Hybrid Work Settings

Employee engagement was first conceptualized by William Kahn who defined engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (Khan, 1990, p. 694). After decades of research on the topic, scholars continue to document positive correlations between high engagement levels and job satisfaction (Henkel & Haley, 2020; Prentice, 2022; Susanto et al., 2023a; Yandi & Havidz, 2022), well-being (Boccoli et al., 2023; Sagar, 2022), motivation (Nehra, 2023; Pincus, 2022; Pura, 2022; Susanto et al, 2023b), retention (Hakro et al., 2022; Tyagi et al., 2022), performance and productivity (Boccoli et al., 2023; Henkel & Haley, 2020; Niati et al., 2022; Kustiawan et al, 2022), and innovation (Artusi

& Bellini, 2022; Cherif, 2022; Gratton, 2021). Despite much research on the many positive effects of having an engaged workforce, only a low percentage of employees worldwide report feeling engaged in their work. “Feeling uninspired” is the fourth most cited obstacle to employee productivity, according to Microsoft’s 2023 Work Trend Index which covers survey responses from 31,000 people in 31 countries. According to Gallup’s State of the Global Workplace 2023 Report, which synthesizes opinions from more than 122,000 employees worldwide, only 23% of the world’s employees are thriving at work and feel engaged, whereas 59% are “not engaged and quietly quitting.” The remaining 18% are “actively disengaged and loudly quitting” (Gallup, 2023, p. 4). The percentage of engaged employees in Denmark and the U.S. is 20% and 34%, respectively, indicating significant regional differences and – perhaps – surprisingly low engagement numbers (ranging from 14-21%) for all Scandinavian countries, which are known for participatory management, self-directed employees (Battistella et al., 2023) and labor-friendly policies (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021).

Another interesting outcome of the Gallup survey was that “engagement has 3.8 times as much influence on employee stress as work location”. In other words, “what people experience in their everyday work — their feelings of involvement and enthusiasm — matters more in reducing stress than where they are sitting” (p. 8). It can be inferred that project managers should improve practices and methods under their direct control to increase employee engagement. Common post-pandemic engagement-enhancing project practices uncovered by recent research on hybrid teams are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Project practices emerging from recent literature on hybrid worker engagement.

Engagement-Enhancing Practices (Articles Published since 2022 on Hybrid Teams)	
Engagement driver: Project manager behaviors	
Practicing transformational leadership	Abolnasser et al. (2023), Abi Saad & Agogu� (2023), Lis� & Greškovi�ov� (2022), Loyless (2023), Mutha & Srivastava (2023), Trudel et al. (2022)
Providing hybrid workers sufficient managerial support, feedback, and recognition	Abi Saad & Agogu� (2023), Chellam & Divya (2023), Jais & Suat (2022), Kumari & Yelkar (2022), O’Halloran (2023), Presslee et al. (2023), Winarno et al. (2022)
Building trust and psychological safety	Bloom et al. (2022), B�ttcher (2022), Cardon et al. (2022), GitLab & Qatalog (2022), Radu et al. (2023), Sokolic (2022), Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik (2023)
Engagement driver: Team culture	
Building strong organizational cultures and fostering a sense of belonging	Abduraimi (2023), Abi Saad & Agogu� (2023), Abolnasser et al. (2023), CFL (2023), Farque (2023), Hadjielias et al. (2021), Hung et al. (2021), “It’s good to belong,” (2023), Miranda-Wolff (2022), “Revitalizing culture” (2022), Tentama & Subardjo (2022), Wardono et al. (2022)
Promoting social activities	Chafi et al. (2022), Dobrow (2023), Krajc�k et al. (2023), Salminen et al. (2022), Soder (2022), Wang et al. (2023)

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Engagement driver: Work quality	
Allowing flexible work schedules, while protecting work-life balance	Brown (2023), CFL (2023), Dobrow (2023), Gallup (2023), GitLab & Qatalog (2022), Harkiolakis & Komodromos (2023), Jais & Suat (2022), Jevnaker & Olaisen (2022), Kumar et al. (2023), Malik et al. (2022), Mannaz & RUC (2023), Sharma (2022), Shipman et al. (2023)
Running effective online meetings	Bjola & Manor (2022), Dobrow (2023), Ellis et al. (2022), Mattiske (2022), Reed & Allen (2022), Standaert et al. (2022), Titus et al. (2023)
Providing necessary communication and collaboration technology and tools	Abi Saad & Agogu� (2023), Beharay & Tilak (2023), Ishak et al. (2022), O'Halloran (2023), Pringgabayu et al. (2023), Swart et al. (2022), Unal (2023)
Engagement driver: Physical environment	
Company office as a collaboration space	Appel-Meulenbroek et al. (2022), Bell (2022), Cooper (2023), McKendrick (2022), O'Halloran (2023)
Outside office workspaces	Albrychiewicz-Słocińska (2022), DiMarino et al. (2023), Dobrow (2023), Kortsch et al. (2022), Krajč�k et al. (2023), O'Halloran (2023), Tidhar (2023), Wang et al. (2023)

2.3 Project Management Practices in Scandinavia

Denmark is a small Scandinavian country of 5.8 million people with a rich history and professional traditions. Project management work has been recognized in Denmark since the mid-1970s, when the first National Project Management Association was founded (Wagner, 2018). Danish project managers lead large-scale projects in construction, green energy, IT, healthcare, and many other industries that require domain expertise, planning and execution skills, and international workforce and stakeholder management competencies. Most Danish project managers possess vocational training or an academic degree and attain project manager responsibilities after some years working in their original profession. They are often certified in one the most common international certification frameworks, including PRINCE2, IPMA, PMI and Scaled Agile (VIA, 2023). In addition, many seek continued education diplomas or project management degrees from accredited Danish higher ed institutions at some point in their career.

Recent published research on project management in Scandinavia largely focuses on agile project methods but fails to connect this approach to team member engagement or related aspects, such as motivation, job satisfaction, and wellbeing. Agile project management involves dividing the project process into small development and implementation cycles, which allows quick responses to change in the environment (Rusanova & Zubkova, 2019). Agile approaches are particularly useful in complex contexts, where experimentation and ongoing learning and development is needed (Rosenmeyer, 2023). It is possible that agile project methods have become popular in Scandinavian organizations and in the research community because they are suitable for exploration and innovation, which is a core goal of many companies in that region (Koch- rvad et al., 2019). One of the main principles behind the agile manifesto (<http://agilemanifesto.org>) is "Individuals and interaction over processes and tools", indicating a focus on employee collaboration and wellbeing,

which is a contributing factor to engagement (Matthews et al., 2018). Critics of the agile method, however, have pointed out that many employees experience the agile methodology as stressful and as causing burnout and disengagement (Bjørn, 2019).

The consulting company Mannaz (2023) surveyed 590 project managers across several industries, resulting in a comprehensive report on current project management topics in Denmark. Agile methods were extensively covered, and the report also covered trends and challenges in distributed projects, where team members work from various locations. Two thirds of respondents said they have worked in distributed or hybrid projects since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, compared to only 17% before lockdowns were instituted in the spring of 2020. This indicates a major shift in Danish project teams within a relatively short timeframe and suggests project managers have had to quickly adapt to virtual and hybrid work. Findings from the report suggest project managers are still adjusting to hybrid work as they report struggling with engagement of team members, building trust, and maintaining a connection to the project. These reported challenges support the need for further research on project management methods and tools for sustaining project member engagement.

Research has highlighted the cultural factors that contribute to both project management and employee engagement in Scandinavia, including a strong focus on collaboration, open communication, and flat hierarchical organizational structures. According to the Hofstede Insights culture model, Denmark scores very low on the power distance dimension, reflecting the fact that “Danese do not lead, they coach, and employee autonomy is required” (Hofstede Insights, 2023). Denmark also scores high on the individualism dimension, indicating a general preference for loosely knit social networks and self-directed work (Battistella et al., 2023). Not surprisingly, there is a strong tradition in Denmark of trust-based leadership, a high degree of employee involvement and self-efficacy, which support the basic premises of hybrid work arrangements. However, both the Mannaz report (2023) and research by Harboe (2023) suggest Danish project managers do strive to maintain social ties, building trust, and keeping team members engaged, although more knowledge on best practices is needed on how those goals can be accomplished in hybrid teams.

2.4 Project Management Practices in the United States

Project management practices in the U.S. have evolved to embrace a mix of traditional methodologies and agile approaches (Giachetti et al., 2022; Lalmi et al., 2022). Many organizations have adopted project management standards and frameworks, such as the Project Management Institute's (PMI) Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) and Agile methodologies like Scrum and Kanban (Breyter, 2022; Yousfi & Wood, 2023). Certifications such as the Project Management Professional (PMP) from PMI and Certified Scrum Master (CSM) from Scrum Alliance, are highly valued and widely recognized by human resource experts in the U.S. job market (Ameer et al., 2022). Many project managers pursue these certifications to enhance their

skills and credibility (Gomes Silva et al., 2022). Other key aspects of current project management practices in the U.S. include project management software, communication management, continuous improvement, and hybrid model approaches.

The use of project management software has become ubiquitous with tools like Microsoft Project, Asana, Trello, Jira, and others widely used for planning, tracking, and managing projects efficiently (Milojević et al., 2023). Through the use of such tools, U.S. organizations increasingly rely on data analytics and project management metrics to make informed decisions and track key performance indicators (KPIs) and metrics to assess project progress and identify areas for improvement (Kerzner, 2022). Additionally, communication management throughout the project life cycle is paramount for project success, and U.S. organizations emphasize maintaining clear and transparent communication channels among team members, stakeholders, and project managers (Unegbu, et al., 2022).

Agile adoption in project management has gained significant traction across various industries in the U.S. due to its focus on adaptability and customer-centricity (Marnada et al., 2022). Organizations embracing agile methodologies, such as Scrum or Kanban, are experiencing improved collaboration and faster product delivery through iterative development cycles and enables project teams to respond quickly to changing requirements, mitigating risks, and improving overall project outcomes (Milojević et al., 2023). According to Crnogaj et al. (2022), the shift towards agile practices requires a cultural change, empowering teams to be self-organizing and fostering a continuous learning mindset to optimize project performance. However, it is unclear if and how agile project methods affect hybrid team member engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote work, including remote project management (Ferreira et al., 2022) and virtual collaboration tools and platforms became essential for managing projects with geographically dispersed teams (Wu, 2022). Post pandemic, many organizations shifted towards hybrid project management approaches that combine elements of traditional waterfall methods and agile methodologies (Ciric et al., 2022; Hussein et al., 2023). This allowed them to benefit from the structure and predictability of traditional methods while also fostering adaptability and collaboration through agile practices (Ciric et al., 2022; Guo & Zhang, 2022). Nonetheless, with the emergence of numerous hybrid methodologies over time, comprehending the distinctions or similarities between these methodologies, along with the overall pros and cons of adopting a hybrid approach, has become quite challenging (Reiff & Schlegel, 2022).

3 Research Methodology

This study was designed as a qualitative inquiry with two cases: Denmark and the U.S. A qualitative methodology was selected because of the exploratory nature of the study combined with lack of insights into the challenges of managing hybrid projects, which made it difficult to establish testable hypotheses (Mfinanga et al., 2019). A case study with two cases was selected as an appropriate design because of 1) the researchers' respective locations and

first-hand cultural knowledge of Denmark and the U.S., and 2) the prevalent adoption of hybrid work after the Covid-19 pandemic in both countries and implied knowledgeable project manager participants. Data collection and analysis took place for each case in parallel, and results were then compared and analyzed for similarities and differences based on the conceptual framework model of employee engagement in project-based organizations by Matthews et al. (2018) outlined above.

3.1 Data Collection Procedures

Each case was handled as a separate research project and approved by the researchers' respective Institutional Review Boards prior to data collection to ensure anonymity of participants and their employers, as well as adherence to applicable human subject research protocols.

Participants for each case were recruited based on the same set of eligibility criteria, which were:

- currently works as project manager in a private sector company, *and*
- currently manages at least one project team whose members work remotely at least half of their time, *and*
- has worked as project manager virtually or in a hybrid manner since the beginning of, or before, the Covid-19 pandemic, *and*
- at least 18 years of age.

For the Denmark case, participants were recruited via emails sent to current and former students enrolled in continuing education project management courses between 2020-2023. A total of 15 project managers representing different employers were interviewed in person (via Zoom or Teams) between March and May 2023. Interviews lasted between 25-35 minutes and followed a semi-structured interview protocol.

For the U.S. case, participants were solicited for a focus group discussion via a recruitment flyer posted in three LinkedIn project management groups. A total of nine project managers representing eight different employers participated in one of three focus groups held in Zoom between March and May 2023. Focus groups lasted 45 minutes to one hour and followed a semi-structured focus group protocol. Each focus group was comprised of the following number of participants: Focus group one, two participants; focus group two, three participants, focus group three, four participants.

3.2 Data Analysis

Data from interviews and focus groups were transcribed and subjected to both inductive coding and subjected to thematic analysis per Braun and Clarke's (2012) 6-step process. Emerging themes were subsequently cross-referenced with Matthew et al's. (2018) employee engagement categories for RQ2 to allow for meaningful comparison of results across the two cases.

4 Results

Results from data analysis are presented by case below.

4.1 Study Participants

The Danish case involved 15 interview participants whose profiles are shown below, including industry, company size, current team size (counting both full and part-time team members), and whether the interviewed project manager reported having team members in other countries. See Table 3.

Table 3: Project manager participants from Denmark

Participant pseudonym	Industry	Company Size	Current Team Size	International team members?
D1	Manufacturing	18,000	20	Yes
D2	Energy	2,200	20-22	No
D3	Food Inspection	1,500	20-25	No
D4	Information Technology	2,000	50	Yes
D5	Energy	2,600	30	No
D6	Information Technology	30,000	10-12	Yes
D7	Engineering Services	750	15-18	Yes
D8	Manufacturing	380,000	20	Yes
D9	Information Technology	1,600	12-15	No
D10	Energy	700	12	Yes
D11	Information Technology	1,300	11-15	Yes
D12	Manufacturing	11,000	20-25	Yes
D13	Engineering Services	35	8-10	Yes
D14	Manufacturing	1,000	10-12	Yes
D15	Information Technology	270,000	18-20	Yes

The U.S. case involved three focus groups with a total of nine participants whose profiles are shown below, including industry, company size, current team size (counting both full and part-time team members), and whether the interviewed project manager reported having team members in other countries. See Table 4.

Table 4: Project manager participants from the U.S.

Participant pseudonym	Industry	Company Size	Current Team Size	International team members?
U1	Information Technology	375	12-16	Yes
U2	Government	500	7	Yes
U3	Staffing	515	21	Yes
U4	Consulting	20	7-11	Yes
U5	Consulting	20	7-11	Yes
U6	Manufacturing	50-99	12-16	No
U7	Consumer Goods	106,000	6	Yes
U8	Nonprofit	500	2-6	No
U9	Manufacturing	500	2-6	Yes

4.2 RQ 1. Results

RQ1. How do project managers perceive the impact of hybrid work on team member engagement?

There were two major themes uncovered for RQ1, unfavorable and favorable effects of hybrid work on engagement.

RQ 1 Theme 1: Unfavorable effects of hybrid work on engagement

Danish project managers expressed sadness of the emergence of hybrid work and longed for the pre-pandemic days when most teamwork happened in an office. Although many of the participants worked with stakeholders and team members in other countries before the pandemic, they expressed a sense of loss of the close collegial relations they enjoyed with their Danish team members. They also felt that communicating mainly online resulted in lower engagement levels, for a variety of reasons. U.S. focus group participants described unfavorable effects the transition to hybrid work had on engagement in remote teams. They mentioned challenges in the areas of communication, culture, adapting to the virtual environment, a desire for in-person communication, and expectations of team member availability and presence. Table 5 summarizes unfavorable effects of hybrid work on engagement as expressed by participants in both the Denmark and the U.S. case. Quotes from Danish participants were translated to English.

Table 5: Unfavorable effects of hybrid work on engagement

Subthemes	Denmark case	US case
Lack of informal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the physical space, you often have longer conversations, possibly about other topics, where new ideas arise. Those kinds of conversations just don't happen virtually. When the meeting ends, it ends. It's almost like slamming the door when you leave, you just log off and don't even say goodbye! When you meet in person, you can walk out of the room together and continue the conversation in a nice way and maybe go have a cup of coffee together. (D11) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team members expressed a longing for personalization and casual conversations that were present in the office environment. The virtual setup has led to a loss of connection. (U9)
Loss of team culture and team spirit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Before Covid-19, people were more willing to give it their all, to meet deadlines. That spirit is much harder to establish today, maybe because people don't feel connected to the company or as engaged in their work. And team spirit is necessary on longer projects. (D2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think it was harder for remote people to be part of that tight-knit culture. (U4) The challenges of the pandemic prompted us to find creative ways to engage, but it also brought weariness from constant virtual interactions and meetings. (U7)
Physical meetings and social activities are not prioritized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Now that hybrid work is normal, people seem to miss seeing each other but they don't want to go to the office every day either. (D2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efforts were made to find alternative ways to engage, such as using apps and organizing virtual events. However, there is a genuine desire for in-person interactions. (U1)
Problem solving and conflict resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hybrid work is here to stay but I really miss the old stand-up meetings we had, where we could collaborate and solve problems together on a whiteboard. When you are in the same room, you can feel each other better and it becomes easier to have difficult conversations. I really miss the old stand-up meetings we had, where we could collaborate and solve problems together on a whiteboard. (D2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The transition to hybrid work has brought about changes in culture. We lost some spontaneity and the ability to quickly respond and help each other. (U7)
Information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In projects, it's really hard to remember to inform people who aren't present in the office about decisions or conversations we have informally or ad hoc. We sometimes forget to tell people in other locations. And then they get discouraged or angry. (D7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being remote has made it challenging to track down and communicate with team members. We have to rely on virtual tools like Teams, and sometimes resort to phone calls to get things done. (U9)
Loss of work-life separation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I get calls and messages 24/7 and I often respond, even though I'm in the middle of putting my kids to bed. I feel over-engaged sometimes, but it leads to lack of engagement in the long term because I get burned out and feel I don't have a life. (D15) 	
Turnover intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no doubt it is much easier to look for a job elsewhere when you are working remotely. You lack close relations with your organization, and you don't have any close ties, so what's to lose? (D1) 	
Boring meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a tendency to involve everyone in everything in Danish projects, which results in a tedious process that online meetings don't support well. Too many people are free-wheeling or bored and waste their time in these meetings. Then they just tune out or turn off their cameras and do other things. (D6) 	
Misinterpretations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a project manager, you need to be hyperaware of interpretations that can happen after meetings. You need to over-communicate and avoid assuming everyone understands intentions and has the same understanding. (D15) 	
Varying degrees of adapting to hybrid work		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My team members struggled with the remote environment and learning new technology. The culture changed as some embraced it while others struggled. (U2) Some people took to remote work quite easily, while others missed the water cooler environment. (U1)
Availability and presence		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remote work has introduced a level of suspicion around availability and responsiveness. Instant messaging and online presence are often used as indicators of engagement. (U4)

RQ 1 Theme 2: Favorable effects of hybrid work on engagement

Despite many unfavorable aspects of hybrid work in terms of engagement, Danish project managers also brought up the positives. By far, the most cited benefit of hybrid work from an engagement perspective was flexibility to plan one's own workday. Participants also cited the ability to focus when working from home as an engagement factor. Lastly, some participants mentioned that flexibility is a must to attract and engage younger employees. Most of the U.S. focus group participants agreed the transition to hybrid work had favorable aspects. They noted that teams became more conscious of and implemented improved strategies to engage and collaborate with hybrid team members. Effective communication and collaboration required enhancing meeting structures and organizational practices in the context of hybrid work. Despite facing challenges and exhaustion from pandemic-related crises, the participants conveyed a positive, unified, and collaborative culture prevailing within their hybrid teams. Table 6 summarizes favorable effects of hybrid work on engagement as expressed by participants in both the Denmark and the U.S. case.

Table 6: Favorable effects of hybrid work on engagement

Subthemes	Denmark case	US case
Flexibility and autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think if you have small children, hybrid work is the best option. My team members very much enjoy the ability to work from home if circumstances call for that. For example, your kid is sick and can't go to daycare, and you won't have to take a sick day and can work from home at least some of the day. (D5) People are more engaged and productive when they can decide how to structure their own day. (D8) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The preference for remote work was prominent among contractors, with the flexibility to come to the office when necessary. There was no pressure to be in the office full time. (U2) While our team members are comfortable with remote work, there is still a desire to connect in person. In-person meetings and gatherings are valued for building relationships. (U1)
Ability to focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can take a "power day" at home. When I'm at the office, I get interrupted constantly. So, if I have to really focus or finish something, I work from home. (D7) 	
Flexibility is a must in the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soon, people won't see hybrid work as a fringe benefit or a privilege but as an expected part of a job offer. You won't be able to get project participants unless they can work hybrid schedules. Then they simply don't want to be there. (D8) 	
Better work-life balance		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The transition to remote work allowed for better work-life balance, as team members could integrate household tasks and family responsibilities into their workday. This has positively impacted attitudes and team dynamics. (U9)
Culture and collaboration		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our culture post-pandemic has been very focused, creative, and collaborative. We expanded our magazine and worked with a small, dedicated team. (U8) We work better together as a hybrid team. We have become more aware of how to engage and work with remote team members, and we have improved our meetings and organization. (U7)
Investment and creativity		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pandemic period sparked increased investment in our magazine. Team members became more engaged and creative in their contributions and efforts. (U8) The pandemic sparked creativity and new ways of staying engaged. Although some aspects have shifted, overall, the engagement has continued, and the team has found positive outcomes from the experience. (U7)
Accessible and personalized culture		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our team culture has leaned more towards being remote. We have released our office space lease and become more agile and flexible in serving clients, working with their preferred modes of engagement. (U5) The culture has become more accessible and comfortable with virtual work. Personalization has increased, with glimpses into each other's homes and more flexibility in acknowledging interruptions during calls. (U3)

RQ 2. Results

A summary of results from thematic analysis of project manager responses related to research question 2 are shown in Tables 7-10. The analysis was first done inductively to uncover themes, and then organized according to the conceptual framework, indicating specific kind of engagement drivers (Matthews et al., 2018). Below, identified strategies are reported with supporting quotes for each case. Quotes from Danish participants were translated to English.

RQ 2 Engagement Driver: Project Manager Behaviors

Danish project managers talked about their own practices in terms of building strong personal relationships with team members and practicing trust-based leadership. They also talked about the need for clear communication and making themselves available for information conversations and questions. Many U.S. focus group participants mentioned the importance of scheduling time to connect with team members on a personal level, especially in the absence of face-to-face interactions. Strategies to improve communication included adopting more open and visible communication channels, and encouraging everyone to participate, and provide input. Table 7 shows engagement drivers related to project manager behaviors for both cases.

Table 7: Engagement driver: Project manager behaviors

Subthemes	Denmark case	US case
Build personal relationships with team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I try to really get to know my team members and have a weekly 1:1 meeting with them where I ask some personal questions. (D6) My best advice is to see people as whole individuals, not just work robots. Have empathy if they are going through difficult times at home and give them the support they need. (D15) I prioritize getting to know people and making them feel connected to the project. (D11) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "We really try to change the way we work somewhat to really be more open with our communication, more really posting it where it's visible and everybody can chime in and give input on. That's been a huge help and really engaging everyone as well." (U7) "We don't have the same water cooler talk, but we have become more connected to each other's lives, which helps break down the stigma of being completely focused during virtual interactions." (U7) "Just when you work remote, you just have those walk by, or walk into somebody's office and have a conversation and walk by them in the hallway so I had to actually schedule time in my calendar to call people and not talk about work, just talking about anything but work, you know. How are you doing? How's the family? (U1)
Communicate clearly and proactively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have to be a role model and communicate clearly. I also have to show my own vulnerabilities and admit mistakes. When I act like a human, it's easier for remote employees to do the same. (D10) I talk to my team members every day. I ask what's going on and if they need help with anything. I also throw in a few personal questions. (D13) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "We were always trying to find the best ways to communicate and collaborate without me doing drive-by, especially for those groups that worked in secure areas." (U2) "We really try to change the way we work somewhat to really be more open with our communication, more really posting it where it's visible and everybody can chime in and give input on." (U7)
Frequency and ways of communication		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Managers increased the frequency of one-on-one meetings and introduced tools to track conversations and goals. We aimed to maintain engagement and regular communication." (U1) "Even after the pandemic, it's more video calls. So, before it was probably just cell phone, you know, just phone calls." (U1) "We're in our groove, comfortable with remote and hybrid work, but we may not reach out to each other as much as before." (U9)
Practice trust-based project management and leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I practice trust-based leadership. If I see signs of low performance or conflicts, I engage in dialogue to see if we need to adjust the amount of work, or if there are professional or personal reasons. (D5) I trust people do what they said they would. I practice trust-based project management and I believe trust builds engagement. (D15) 	
Expect certain skills of team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a project member, you have to participate actively in meetings and ensure you contribute. (D3) We expect our people to be able to communicate. We hire independent people who can self-manage. People need to reach out for help and information, they cannot be passive. (D5) 	
Be available and be present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compassion sometimes gets lost behind the screen, so I try to be present and pay attention. (D3) I respond as soon as I can to text messages and calls. It's really important I am available and I communicate on many platforms. (D15) I make time for my team members. I prioritize being available and have room in my calendar every day. Nothing is more disengaging than not being able to get hold of your project manager! You have to listen and not be rushed. (D6) 	

RQ 2 Engagement Driver: Team Culture

There were several strategies related to project team culture in hybrid teams. Danish project managers mostly talked about meetings as ways of building team culture and discussed how to prioritize social activities in both virtual and in/person meetings. U.S. project manager participants described the use of collaborative tools, maintaining a team-first culture, and developing good relationships among team members as ways of building team culture.

Table 8: Themes for RQ 2 Engagement Driver: Team Culture.

Subthemes	Denmark case	US case
Maintain in-person meetings / in-office days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When we meet in person, we make time for social activities. It helps onboard team members from other locations, and they become "part of the gang" (D6) I prioritize traveling to other locations and meeting people in person. It helps put faces to a name and to keep them engaged in the project. (D2) We meet in person several times each year. It's costly but necessary to keep the team spirit alive and allow people to feel part of the greater company. We spend all day in meetings and really get to know each other and solve problems together. Everyone is super engaged. (D13) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We went through the Gallup Survey to drive engagement and identify challenges. We made efforts to correct those and brought remote team members into the office to maintain social bonds. (U4) "We go to a trade show, and we are pretty big company, so we'll go to these great shows, and as a team, we would go early, set up the booth, and then that night, or during that timeframe that we were there, we would go to a maybe a show or we would go to dinner, really nice dinner as a team, and do stuff like that." (U9)
Establish and maintain a teamwork-first culture		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fortunately, I work in the manufacturing field for a family-owned company, so it's always been a teamwork-first culture. Many of us have been there for a long time, and everyone gets along very well with a positive mentality." (U6) "We have a group that has worked together for 5 plus years. We have a very close-knit team with a good relationship, both with those working directly on-site and virtually in other countries. We had a good starting culture." (U7)
Prioritize social time in online meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I open meetings 5 minutes ahead of time. Then we can spend a few minutes chitchatting. (D1) I spent a little time in meetings on private talk. Of course, my focus is on the agenda, but a few informal exchanges don't hurt. (D4) I try to prioritize talking about things that aren't work related. If we can laugh a little and joke around on Teams, people tend to feel more connected to the project and it helps create a team spirit. (D6) 	

RQ 2 Engagement Driver: Work Quality

Strategies uncovered reflected project management practices that enhanced the work quality for project members in hybrid teams. Danish Engagement in Hybrid Project Teams

participants largely reported work quality drivers of engagement in the context of online meetings. In addition, some Danish participants talked about keeping team members engaged by prioritizing their learning and growth. Given the limitations on face-to-face interactions, project manager participants in U.S. hybrid teams also relied heavily on technology-based communication tools to accomplish work. Video conferencing, messaging, and online collaboration platforms played a pivotal role in facilitating regular interactions among team members. As virtual communication became the standard, teams adjusted by adopting fresh strategies to preserve collaboration and strengthen personal connections.

Table 9: Engagement Driver: Work Quality

Subthemes	Denmark case	US case
Shift to online meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even though some of us are in the same room or same building, I ask everyone to attend meetings online. Then the conditions are the same for everyone and we don't leave people hanging online. When everyone is equal, there is no A Team and B Team. (D5) • Those of us who are in the office move to soundboxes and log in to avoid running two kinds of meetings in one. (D15) • It is awkward if some people are in a room together and some are not, so we ask everyone to participate online. Then everyone is equal. I feel people are more engaged that way. (D12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Company-wide gatherings shifted to virtual formats or reduced in frequency, affecting the overall social engagement within the organization." (U8) • "We used to meet yearly, and it was mostly like some kind of a company-wide party or meeting. It was kind of formal, like what is happening throughout the year and those kinds of things, but now it has become more like informative webinars and updates." (U3) • "We've gotten much more comfortable with inconveniencing a co-worker with a quick video call to maintain face-to-face type of conversations." (U5) • "With hybrid work, sometimes it's easier to log on and pop on really quick, see them on Teams, see them on Zoom, and get a little bit more face-to-face than we used to do before, even if it is over the internet face-to-face." (U6)
Videoconferencing practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I ask people to turn on their cameras. If I can tell they are doing other things, I may send them a chat message and ask if they are still participating? (D3) • I sometimes say that "I miss seeing your smiling face", and that makes people turn on their cameras (D12) • I ask people to turn on cameras to mimic in person meetings and maintain engagement. (D14) • Always camera and microphone on, unless your kids walk into the room. If your dog barks, then you can take a moment and chat about that. It makes online meetings more engaging. (D15) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I don't have to see myself on camera during meetings because I don't want to constantly be looking at myself. I find that helps me focus on what's happening in the meeting and with the people." (U2) • "We've seen people that we haven't seen in a while, and then we would start conversing with this other group, and then another group that we haven't talked to in a while. And I just see that we're all kinds. 'Oh, what's everybody up to?'" (U9)
Use collaboration software and Teams/Zoom tools and plugins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We use a Teams channel for communication during the day. It helps people stay engaged to know there is a chat they can join any time (D7) • We use the chat function in Teams and this is where people can post questions and ideas, without interruption. I always scroll through the chat before the meeting ends and address any loose ends. We don't miss any good ideas or input that way. (D3) • We use chats, polls and whiteboards during Zoom calls. (D6) • We use tools like Slack and Tinkerspace to build a sense of community. (D4) • We use Jamboard on Zoom. (D4) • We use Google docs, project management software and other tools so we can collaborate on the fly and during meetings. (D9) • I use breakout rooms in Teams for smaller group chats, to break the monotony. (D11) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We were a very collaborative group. Whether we had consultants that were in town or local or remote, our culture supported that collaborative effort, using many of the collaborative tools that we've been leveraging since the pandemic." (U3) • "We engage them more in a better way as we moved through the pandemic. We became better at using collaborative tools and really putting more out there." (U7) • "As soon as it stopped working, we said, turn that thing off and we'll do a phone call instead. I think we engage them more in a better way as we moved through the pandemic." (U6) • "We have threads with each of my individual workers. Using that cut down on email, which is always a good thing, but it also just let us have a running dialogue at all times." (U8) • "We got better at really putting more out there, moving away from the more traditional of always sending emails everywhere all the time and tried to move into more collaborative tools." (U7)

Subthemes	Denmark case	US case
Increased check-ins and casual conversations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I had to become very conscious of the fact that when you work remotely, you just don't have those walk-by or walk-into-somebody's-office conversations. So, I would schedule time in my calendar to call people and not talk about work, just talking about anything but work, like 'How are you doing? How's the family?'" (U1) • "Another thing that we did was create a daily doodle. Each day we each take turns coming up with a prompt, and then we do a doodle and share it with each other. That's been a great way to stay connected." (U8)
Support personal and professional learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I want to use my projects as a career path. My team members get opportunities for learning new competencies. (D1) • It's important to me that my team members leave my projects with new skills. (D6) 	
Practice engaging meeting facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will sometimes ask provocative questions to engage people in online meetings. Or, I will direct a question to one person to get them to engage. Online meetings have to be fun! It is hard to facilitate online meetings and I often feel drained afterwards. But I work hard to engage people and make the meeting worth their time. (D3) • You don't have to be an actor; you have to be authentic to run good online meetings. No one wants to see a clown, but you have to up your game sometimes. (D15) • I am 100% focused and present in online meetings. I'm very visible and engaged and I smile a lot. (D14) 	
Plan online meetings well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My best advice is to communicate the goal of the meeting to everyone ahead of time. You should not waste people's time, or they will check out. I sometimes send out a form to collect data ahead of time. It helps shorten meetings and I can focus on more engaging topics. (D11) • Respect people's time and don't invite everyone to all meetings. (D6) • Think about engagement when you plan online meetings! Spend time preparing for them and consider moving some conversations to 1:1 meetings. (D2) • I plan how I communicate and how I present. No text-heavy PowerPoints for example. I've really started considering my pedagogical approach! (D12) 	

RQ 2 Engagement Driver: Physical Environment

Strategies uncovered also reflected project management practices related to the physical workspace, although not to the same extent as other drivers. Some Danish project managers talked about the company office environment, although the initiatives taken to keep the office attractive to hybrid workers were not something they controlled themselves. A variety of approaches to create opportunities for meeting in-person were revealed by U.S. project managers related to the physical environment. Some mentioned celebrating occasions, sharing food, and attending events.

Table 10: Engagement Driver: Physical Environment

Subthemes	Denmark case	US case
Make the company office an attractive place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our coffee is the best in town. (D5) • Our office now has many quiet corners and areas with couches where people can sit and chat. We also have table tennis although few people play. People don't have their own desks anymore, but all equipment is standard so you can plug in anywhere. (D2) • We try to make the office an inviting space where people want to hang out. It's not like a jungle gym but it's green and we used sustainable materials. We also have games, to keep people entertained and engaged. (D15) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "In office we were celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, whatever events. Somebody baked some food and bring it into the office." (U1)

5 Discussion

In general, Danish project managers were less enthusiastic about hybrid work compared to their American counterparts. Although they accepted the new realities of balancing remote and in-person communication and collaboration and tried to make the best of the situation, they also mourned "the good old office days." Danish participants cited more unfavorable aspects of hybrid work and reported more issues with maintaining engagement among their project team members. U.S. project managers were more comfortable and had more experience with remote work arrangements. One explanation may be that remote working teams were not common in Denmark before the Covid-19 pandemic, although many projects involved some collaboration with international partners. Thus, the transition to working from home felt like a major disruption to work practices and project managers are still adapting to having fewer in-person interactions with team members. By contrast, many U.S. project managers were already used to remote or distributed work - in some cases because of larger geographical distances between team members compared to Denmark - and may thus have had more tools and strategies immediately available to them when lockdowns happened.

Danish and U.S. project managers largely agreed on the most significant engagement challenges in hybrid teams. Hybrid work negatively impacts team culture due to having fewer opportunities for informal interactions and relationship-building. This finding is consistent with the literature on the difficulties of maintaining strong team cultures, when members are not physically co-located most of the time (CFL, 2022; Pullan, 2022; Trevor & Holweg, 2022). A strong team culture reflects a shared sense of purpose, collaboration, and a positive spirit, all of which contributes to an environment where team members feel valued, committed to their work, and engaged with the organization (Abduraimi et al., 2023; Kumari & Yelkar, 2022; Miranda-Wolff, 2022).

There were also differences in Danish and U.S. project managers' perceptions about barriers to effective hybrid work. Danish project managers brought up problem solving, conflict resolution, boring online meetings, and information sharing as unfavorable engagement aspects, whereas U.S. project managers discussed the suspicion that has arisen around being present and available when working from a remote location. Cultural differences may explain some of these findings. Danish employees tend to be direct in their communication (Gertsen & Søderberg, 2011), but seemingly harsh words are often softened by body language, humor, or irony. Such moderators are easier to miss when employees communicate mostly through writing and in online meetings. Hence, problems and conflicts can be harder to solve, and messages may be interpreted differently than they were intended. In Denmark, managers typically practice trust-based leadership, which means that there is little pressure to demonstrate an online or at-work presence in hybrid teams. By contrast, U. S. project managers may be more inclined to monitor employees for signs of activity. This finding is supported by a large survey administered by Gitlab and Qatalog (2022), where more than half of U. S. remote or hybrid knowledge workers said they felt pressure to show an online presence, resulting in spending an additional 67 minutes online per day on unnecessary "busywork", suggesting a significant decrease in productivity. This conclusion was, however, not supported by our study findings.

When it came to identifying favorable aspects of hybrid work, U.S. project managers were more enthusiastic than their Denmark counterparts. Both Danish and U.S. project managers agreed that team members enjoyed the flexibility and autonomy of hybrid work. This finding aligns with research by Sokolic (2022) and Gorjifard and Crawford (2021) who found employees desire greater flexibility in balancing their work and personal responsibilities. The need for flexibility and autonomy through hybrid work also supported the engagement driver portion of the framework by Matthews et al. (2018) in permitting flexible work schedules, while safeguarding work-life balance. Danish participants also noted there were fewer interruptions when working from home that allowed for greater focus and completion of tasks.

Worthy of mention is that several of the U.S. project managers who participated in this study noted the pandemic sparked greater engagement and creativity that continued post-pandemic in the hybrid format. This finding is consistent with research by Summerfield (2022) who found combining a hybrid work model with a clearly conveyed human approach resulted in a positive impact on creativity. By contrast, none of the Danish project managers felt that hybrid work has affected creativity in a position manner. This difference may be attributable to pre-pandemic remote work experience by U.S. project managers. Because of prior remote work experience, the transition to hybrid work did not have as great an impact on U.S. project managers as compared to Danish project managers, who experienced hybrid work as a major barrier to creativity and, to some extent, engagement.

Both Danish and U.S. project managers prioritized building personal relationships with team members through open and frequent communication, showing empathy, and providing opportunities for everyone to be heard. Given the limited face-to-face interaction in hybrid teams, communication in a

project-based work environment is paramount for team success (Swart et al., 2023) and establishes the basis for building trust (Cardon et al., 2022; Sokolic, 2022; Wiatr & Skowron-Mielnik, 2023). However, some differences were discovered related to communication between U.S. and Danish project managers. U.S. project managers explained that ways of communication changed during the pandemic and continued post-pandemic. The frequency of one-on-one meetings increased, and new tools were introduced to track conversations and goals. During and after the pandemic, the use of video calls also increased. These differences may be ascribed to cultural differences as previously noted. Since Denmark managers practice trust-based leadership, team members feel little pressure to show online presence. Conversely, in the U.S., project managers may be more likely to monitor team members' online presence.

Additional differences found between U.S. and Denmark project managers related to expecting certain skills of team members including self-management and being available and present. This is consistent with the project manager behaviors component of Matthews et al.'s (2018) model of employee engagement in project-based organizations. A manager's actions or behaviors such as providing guidance, encouraging collaboration, and building trust play a vital role in optimizing the human factors that lead to project success (Matthews et al., 2018). Although U.S. project managers did not make comments related to these practices, it is possible they simply overlooked these areas. One explanation could be the cultural differences previously discussed as related to trust-based leadership generally practiced by Denmark project managers as compared to a more closely directed leadership style by U.S. managers.

According to Matthews et al. (2018), maintaining a positive and strong team culture is key to engagement, which was confirmed by our study. Both Danish and U.S. project managers were focused on fostering a team spirit and strong social ties among their project members. Recent research confirms the importance of promoting social activities in hybrid teams (e.g., Dobrow, 2023; Krajčík et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023), which again helps create a sense of belonging and shared goals (Abduraimi, 2023; CFL, 2023; Farque, 2023). If such engagement driving activities are not prioritized, projects can be experienced as impersonal, results-driven work, where individuals mainly focus on getting things done. U.S. project managers in this study discussed making teamwork come first, which aligns with the generally accepted statement in U.S. work culture that "there is no / in teamwork." Danish project culture also reflects a team approach, but project managers may be more focused on creating "hygge." The concept of hygge reflects a sense of cozy togetherness that fosters wellbeing in social contexts (Vejlgaard, 2023), which may explain why Danish project managers talked extensively about prioritizing social activities and small talk during online meetings. The need for hygge creates a dilemma for teams that meet mostly online, as hygge is an attribute of a physical space and atmosphere that is almost impossible to simulate virtually.

The many social and collaborative aspects of working together online were discussed by both Danish and U.S. project managers, in the context of creating engagement through perceived quality of work. According to Matthews et

al. (2018), work quality as an engagement driver reflects team members' perceived challenge of work tasks, opportunities for learning and growth, providing a sense of accomplishment, and using the strengths of everyone. What mattered the most to participants in both the U.S and in Denmark were how the shift to online meetings had caused them to think about which communication and collaboration tools and methods worked best. When most work happened in a shared office, much communication and collaboration may have emerged more naturally and without much consideration for effectiveness or work quality (Yang et al., 2022). When meetings take place online, process facilitation and focus on engagement and participation become an added responsibility of project managers. They must think about how to plan and run the meeting, using digital collaboration tools. It appears from our data that Danish project managers were more consciously thinking about promoting work quality through effective and engaging online meetings compared to their U.S. counterparts, which may be explained by the relatively newness of hybrid work in Denmark. Recent Danish research on hybrid work also indicates that most managers are still adapting to the complexity introduced by hybrid work arrangements (Rasmussen, 2023). Danish project managers may feel the shift to online meeting practices and as radical change to work, compared to American project managers who were already used to remote and hybrid work arrangements when the pandemic hit. Danish project managers were also concerned with how they could support team members' professional learning opportunities while working on hybrid project teams, which was not brought up by any U. S. participants, likely because they felt this was an implied responsibility that had not changed due to hybrid work.

The final engagement driver discussed in this research was physical environment that reflects perceived quality of workspaces, both in-office and remotely, in terms of space for collaboration and facilitating concentration (Matthews et al., 2018). According to O'Halloran (2023), companies that allow hybrid work should view people's homes as an extension of the office space and ensure employees have the necessary tools and technology to do their work effectively. Participants in our research did not discuss their at-home office setup, possibly because they already had dedicated workspaces and equipment provided by their employers, allowing them to communicate and collaborate virtually in an effective way. Both Danish and U.S. project managers did, however, discuss company offices. Surveys show organizations that cater to flexible work arrangements are among the most attractive to professionals seeking new opportunities (Cooper, 2023; McKendrick, 2022). Office spaces should be designed to allow for collaboration and social gatherings, as well as spaces for individuals to concentrate and attend meetings without disturbing others. Our research supported such findings, as both Danish and U.S. project managers mentioned flexible and inviting spaces where team members can gather to work and socialize as an engagement driver. It may be tempting to downplay the importance of the office when people work hybrid schedules but for project teams, it is still essential to connect in person regularly to maintain a connection to the team and to ensure team members stay engaged.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

This comparative case study produced a series of insights into project managers' experiences with hybrid work and effective practices and strategies that help foster engagement in hybrid teams. Overall, Danish project managers who participated in this study were less enthusiastic about hybrid work than their U.S. counterparts, cited more unfavorable aspects, and expressed sadness for the loss of the in-office collaboration that happened prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. In contrast to the U.S., remote work was not widespread in Scandinavia prior to pandemic lockdowns and hence, hybrid work arrangements are a relatively new phenomenon in Denmark. As such, hybrid work is considered a major change to how work gets done and a change that influences many project management practices. American project managers seem to have benefitted from decades of experience and research on how to engage remote teams, and the transition to hybrid work arrangement is thus less of a disruption, compared to Denmark. U.S. project managers are further along on the hybrid work adoption curve and have more positive attitudes and experiences with how to effectively collaborate and communicate virtually.

Cultural differences between Denmark and the U.S. help explain many of our study's findings, although not all. In Scandinavia, trust-based leadership and participatory management is the norm, as is low power distance between management and employees. In general, Scandinavian employees are well-educated critical thinkers, who demonstrate a high degree of self-efficacy. Traditionally, managers mainly act as coaches who focus on negotiating the basic conditions of work as well as communicating with stakeholders. Hybrid work has changed these basic conditions and communication methods and the Danish project managers we interviewed felt that they had to play a more active role in getting work done. New skills are required to manage hybrid project teams, such as facilitating effective online meetings, planning social activities, and creating opportunities for informal communication. Many Danish project managers are not used to taking an active role in such activities, because they happened naturally when team members worked from the same office. They are not trained in these skills either, which may help explain why they expressed many challenges with managing hybrid teams and why they talked about the pre-pandemic days in nostalgic terms. By contrast, U.S. project managers operate in work environments with greater power distances and hence, may be more used to taking charge and expecting team member cooperation and acceptance of online tools and methods of collaboration. As a result, they may perceive hybrid work as just another way of getting work done, as their project management practices have not changed significantly since the beginning of the pandemic.

Cultural differences do not explain, however, why engagement levels are very low in Denmark and quite low in the U.S. As mentioned above, a recent survey by Gallup indicates only 20% of employees in Denmark feel engaged, as opposed to 34% in the U.S. Hybrid work provides an opportunity for employees to enjoy flexible schedules and work from home whenever convenient, which should help foster engagement, so other engagement factors beyond what is reported in this study must play a role. We can speculate that the

engagement dimension of work quality proposed by Matthews et al. (2018) plays a larger role than the framework suggests. Perhaps project work in 2023 is not perceived as meaningful or employees feel they waste time on unnecessary tasks. More research on why engagement levels are very low in different cultural contexts is needed to clarify contributing factors and propose solutions.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that despite widespread adoption of agile project methods in both Denmark and the U.S., none of the participants from either case mentioned agile methods as having an impact on engagement in hybrid teams. A characterizing feature of pre-pandemic agile project management was co-location, which enhances collaboration and engagement among team members (Rosenmeyer, 2023; Hussein et al., 2023). It was confirmed by our research that most meetings take place online in hybrid teams, indicating that more research is needed to understand if agile project methods play a role in keeping members of hybrid teams engaged and how this can be achieved.

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