An Identification-based Understanding of Team Engagement in Global Virtual Teams (GVTs)

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Abstract

Because of globalization and technological advancements, organizations have adopted virtual work arrangements, specifically Global Virtual Teams (GVTs). This study conducted a 16-month ethnographic inquiry in a multinational enterprise to explore team engagement in GVTs. The findings indicate that GVT members often handle multiple roles across various teams and organizations and identify with these entities separately, thus displaying different levels of identification with roles, teams, and organizations. These three identification cascades affect other members' engagement and overall team engagement. Higher levels of identification with roles, teams, and organizations trigger a positive engagement contagion across the GVT, whereas a lower level of identification triggers a negative engagement contagion. We also identify four distinct configurations of GVT members, illustrating the complex nature of engagement dynamics in GVT settings. This identification-based understanding of engagement in GVTs contributes to the literature on team engagement and IS by highlighting the significance of understanding the sensitive dependence of GVT team engagement on members' identification with their roles, teams, and organizations and subsequent engagement contagion.

Keywords: Global Virtual Teams (GVTs), Employee Engagement, Identification, Ethnography.

1 Introduction

Work configurations in modern organizations have evolved significantly in recent years due to globalization and technological developments to accommodate remote forms of work arrangements. According to a KPMG report (2022), nearly 90% of the surveyed companies had remote working arrangements. Microsoft Work Lab (2021) reported a 148% increase in weekly meetings, a 40.6B increase in the number of emails delivered, a 45% increase in weekly team chats per person, and a 66% increase in the number of people working on office documents from February 2020 to February 2021, signaling a more digitized and virtual work

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environment alongside siloed teams. With the increase in digitization, employees are at the inflection point of leaving their employers (approximately 41%), signaling a decreased overall engagement in remote work conditions. This study explores an identification-based understanding of engagement in remote working arrangements called global virtual teams (GVTs). In GVTs, team members are separated by time and space and come from diverse cultures and backgrounds using technology-mediated communication for collaboration and interaction to organize tasks (Chamakiotis et al., 2013; Choi, 2020; Taras et al., 2019). Although engagement in GVTs has already been explored (e.g., Maslach et al., 2001; Shuck et al., 2017), we adopt a multilevel dynamic view of team engagement by highlighting the possibilities of multiple identifications in GVTs as members juggle across multiple roles, teams, and organizations. This multiple identification-based understanding warrants separate attention to signify its impact on GVT engagement.

Working in GVTs has challenges ranging from understanding speech patterns and communicating effectively in a multicultural setting to efficiently leading GVTs, developing personal and professional rapport, working across various technology-mediated communication devices, and selecting appropriate channels of communication (Adamovic, 2018; Jimenez et al., 2017; Shaik & Makhecha, 2019). These challenges affect GVT members' productivity, increase costs, create stress, and reduce retention and morale (Cathro, 2020; Grenny & Maxfield, 2017). Organizations intend to mitigate the negative impacts by increasing employee engagement (Gilson et al., 2015). While higher engagement levels lead to better organizational productivity (Harter et al., 2002) and results (Gallup, 2023; KPMG, 2022) engagement in GVTs is often lower. Existing literature has explored individual member engagement in GVTs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Saks, 2019). Panteli et al. (2019) examined how leadership behaviors affect engagement in GVTs, Shaik and Makhecha, (2019) investigated the drivers of employee engagement, and Shaik et al. (2020) explored the role of cultural intelligence in fostering engagement in GVTs.

The predominant focus on individual engagement in GVTs overlooks team-level engagement processes emerging from social identification mechanisms (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Dick et al., 2004). Since engagement is contagious among team members (Bakker, 2022; Hatfield et al., 1993) and members in GVTs play different roles across teams and organizations, understanding the role of multiple identifications (role, team, and organizational) in shaping engagement contagion is crucial. This study develops an identification-based perspective on GVT engagement and explores how different identification configurations influence engagement gain and loss cycles, thus bridging the existing gap in literature (Costa et al., 2017; Yun & Beehr, 2024). Thus, this study contributes to both theory and practice by offering actionable insights for organizations to enhance team engagement in virtual work environments (AON, 2022; Gallup, 2023; KPMG, 2022).

This study investigates the dynamics of team engagement in GVTs by addressing the following key research question: How do multiple forms of identification—role, team, and organizational identification—affect engagement contagion within GVTs? This study explores the interplay among these forms of identification and their impact on both individual- and team-level engagement in virtual, multicultural, and geographically dispersed teams. By examining the identification-based dynamics of engagement, this study has two objectives: first, to understand how engagement spreads among team members through identification processes, and second, to offer actionable insights for organizations to

foster positive engagement contagion to enhance overall team performance and cohesion in GVTs. This study contributes to the theoretical and practical knowledge of virtual teamwork by proposing a novel framework; identifying engagement contagion; and illustrating how varying levels of identification can lead to positive or negative engagement cycles within globally distributed teams.

The study introduces the concept of "identification-based engagement contagion," theorizing how engagement spreads within GVTs through social identification mechanisms, extending emotional contagion theory to virtual work settings (Barsade, 2002; Bakker & Sanz Vergel, 2013). By uncovering the non-linear dynamics of engagement contagion, this study contributes to the information systems (IS) and HRM literature on virtual teamwork by providing empirical evidence from a 16-month ethnographic inquiry. This study highlights the interplay between technology-mediated communication and team identification. The findings offer practical insights for organizations to foster positive engagement contagion by strengthening identification processes in remote and hybrid teams to enhance performance and collaboration in globally distributed work environments (Gallup, 2023; KPMG, 2022). For practitioners, understanding these identification forms enables targeted interventions to enhance role clarity and organizational identification, which is particularly valuable for members at client locations.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Hybrid Work and GVTs

The modern organizational landscape has been transformed with the emergence of hybrid work and GVTs (Choudhury et al., 2024; Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further expedited the adoption of remote and hybrid work models, introducing greater complexity into work arrangements (Chamakiotis et al., 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021). Although GVTs operate through geographical dispersion and technology-mediated communication (Chamakiotis et al., 2013), hybrid work combines in-office and remote elements (Raghuram et al., 2019). A significant challenge emerging from hybrid work is "presence disparity," in which inequalities arise between members who can meet face-to-face and those who cannot (Malhotra & Majchrzak, 2014; Santillan et al., 2023). This disparity can diminish team engagement and collaboration, thus necessitating targeted engagement strategies. The hybrid work model blurs traditional organizational structures, often requiring employees to navigate multiple team memberships and organizational affiliations simultaneously (Choudhury et al., 2021; Raghuram et al., 2019). This necessitates understanding of how different identification processes contribute to the engagement dynamics in virtual teams. More specifically, GVT members' ability to identify with their roles, teams, and organizations can significantly impact team cohesion, knowledge-sharing, and overall engagement contagion cycles (Bakker, 2022; Panteli et al., 2019). Understanding these identification processes helps unravel engagement contagion mechanisms, as stronger identification at one level can reinforce engagement at another, whereas weaker identification may lead to disengagement and knowledge silos (Reade, 2001; Ramarajan, 2014). This transition is crucial for developing our central argument that identification-based engagement contagion is a key driver of team-level engagement in GVTs and offers new insights into the interconnected nature of engagement in globally distributed teams (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Yun & Beehr, 2024). By identifying how these engagement patterns emerge in GVTs, this study advances both the theoretical and practical

perspectives on multi-level dynamic team engagement processes to improve the effectiveness of virtual teamwork in hybrid settings.

2.2 Identification in GVTs

Identification was introduced by Sanford (1955) and later defined by Kagan (1958) as an "acquired cognitive response within a person." Kelman (1958) suggested that "identification is a self-defining response, set in a specific relationship." The identification literature has been explored at an organization, team, and role levels. The foundation lies in the Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Turner & Tajfel, 1979), which explains how individuals derive their self-concepts from social group membership. This theory has been extensively applied in organizational contexts through "organizational identification" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), linking higher identification levels to increased commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (Riketta, 2005; Mirbabaie et al., 2021). Wiesenfeld et al., (1999) pioneered research on organizational identification in virtual contexts, emphasizing its role as a psychological bond that compensates for physical distance. In GVTs, members exhibit nested identities and simultaneously identify with parent and client teams (Connaughton & Daly, 2004; Lechner & Tobias, 2022). The concept of multiple organizational identifications, introduced by Reicher et al., (1995) and expanded by van Dick et al. (2004), has become particularly relevant as GVT members navigate multiple work groups across organizational and cultural boundaries. Sivunen (2006) identified four tactics to foster team identification: addressing individual needs, providing positive feedback, emphasizing common goals, and promoting team activities. Fiol and O'Conner (2005) highlighted the role of technology in shaping identity. Although well studied in traditional settings (Ashforth et al., 2008), role identification remains underexplored in virtual contexts.

Organizational identification and engagement are related to each other (He et al., 2014; Panteli et al., 2008; Sun et al., 2023). While engagement contagion has been studied in traditional settings (Bakker et al., 2006; Panteli, 2019; Yun & Beehr, 2024), its manifestation in GVTs and its relationship with identification remains understudied, which we address by understanding team-level engagement dynamics in virtual contexts. This understanding is particularly significant because in the hybrid and virtual work context, employees experience identity fragmentation, loyalty conflicts, and shifting organizational commitments (Reade, 2001; Ramarajan, 2014). Stronger identification with a team or organization enhances commitment, knowledge-sharing behaviors, and overall performance. However, little attention has been paid to how these multiple levels of identification interact within GVTs and contribute to engagement contagion (Wiesenfeld et al., 1999; Fiol & O'Connor, 2005). The interplay among role, team, and organizational identification suggests that engagement is a dynamic and socially shared process, where shifts in identification can trigger engagement gain or loss cycles (Bakker, 2022; Costa et al., 2017). Understanding these identification mechanisms is essential to explore how engagement spreads across team members, reinforcing the idea that engagement is contagious in virtual settings (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Hatfield et al., 1993). By integrating identification theory with engagement contagion dynamics, we provide a novel theoretical perspective on GVT engagement along with practical implications for strategic management through identification-focused interventions. Section 2.3 focuses on the challenges of sustaining engagement in distributed teams and the mechanisms through which identification-based engagement contagion occurs.

2.3 Employee Engagement in GVTs

The importance of employee engagement for organizational success and competitive advantage is well established (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Macey et al., 2009; Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). Practitioners also find this concept extremely significant (Gallup, 2023; KPMG, 2022; AON, 2022; WTW, 2021) as engaged employees bring their cognitive, emotional, and physical selves to their jobs, resulting in increased productivity and well-being. Conversely, disengaged employees detach themselves cognitively and emotionally from their jobs (Kahn, 1990). Psychological meaningfulness, availability, and safety are vital for achieving higher engagement levels (Kahn, 1990). Work engagement, the opposite of burnout, is characterized by greater vigor, dedication, and absorption in job tasks (Maslach et al., 2001). Engagement is influenced by job characteristics, organizational and supervisor support, rewards and recognition, and justice (Farndale et al., 2014; Saks, 2019). Although most studies focus on individual engagement, the antecedents and dynamics of team engagement (Adamovic, 2017; Shuck et al., 2017), specifically in GVTs, have garnered little attention (Gilson et al., 2015).

The focus on team engagement is more relevant in the context of GVTs, as team members' productivity is influenced by several factors such as differences in time zones, cultures, technology-based communication, and lack of face-to-face interaction (Adamovic, 2017; Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017; Shaik & Makhecha, 2019). GVTs tend to have lower cohesiveness than collocated teams (Polzer et al., 2006), and team members may have less trust in each other (Adamovic, 2017; Aten & Thomas, 2016; Newell et al., 2007). Furthermore, GVTs are culturally diverse, leading to difficulties forming group identities and sharing norms and meanings (Gilson et al., 2015; Shaik et al., 2020).

A limited number of studies on team engagement establish it as an emergent, multilevel process influenced by interactions and shared experiences (e.g. Costa et al., 2012). Costa et al. (2017) characterized engagement as dynamic, emphasizing the roles of team coordination, learning, and adaptation. They also introduced crossover effects between individual and team engagement and mentioned that the specific manifestation mechanisms require further investigation. We address this gap in our study to gain a more comprehensive understanding of team engagement dynamics.

2.4 Theoretical Underpinning

This study is grounded in two key theoretical frameworks: the job demands-resources (JD-R) model and emotional contagion theory. These theories help understand engagement processes at both the individual and team levels in organizations. However, our findings extend, challenge, and refine certain assumptions within these frameworks, particularly in the context of GVTs, where engagement operates under unique structural and identification-based conditions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hatfield et al., 1993; Reade, 2001).

The JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) explains employee engagement and burnout by categorizing work characteristics into job demands (which require sustained effort and may cause stress) and job resources (which help employees manage demands and foster motivation). When job resources outweigh job demands, engagement occurs, leading to greater vigor, dedication, and absorption at work. Our study challenges and extends the JD-R model in key ways, particularly in the context of the GVTs. First, while the JD-R model focuses on tangible job resources, such as supervisor support, autonomy, and task clarity, we

argue for the equally important role of intangible resources, such as social identification (role, team, and organization) in the context of GVTs (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Dick et al., 2004). Employees with stronger team and organizational identification remain engaged even in the absence of conventional job resources, whereas weak identification functions as a hidden job demand, causing disengagement. Second, the JD-R model primarily defines job demands in terms of workload, time pressure, or emotional strain. However, in GVTs, low identification can act as a demand, increasing psychological strain and disengagement, even when traditional demands are low (Fiol & O'Connor, 2005; Ramarajan, 2014). Finally, while JD-R assumes that engagement is individually experienced, we argue that in GVTs, engagement occurs through identification-based interactions, creating engagement gain-and-loss cycles at the team level. This challenges the view that job demands and resources operate only at the individual level, suggesting that engagement is inherently social and contagious in GVTs (Costa et al., 2017; Yun & Beehr, 2024).

Furthermore, emotional contagion theory (Hatfield et al., 1993) posits that emotions and engagement spread among team members through social interactions, behavioral mimicry, and shared emotional states. Traditionally, this contagion occurs through face-to-face cues such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions. However, in virtual environments, engagement contagion operates differently (Barsade, 2002; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). Thus, our study extends ECT in the context of GVTs in keyways. First, engagement in GVTs spreads digitally and psychologically through a shared identification process. Team members who strongly identify with their role, team, or organization influence others to engage more even in the absence of frequent interpersonal interactions. Second, negative engagement contagion is amplified in GVTs because of weak identification structures. In traditional co-located teams, disengagement can often be corrected through informal, spontaneous interactions (e.g., casual office conversations), whereas in GVTs, disengagement can escalate quickly in the absence of immediate interventions (Rockmann & Pratt, 2015; Santillan et al., 2023). Third, our study highlights dual identification conflicts (e.g., employees balancing loyalty to a client versus their parent company), which disrupt engagement contagion processes (Reade, 2001; Raghuram et al., 2019). In traditional teams, engagement flows naturally within clearly defined team structures. However, in GVTs, engagement shifts depending on the stronger identification (client versus parent organization).

3 Organization Context

Cyient, a multinational enterprise specializing in engineering, manufacturing, data analytics, and network operations, was the focus of this study. The company is headquartered in Hyderabad, India, and has a global presence of 58+ locations across 21 countries. It employs more than 15,000 people. Its expansive structure facilitates the examination of identification and engagement at multiple levels. GVT members manage multiple roles across teams and organizations, providing unique insights into how they identify various work aspects. This multirole context is particularly relevant given today's flexible, project-based work configurations, which extend beyond traditional single-role studies. Multiple GVTs enable a comparative analysis of team configurations. Team diversity in composition, size, and purpose provides a nuanced understanding of how member identification manifests in GVTs. The organization's global reach, involving projects where members work onsite with client organizations, offers insights into the identification challenges between parent and client companies. Its involvement across multiple sectors (engineering, manufacturing,

analytics, and network operations) provides opportunities to study GVTs across diverse task backgrounds. This research encompassed teams from human resources, aerospace and defense (A&D), rail and transport (R&T), and telecommunications (TC) fields. Each sector faces unique identification challenges due to the varying nature of work, stakeholders, and team demographics. The case captures the distinct dynamics between client and parent GVT members, presenting opportunities to study organizational identification conflicts and employee engagement contagion. Diverse cultural and geographical contexts, with data from India, the USA, Norway, and Singapore, illuminate the influence of cross-cultural differences on identification processes. Time-zone differences across global GVTs provide insights into the temporal factors affecting member identification. This is particularly relevant in today's time of reliance on technology-mediated communication in hybrid and remote work contexts. With its global, complex, and dynamic organizational structure, Cyient is an ideal case for understanding the identification process in GVTs and its influence on GVT engagement.

4 Research Methodology

Due to the lack of available research on team engagement in the GVTs domain, we used an ethnographic approach involving participant observation. We adopted an insider-outsider research design, as suggested by Bartunek and Louis (1996). The lead author was a full-time research associate at Cyient who collected data for academic purposes while performing professional duties. The organization's leadership and subsequent corporate managers were aware of the lead author's research, but they did not influence its outcomes. The other authors had no contact with respondents. This allowed the research team to balance personal involvement and professional distance, which is necessary for ethnographic research (Anteby, 2013) and facilitated the creation of a theory from micro-interaction analysis.

We chose ethnographic approach for this research– because, first, team engagement is a complex, multifaceted, and nuanced phenomenon that involves intricate and sensitive social dynamics, cultural influences, and technology mediation. An ethnographic approach allows for deep contextual understanding and helps create a "thick description" to capture the nuanced and layered meanings and interpretations of social actions in a specific context (Geertz, 1973). Second, an exploratory approach is warranted, given the limited understanding and research on team engagement in GVTs and multilevel identification by GVT members. Ethnographic inquiry allows for the emergence of unexpected themes and insights (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007). Third, this study maps how team engagement in the GVT context is manifested and experienced by GVT members in their everyday lives and work. The focus of ethnographic inquiry on participant observation and field immersion allows researchers to capture lived experiences as they unfold in real time (Barley, 1990) in ways that surveys or interviews alone cannot capture (Van Maanen, 2011). Fourth, as GVTs spread across diverse cultural and organizational contexts, the emphasis on understanding the phenomenon in natural settings makes it ideal to explore the contextual factors that influence team engagement (Fetterman, 2019). Finally, the identification processes at multiple levels and team engagement, in general, might be tacit processes often taken for granted by GVT members. The immersive approach facilitated by ethnographic inquiry allows researchers to explicate this knowledge through prolonged observation and participation (Spradley, 2016). Ethnographic inquiries were implemented using several strategies.

4.1 Data Collection

During the research period of 16 months, the lead author collected data from five teams in India and Connecticut, USA. In the HR department, the lead author was part of the employee engagement team and HR team of the Rail and Transport business units. The role involved assisting corporate HR (CHRO and HR, India Head) by providing academic insights into their issues of concern. They engaged in HR-related projects across three teams in India and two delivery teams (Aerospace and Defense Business Unit – A&D BU) in Connecticut. Confidentiality agreements prevented the lead author from fully immersing himself in the delivery teams. Other authors who were not in the field provided balance to maintain an adequate distance. The association with HR teams lasted for 16 months and with delivery teams for 2 months (in India and Connecticut). All teams involved members from various locations worldwide working as a single unit. Table 1 presents detailed information on the five teams.Data were collected through regular hands-on participation in HR teams in different formal and informal settings (meetings with consultants, colleagues, work sessions, daily assignments, and weekly updates), thereby providing access to several meetings with consultants (Sturdy et al., 2009). Field notes were taken during participant and non-participant observations. The lead author maintained a notebook throughout the observation period, resulting in 400 pages of field notes classified chronologically. These notes were shared with the other authors weekly. During the first two months, the field notes considered team members' everyday activities, modes, ways of functioning, and general life as GVT members. However, when the lead author started socializing and performing several day-to-day activities, the professional challenges identified as attractive were carefully attended to along with related experiences.

Teams	Location of the researcher	No. of Members	Type of Data
HR Team (Rail & Transport BU)	Hyderabad, Manikonda	6	Participant Observation, Note-Taking Conference Calls (WebEx), Informal Meeting
Engagement Team	Hyderabad, Manikonda/Madhapur HQ	5	Participant Observation, Formal Meetings, Note-Taking Conference Calls (WebEx), Informal Meeting
HR Corporate Team	Hyderabad, Madhapur HQ	19	Participant Observation, Formal Meetings, Note-Taking Conference Calls (WebEx), Informal Meeting
Email Trails			Emails exchanged among GVT members while being a participant observer in the above three teams.
Delivery Teams			
Team 1 (Telecommunications BU)	Hyderabad, Uppal SEZ	7	Non-participant observer, Interviews (FtF, WebEx, Phone)
Team 2 (Rail and Transport BU)	Hyderabad, Madhapur, HQ	9	Non-participant observer, Interviews (FtF, WebEx, Phone)
Team 3 (Aerospace and Defense BU)	Connecticut, US	10	Non-participant observer, Interviews (FtF, WebEx, Phone)
Interviews			
Employees from various business units		24	Interviews (FtF, WebEx, Phone)

Table 1: Data Collection

As a full-time practitioner from Aug 2019 to Nov 2020, the lead author accessed multiple informal conversations with informants, which were often open-ended and unstructured, along with formal and informal interviews. Most of these conversations were friendly for the most part, combined with descriptive and, at times, structural and contrasting questions (Spradley, 1979). Approximately 80 colleagues covering multiple levels – managers, partners, and CXOs – participated in these conversations. The documents crafted by the GVT members during their day-to-day activities (emails, reports, PowerPoint presentations, and word files) were also sources of first-hand data collected throughout the projects. They were anonymized and discussed with other authors.

4.2 Data Analysis

This study employed the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) to systematically analyze qualitative data and develop a theoretical model of identification-based engagement contagion in GVTs. We fleshed any valuable theme by consistently summarizing the units of field notes in which we could capture a working definition that reflected our informants' experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This iterative, reflective process that involved multiple rounds of coding and analysis allowed us to obtain insights from the data directly, rather than fitting the data into preconceived themes.

We familiarized ourselves with the data through immersion, in which all researchers read the transcripts, field notes, and related documents multiple times to comprehensively understand the content. Then, we made initial notes on the potential patterns and exciting aspects of the data. The GVT members referred to two ways of being inclined or interested in an activity: (a) sudden inclination to engage in an activity they were not much interested in initially; and (b) sudden lack of inclination to engage in a particular activity they were initially very interested in, which the lead author also experienced on several occasions. We found that GVT members were aware of this phenomenon, but they did not explicitly mention it. Upon investigating the contextual conditions of this phenomenon, we realized that this sudden shift in engagement affected the performance of GVT members. As data collection and analysis continued, we observed that sudden engagement shifts were not observed in GVT members who were individual contributors – that is, in those who did not perform team tasks. This led us to realize that GVT members who were part of team tasks, performed multiple roles, belonged to various teams, and were located in different organizations experienced sudden shifts in inclination and non-inclination while performing a specific task. We then investigated the attributes that contributed to this phenomenon at the role, team, and organizational levels. To gain a better insight into the complexities of this phenomenon, we shifted our focus to the literature on GVT member identification with their roles, the teams to which they belong, and their organizations. We then performed a more systematic axial and systematic coding of data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Although the lead author collected data from five different teams, our aim here was to understand the common themes that emerged across all teams.

The lead author interviewed 24 GVT members from other business units (Telecommunications and Aerospace & Defense). These units were selected based on the accessibility provided by the CHRO. Our main objective was to assess the transferability of our findings to GVTs in different industries with varying work styles (Schein, 1969). These interviews proved the reliability of our results and helped us identify the limitations of the GVT member identification and engagement association.

Data Collection	Interviews																Interviews
	Delivery Team 3													East Hartford, Connecticut - US			
	Delivery Team 2										Hyderabad, Uppal - India						
	Delivery Team 1							Hyderabad - Manikonda, India									
	HR Team (Rail and Transport BU)	Hyderabad, Manikonda - India															
	HR Corporate Team					Hyderabad, HQ - India											
	HR Engagement Team	Hyderabad, HQ - India															
TIMELINE		Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20
Data Reflection		Initial references of engagement															
					Reflective process along with observation of team members doing team tasks - performing multiple roles, belonging to various teams, and/or located in multiple organizational sites												
		Continuous reflection with fellow researchers															

Table 2: Data collection and reflection timeline

The research team conducted systematic initial coding using in-vivo coding, where appropriate, to preserve the participants' voices. For instance, the quote "I sometimes forget that they are not in Cyient and are located on-site" was initially coded as "awareness of virtual team members" and "challenges of virtual team collaboration." These first-order codes were data-driven and captured the raw participant expressions. As the analysis progressed, related codes were grouped into broader themes, such as consolidating "role investment," "role enthusiasm," and "role detachment" under "Role Identification." The second-order coding phase further refined these themes, ensuring conceptual rigor through an iterative review. For example, "Organizational Attachment or Association" was revised to "Organizational Identification" to better capture the nuances of how GVT members navigated identification between parent and client organizations. The research team triangulated the interpretations with multiple researchers independently coding the data before comparing insights and reaching a consensus to ensure reliability and validity. To maintain methodological transparency, the team documented coding decisions, theme development, and analytical memos on the audit trails. Finally, these refined categories were synthesized into aggregate dimensions to form a higher-order theoretical framework explaining how engagement contagion operates within GVTs. A representative coding structure is presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the systematic coding process and theme development. Gioia's methodology bridged qualitative richness with theoretical abstraction, ensuring that the emergent

framework was empirically grounded, methodologically rigorous, and theoretically robust (Cariello et al., 2024; Wessel et al., 2019).

We recognize the importance of accurately documenting our ethnographic approach (Van Maanen, 2006) to ensure validity. Our condensed account of events over 16 months was seen in the eyes of the GVT members. We include personal accounts referred to as "field notes," informal conversations with Cyient's GVT members ("Interview, HR" or "Interview, A&D"), and interviews with individuals from different business units (Interview, Comms, and Interview R&T).

5 Findings

Our analysis found that team members' identification with their roles, teams, and organizations is crucial in employee engagement in GVTs. We present our findings in a structured manner in four categories that capture the dynamics of identification-based team engagement in GVTs: (a) configurations of virtual teamwork, including role, team, and organizational identification; (b) scenarios of GVT member identification; (c) the relationship among role, team, and organizational identification; and (d) identification-based engagement contagion in GVTs.

5.1 Forms of Identification in GVTs

In virtual configuration, GVT members (a) simultaneously performed multiple roles within a team, (b) simultaneously had multiple memberships in different teams, and (c) were at client or company locations in different organizations. They identified themselves with their roles, teams, and organizations in which they were located.

5.1.1 Role Identification

The extent to which GVT members personally identify their roles based on their preferences and interests is associated with their role identification. This personal identification guided their investments in that role and, as a result, their performance. Conversely, less identification with their roles meant that they were stuck with the formal scripts of their jobs. The extent of role identification was evident in three ways (Figure 1).

a. Personal Investment in the Role

GVT members who identified more with their roles invested more time and effort, beyond what is formally required. For instance, when a manager describes his role toward his teammates as a "cheerleader" or "figurehead," he is investing more than required and expected. As mentioned,

> "I step in—not because it's in my job description, but because I can't imagine doing it any other way. When you identify so closely with what you do, you don't just complete tasks; you create an impact that fuels the whole team's momentum." (Interview, A&D)

This finding is aligned with Ashforth et al.'s (2016) findings on role identification, which reports that individuals with higher identification with their roles are more likely to engage in extra-role behaviors, thus demonstrating higher levels of commitment.

b. Role Enthusiasm

GVT members had to balance their personal goals and preferences with the external requirements for their assigned roles. It was essential to determine how well they fit in with the given roles and how well the role fit them. The more enthusiastic members were in their

assigned roles, the more they reflected on their level of engagement. These members initiated additional activities to benefit their teams, such as organizing sessions and sharing knowledge. A manager in charge of the GVT mentioned that he organized on-site sessions for GVT members to share their experience of working on real-time engines with off-site team members.

> "[These] sessions keep the team engaged and invested, making them feel connected to the bigger picture beyond just the tasks at hand."
>
> "I still remember when one of our engineers, Vikram, returned from a project in Canada. He walked into the session, jet-lagged but excited, and started sharing how different it was working in freezing temperatures at the airfield compared to the scorching heat of Hyderabad. He pulled out a photo of himself wrapped in four layers of jackets, standing next to a snow-covered aircraft engine, and the whole team burst out laughing. But then he got serious—he spoke about how the Canadian team approached problem-solving differently, how they handled unexpected failures, and what we could learn from them. By the end of the session, our off-site members weren't just passive listeners; they were brainstorming how to implement some of those practices here. That's when I knew—this wasn't just about knowledge transfer. It was about making them feel a part of something bigger, something that extended beyond their desks and time zones." (Interview, A&D)

c. Role Detachment

Our findings indicated lower role identification when GVT members adhered to their scripted ways of performing or reduced their investments in their roles. It also involved reduced awareness and acknowledgment of their roles and team members. With reduced role identification, GVT members invested less in their roles, and were thus less engaged. For example, an HR team member mentioned:

> "Honestly, there are times when I forget that some of our team members aren't based here in Bengaluru but are stationed at client sites, like in Frankfurt or São Paulo. We send out important communication emails assuming everyone receives them, but it's only when I visit the site that I realize they've missed critical updates—things as basic as policy changes or workflow adjustments… And when you don't feel like a part of just about sending updates; it's about making sure people actually feel included and recognized, no matter where they are." (Interview, Comms)

Thus, in our findings, high role identification among GVT members was expressed during their role performance with higher dedication, absorption, and vigor (high engagement). Factors that made members identify and engage more with their roles include personal goals and preferences, external role requirements, perceived fit between the individual and the role, and opportunities for role expansion and creativity. Reduced role identification was reflected in "acting out" the role and sometimes donning masks in their roles reflecting lower dedication, absorption, and vigor.

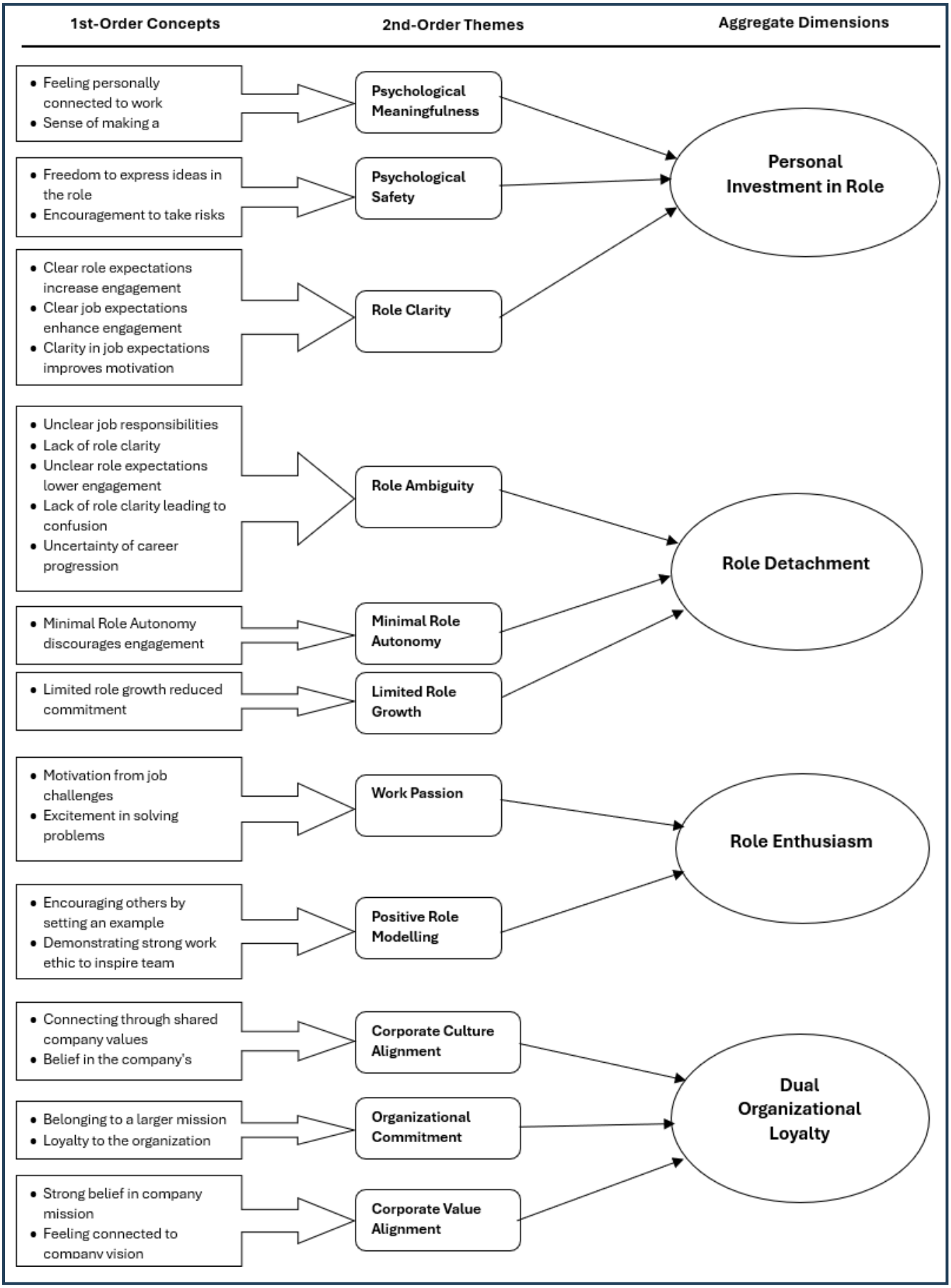

Figure 1: Representative coding structure illustrating the systematic coding process and theme developmen

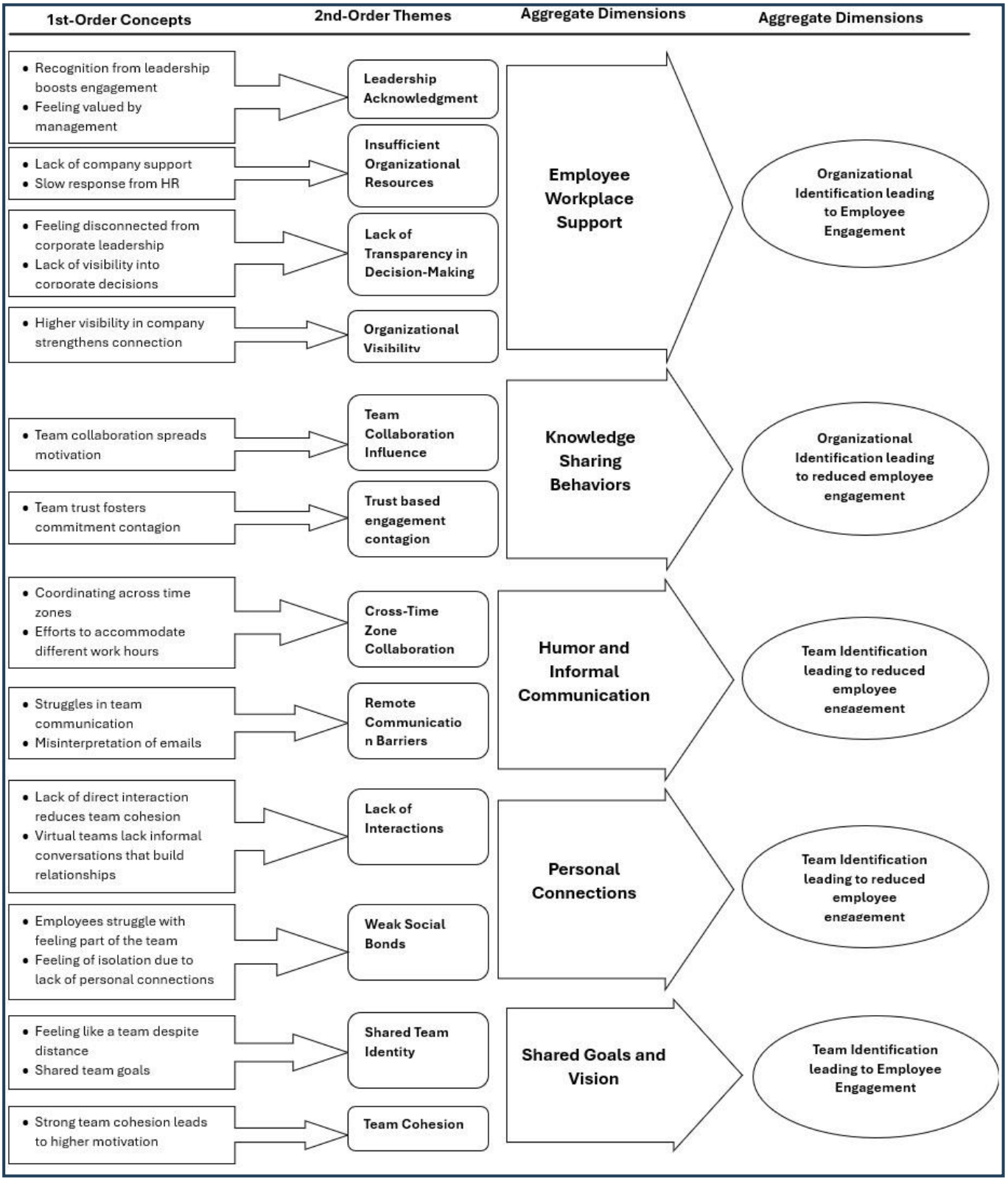

Figure 2: Representative coding structure illustrating the systematic coding process and theme

5.1.2 Team Identification

Team identification concerned how much GVT members could express and identify themselves as team members, and this was driven by three aspects:

a. Shared Goals and Vision

Higher levels of team identification were characterized by a strong sense of working toward common goals. GVT members strongly identified with their teams by coordinating efforts across time zones and cultural boundaries through dedication and energy, which indicates their engagement with the team. For example, a senior director stated:

> "coordinating across time zones became second nature to us. Someone had to compromise—some of us were up late at night in Hyderabad, while others had to wake up early in Seattle or adjust their schedules in Frankfurt. For some, it was right in the middle of their workday, and they had to carve out time. But we made it work because we shared the same goal. We weren't just a group of individuals assigned to a project; we became a team." (Interview, A&D)

b. Personal Connections

Personal connections facilitated robust team identification among team members. GVT managers or leaders who put in effort to know and understand their team members personally fostered cohesion and high team-level engagement. This created a synergistic environment in which GVT members could freely express themselves. The frequency and quality of team interactions, leadership behaviors, social bonding, cultural awareness, and sensitivity facilitate team identification. As mentioned in an interview:

> "I still remember when one of our teammates, Raj, in Singapore, had a terrible flu. He casually mentioned this on a late night call, and the next day, someone from our Dallas team ordered soup to be delivered. Raj was so surprised—he said, 'I have never even met you in person, and you just did that for me?' That moment stuck me because it showed how much we cared about each other, beyond just working. These minor factors are important. The better we know each other, the more we trust and support one another, which makes a huge difference in how we work together. This turns a group of people into a real team regardless of where we are in the world." (interviews, rail, and transportation).

c. Informal Communication

Informal communication fostered collaboration and mutual understanding among virtual global teams. Beyond structured meetings and formal emails, unplanned and flexible interactions helped team members navigate time-zone challenges and maintain a sense of cohesion. As highlighted in one interview:

> "Working across Hyderabad, Germany, and the U.S. means someone is always adjusting their schedule. There are nights when I've taken customer calls at 1 AM, and mornings when the team in India has started early just so we can all align. It's not easy, but over time, we've learned to manage. We know that if one of us is making a sacrifice today, someone else will do the same tomorrow. It's this kind of coordination that keeps things moving—no one is working in isolation, and that understanding makes all the difference. We might be sitting in different countries, but we operate as one." (Interview, IT Services)

This quote highlights how informal, adaptive communication—whether through late-night calls, early-morning check-ins, or quick messages—creates a rhythm of collaboration. The

willingness to adjust schedules and accommodate one another fosters reciprocity and trust. These informal touchpoints ensure that work progresses smoothly, reinforcing the perception that, despite geographical separation, the team functions as a unified whole.

5.1.3 Organizational Identification

Organizational identification concerns how GVT members identify with the organization (parent and/or client) to which they belong. Organizational identification was complex, especially for GVTs whose team members were stationed at client sites. The degree of identification with parent and client organizations significantly impacted knowledge sharing and collaboration, and vice versa. The subthemes for organizational identification are as follows:

a. Dual Organizational Loyalty

The degree of organizational identification displayed by GVT members differed based on whether they were stationed at client sites or parent organizations. Individuals who spent more time at the client site identified more with the client organization. Shared by a GVT member:

> "Working at a customer site like Pratt & Whitney in East Hartford or Airbus in Toulouse changes things. Over time, you start seeing yourself more as part of their team than Cyient's. Meetings with Cyient feel like a formality, and before you know it, the connection starts fading…It wasn't intentional, but the longer you stay, the more your identification shifts." (Interview, A&D)

This can lead employees to lose their sense of identification with their parent organization. As mentioned by another member:

> "That's the challenge—when employees feel isolated from their parent company, they start identifying more with the customer. If Cyient doesn't actively engage them, we don't just risk losing them to disengagement—we risk losing them to the very clients they were sent to support." (Interview, Comms)

b. Knowledge-sharing Behaviors

Stronger identification was associated with knowledge-sharing and collaboration with members across client and parent organizations. For example, a GVT member stated:

> "What you're touching on here is that when employees don't have a strong connection with their parent organization, they hesitate to share knowledge. If they don't have a good relationship with leadership at Cyient, they don't know what to expect from them. So, when they develop a unique insight from working at a client site like Pratt & Whitney in East Hartford, they might hold back instead of sharing it with Cyient. I've seen this firsthand—there was a team in Toulouse that developed a streamlined process for handling design reviews while working on an Airbus project. It saved so much time, but instead of bringing it back to Cyient, they only discussed it within the Airbus team. When I asked why they hadn't shared it, someone just shrugged and said, 'I don't know if leadership at Cyient would even care.' That's the problem—without trust and identification with the parent company, valuable knowledge gets stuck at the client site, and the organization as a whole misses out on critical improvements." (Interview, Comms)

c. Employee Workplace Support

The strength of organizational identification was also associated with perceived organizational support, including recognition, career development opportunities, and work-life balance. For example, one GVT member described the experience of a teammate:

> "She was one of the most proactive members of our team, but over time, she became quieter. At first, we thought she was just busy, but then she confided that she felt like she was 'out of sight, out of mind'—she wasn't sure if leadership at Cyient even noticed her work anymore. She had no visibility into career growth opportunities and felt disconnected from the company's internal initiatives. It wasn't about the workload; it was about feeling valued. That's where workplace support makes all the difference. If employees feel recognized and know that their contributions matter, they stay engaged. But if that support is missing, they gradually detach—not just from their role, but from Cyient itself." (Interview, Rail and Transport)

Thus, identification processes in GVTs are complex and multifaceted, and involve role, team, and organizational identification. This emphasizes the significance of identification as a multilevel, nuanced, and dynamic construct that emerges based on roles and membership of GVT members in multiple teams and organizations.

5.1.4 Scenarios of Role, Team, and Organizational Identification in GVTs

By observing the role and team identification of members within the GVT, four distinct scenarios emerged based on the number of roles, teams, and organizations to which each member belonged:

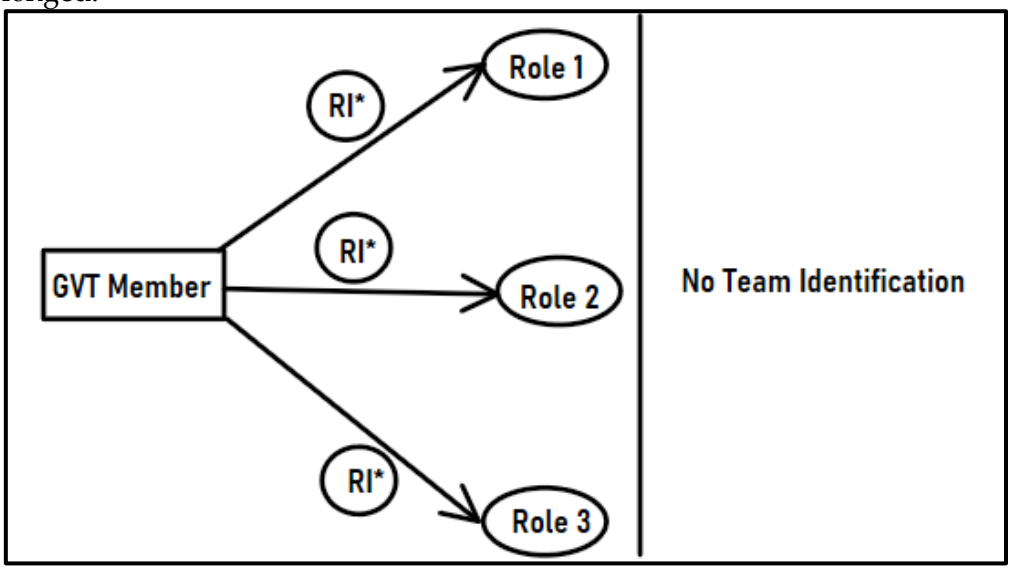

Figure 2: Scenario 1 of GVT Member Identification (Source: Authors)
(RI=Role Identification; TI= Team Identification; OI=Organizational Identification)

a. Scenario 1: The Solo Virtuoso – Single Role, Single Team, Single Organization

During our initial examination, we noted that a GVT member could perform various duties and assume different roles. Their identification was based on the specific roles they performed. Nevertheless, there may be instances in which such individuals did not express interest in being part of a team or engaging in team-oriented endeavors. The roles that they accept enable them to reduce their reliance on team members and managers. These personnel are recognized as "individual contributors" with exceptional proficiency in their fields. For example, the director of operations said:

> One employee who is not so young works in my team. He does his job and does it very efficiently. However, he does not respond to team initiatives or bonding exercises. You would not believe that even I have not met him until now. It is just like we pay him for the work he does for us. However, he is an expert in his field. It would be good to other team members to get to know him. They could learn so much from him (sic).

In such cases, GVT members, although part of the team, did not identify with the team. They identify with their roles and perform highly efficiently. The critical characteristics observed in this scenario are high role identification and low team identification.

b. Scenario 2: The Multitasking Virtualist – Multiple Roles, Single Team, Single Organization

The second scenario corresponds to when a GVT member carries out multiple roles and, thereby, multiple tasks in each role, identifies t with roles based on interests, and belongs to a single team (reporting to a single manager), and hence, a single organization. For example, a member of a GVT team fulfills dual responsibilities. Specifically, this individual has served as both a talent acquisition manager and an assistant to their team manager for data analysis and error handling in organizational software. Despite these dual roles, individuals report to a single manager. Similarly, in Connecticut location, a business development executive takes on responsibilities related to the hiring process for a role that is not particularly relevant to her position.

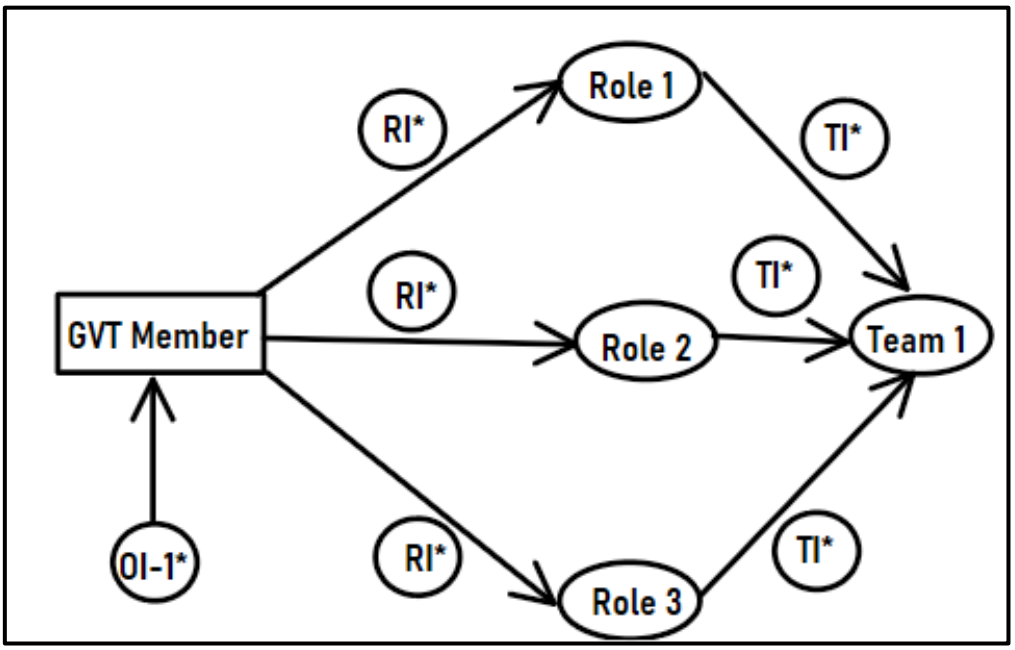

Figure 3: Scenario 2 of GVT Member Identification (Source: Authors)
(RI=Role Identification; TI= Team Identification; OI=Organizational Identification)

Similar to the previous individual, she reported to the same manager for both roles. The key characteristics observed in this scenario were varying levels of role identification, moderate-to-high team identification, and high organizational identification.

c. Scenario 3: The Virtual Juggler – Multiple Roles, Multiple Teams, Single Organization

In the third scenario, a GVT member had multiple reporting managers with distinct roles, unlike Scenario 2. However, each member was tagged with only one reporting manager for performance evaluation and online system tagging (only one reporting manager is accepted

per employee). For example, an HRBP (semiconductors) was reporting directly to the HR-Asia Head but was also involved in several L&D initiatives where he reported to the L&D Head. In these circumstances, the GVT members were part of multiple teams but a singular organization. This scenario includes varying levels of role identification across roles, team identification across teams, and organizational identification.

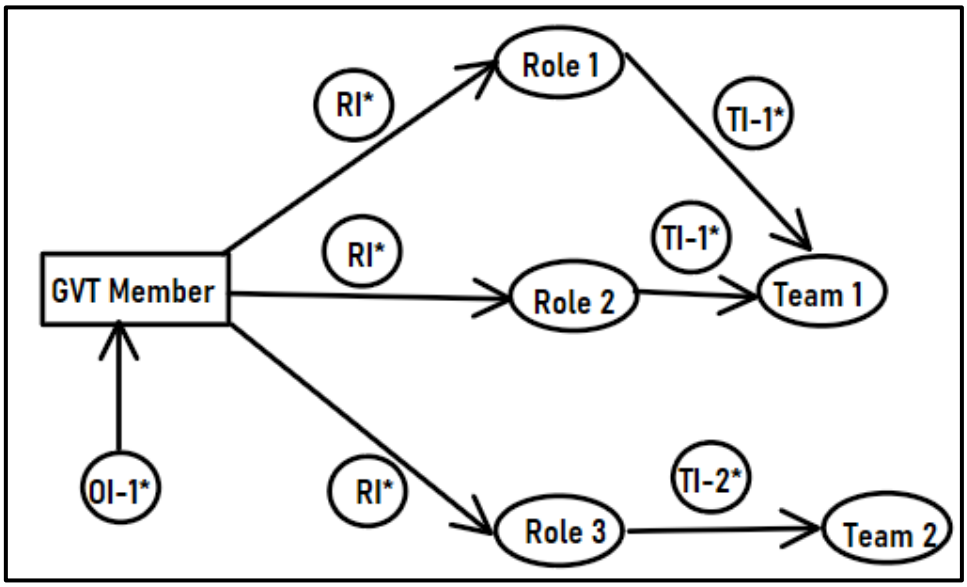

Figure 4: Scenario 3 of GVT Member Identification (Source: Author)
(RI=Role Identification; TI= Team Identification; OI=Organizational Identification)

d. Scenario 4: The Boundary Spanner – Multiple Roles, Multiple Teams, Multiple Organizations

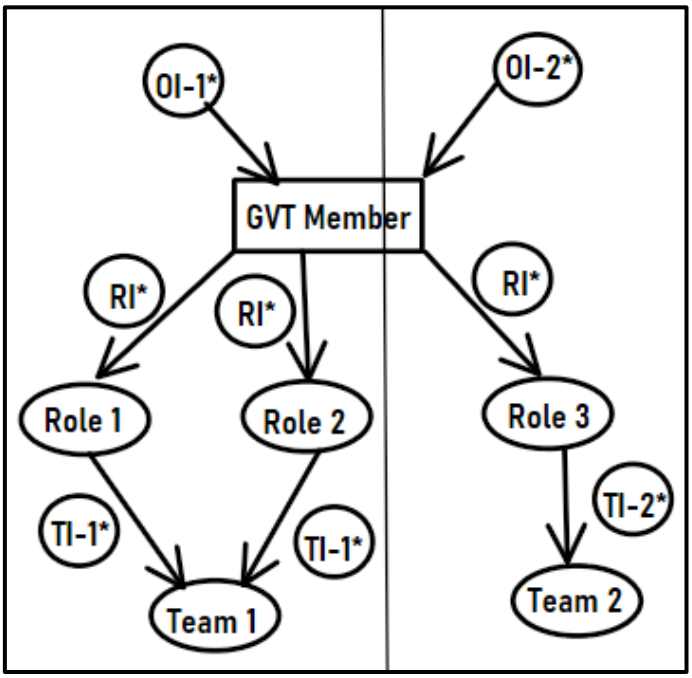

Figure 5: Scenario 4 of GVT Member Identification (Source: Author)
(RI=Role Identification; TI= Team Identification; OI=Organizational Identification)

In the fourth scenario, certain GVT members were stationed at client locations and collaborated with their parent company teams. These members were accountable to their

client manager and parent company managers for their separate duties. Throughout this scenario, the GVT members aligned themselves more closely with either their parent or client organizations. This scenario includes varying levels of role identification across different roles, varying levels of team identification across various teams, and dual organizational identification (parent and client). For example, GVT members working on-site with client organizations can develop greater identification with their client organizations than with their parent organizations.

The interplay among role, team, and organizational identification reveals their interconnected and mutually influential nature, with individual differences significantly affecting how members relate to these various aspects of their work environment. The different scenarios with varying levels of identification are summarized in Table 3.

S. No.	Scenario	Description	Role Identification	Team Identification	Organizational Identification
1	The Solo Virtuoso	Single Role, Single Team, Single Organization	High – Focused on specific role expertise	Low – Limited engagement with team initiatives	Moderate – Primarily identifies with the parent organization
2	The Multitasking Virtualist	Multiple Roles, Single Team, Single Organization	Varied – High for preferred roles, lower for others	Moderate – Engaged with a single team	High – Strong connection to parent organization
3	The Virtual Juggler	Multiple Roles, Multiple Teams, Single Organization	Varied – Based on interest in each role	Varied – Different levels for each team	High – Strong identification with parent organization
4	The Boundary Spanner	Multiple Roles, Multiple Teams, Multiple Organizations	Varied – Based on role preferences	Complex – Varies between client and parent teams	Dual – Identifies with both client and parent organizations

Table 3: Types of scenarios and characteristics of identifications

5.2 Relationship among Role, Team, and Organizational Identification: Identification-based Engagement Contagion

The way team members in GVTs identified themselves (with their roles, teams, and organizations) potentially influenced their own engagement and overall team engagement. Members with higher team orientation manifested higher team identification, which was associated with higher organizational identification. For instance, the Senior Director mentioned how he felt more connected to his role and team when his manager wrote to him, recognizing his work. This recognition helped him to identify more strongly with his team and roles.

> "The work is challenging, but it's the relationships I've built—whether with my teammates in Bengaluru or those stationed in Connecticut—that make me want to stay just as much as the job itself. When you know you're valued, it strengthens your connection not just to the team but to the entire organization." (Interview, Comms, India)

These findings indicate that higher roles and team identification are linked to higher engagement at individual and team levels. For example, an associate director in the Architecture and Design unit highlighted the importance of the manager's role identification in ensuring that the team works cohesively towards common goals. She noted that team

members' ability to work together well, despite never having met in person, is a testament to their strong team identification and engagement.

> "Earlier in my role as a project lead for a repair engineering team, I was responsible for coordinating with repair stations in Norway and Singapore. I've never met those team members in person, yet we work seamlessly together. The reason? I strongly identified with my role as a manager, and that commitment set the tone for the entire team. I didn't just see myself as someone assigning tasks—I saw my role as creating a sense of unity, making sure each team member felt included, valued, and motivated. I consistently acknowledged contributions, celebrated small wins, and ensured that our meetings were more than just status updates. Because I was engaged and proactive in fostering collaboration, my team members also began to see themselves as part of something bigger. They weren't just completing tasks remotely; they were part of a collective effort, aligned towards a shared goal. I've realized that when managers are deeply committed to their role, it directly influences how the team identifies with their work. My identification as a leader created a ripple effect—because I was engaged, they became engaged. That's why, despite never having met in person, we still function as a tight-knit team." (Interview, A&D, Connecticut)

Our findings provide evidence for a link between identification and engagement contagion. A Sr. Project Manager in Connecticut emphasized the role identification of team members affecting team identification and organizational identification, and thus team engagement, which then further boosted identification.

> "Once we built that connection, something interesting happened—the people who had been working in isolation started seeing themselves not just as employees in a remote office, but as part of a larger team. Their identification with their roles grew stronger, and that had a cascading effect. When they saw that their contributions mattered, they engaged more with the team. And as they became more engaged with the team, they naturally started identifying more with the organization as a whole. One of the key factors was having someone on-site who was as passionate about the business and the company as we were. That energy was contagious. Once those role anchors were set in place, collaboration became effortless—whether electronically, over the phone, or during in-person meetings. The real takeaway? When team members strongly identify with their roles, they foster a team culture that strengthens engagement, creating a lasting bond with the organization." (Interview, A&D, Connecticut)

We also found that even though there is higher role identification, reduced team identification might affect organizational identification and eventually reduce the role identification of GVT members and their engagement. A few examples include:

> "I can't speak for everyone, but personally, if I didn't have a strong teammate and a manager who was involved, I think over time, I'd start feeling disconnected. Right now, I enjoy my work, but if I didn't have a team to collaborate with, it would be harder to stay engaged. Even if I'm good at what I do, feeling isolated from the larger team would make me question my place in the company. And once that happens, it's only a matter of time before I start thinking, 'Maybe I should find a workplace where I feel more connected, not just to my tasks but to the company itself.' Just knowing my work matters isn't enough—without a team to support and engage with, it's easy to lose motivation." (Interview, Rail & Transport, Madhapur)

When GVT members worked onsite in client organizations, they developed a stronger connection with the client organization than with their parent organization. This dynamic resulted in reduced interaction and knowledge-sharing with the parent team, ultimately decreasing their parent organizational identification and team engagement levels, leading to higher attrition rates within the organization. While commenting on the same, a business development manager said:

> "When someone is stationed at a client site like Pratt & Whitney in East Hartford or Airbus in Toulouse for an extended period, they naturally start adopting the customer's ways of working, priorities, and even their culture. Over time, the connection to Cyient weakens. I've seen employees who, after a few years on-site, barely engage with their Cyient teams anymore. They stop attending internal meetings, don't keep up with company initiatives, and eventually, when faced with a career decision, their first thought is, 'Why not just join the client company instead?' That's where we lose people—not just to disengagement but to actual attrition. This has been a long-standing issue, and unless we actively reinforce their connection to Cyient, it will continue to be a challenge." (Field Notes, Connecticut)

Thus, we conclude that the engagement level of a GVT member is influenced by the role, team, and organizational identifications that interact to create a contagious effect on engagement within GVTs. We label this phenomenon the "identification-based engagement contagion." (See Appendix-Table 1 for representative quotes). It indicates that a GVT's collective engagement differs from the sum of its member engagements. Positive contagion results in positive spirals of team-level engagement, whereas negative contagion leads to negative spirals. This dynamic contributes to our understanding of team engagement in the context of GVTs. For instance, when the director of operations states that their work is delayed because of a fellow team member, or the HRBP finds it challenging to interpret the tone of a conversation, or the Sr. The project Manager mentions that email communication is difficult and phone calls impossible, it can be inferred that the success of a role and team depends on the relative investments of the GVT members. Due to the structure of GVTs, team members have limited face-to-face interactions with each other and their managers, particularly in multiple time zones. The longer GVT members are separated without communicating with their managers, the more disconnected they become from their roles and team performance. Moreover, they lose their sense of identification with their roles and teams, which affects their investment in their roles and team members and ultimately leads to reduced team engagement.

> "The first thing that influences my engagement is how connected I feel to my team. But it doesn't stop there—there's also an organizational aspect that impacts the team itself. It's not just about me personally, but about how the team dynamic affects my connection to Cyient as a whole. For example, if my teammates in Hyderabad and East Hartford are engaged, motivated, and collaborative, that energy spreads—it makes me more invested in my work. But if the team struggles with communication gaps, unclear expectations, or delays, it creates a ripple effect. Over time, even the most motivated team members start feeling disconnected, not just from the team but also from Cyient. I've seen this happen when policies or processes don't align well with how we work across different locations. If something like performance evaluations or internal promotions feels disconnected from our reality as a global team, it impacts how much effort we put into both our roles and our collaboration.

> Engagement in GVTs isn't just about individual effort—it's contagious. When the team is engaged, everyone is engaged. When the team is disengaged, even the most committed individuals start pulling back." (Field Notes, HR, India)

6 Discussion, Conceptual Framework and Propositions

Through our research, we conceptualize "identification-based engagement contagion" in GVTs as members often assume multiple roles across different teams and report to multiple managers across organization boundaries (Glikson & Erez, 2020; Shaik et al., 2020; Whillans et al., 2021; Zakaria & Yusof, 2020). For structural reasons, we highlight that in GVTs, members hold multiple roles, belong to multiple teams, and work across multiple organizations, thus leading to different types of identifications.

Organizations increasingly rely on remote teams that are cross-functional, cross-border, and composed of members with highly developed and distinct areas of expertise to complete tasks (Pearsall et al., 2010; Sundstrom et al., 2000). In a virtual team configuration, where team members work across different time zones and have a 24-hour working schedule, they play multiple roles. For successful execution of each role, team members need to associate with their roles and have a shared understanding of each other's expertise by developing shared cognitive structures over time (Nordback & Espinosa, 2019; Ilgen et al., 2005; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). To achieve this, team members need to identify their roles and exhibit purposeful interpersonal interactions to understand the roles and capabilities of their team members (Mohammed & Dumville, 2001). These behaviors, termed role identification (Kozlowski et al., 1999), tend to affect how teams function cohesively, thereby increasing team performance and satisfaction (Austin, 2003; Edwards et al., 2006; Pearsall & Ellis, 2006). Improved team cohesion and shared capabilities across GVTs motivate members to feel a sense of belonging (Tyler & Blader, 2003), thus creating team identification. In GVTs, the members of multiple teams can have varied levels of team identification based on their preferences and shared team behaviors.

Organizational identification depends on an individual's attraction to the organization regarding its systems and overall employer brand (Edwards, 2005; Pratt, 1998; Riketta, 2005). However, when GVT members shared team behaviors with their team at the parent's location, their organizational identification with the parent organization increased. Similarly, when team identification was higher with the client team, it impacted the client's organizational identification. Therefore, we propose the following:

P1a: *In GVTs, the members identify with their roles, teams, and organizations distinctively.*

P1b: *In GVTs, member role identification, team identification, and organizational identification influence one another.*

Increased identification of GVT members with their roles, teams, or organizations can be considered a resource in terms of the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) as it results in improved coordination and communication across team members, along with higher performance. Reduced identification may be considered a demand because it negatively affects employee well-being, satisfaction, and overall performance. According to the JD-R, perceived resources and demands can initiate a gain or a loss cycle. A gain cycle (job resources) is initiated when employees perceive and positively influence their jobs, while a loss cycle (job demands) is initiated when employees perceive and negatively influence their

jobs (Bakker et al., 2020). Our analysis indicates that employees with lower levels of role identification put less effort into that role, thereby contributing less toward team goals and having fewer team identifications. Similarly, when the team is less cohesive, with reduced supervisor and peer support, members have less team identification, which affects the efforts they put into roles related to that team and negatively impacts their role identification. When members are part of multiple organizations (client and parent), their affiliation with organizational goals, brand, and loyalty affects their identification with their roles and teams (client and parent). Reduced organizational identification with the parent organization affects team identification, which affects their role in the parent organization by reducing information-sharing, bonding with team members, and overall team performance. The adverse effects of reduced identification (role, team, or organization) initiate loss cycles in the GVT. While we did not explicitly capture the productivity of these teams, our participant observations guided us toward evidence of such loss cycles. Similarly, we found that gain cycles were initiated when members identified highly with their roles, teams, and organizations, contributing positively to their job roles, leading to gain cycles. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

P2a*: An increased role, team, or organizational identification of a GVT member leads to increased member engagement by initiating gain cycles.*

P2b*: A decreased role, team, or organizational identification of a GVT member leads to decreased member engagement by initiating loss cycles.*

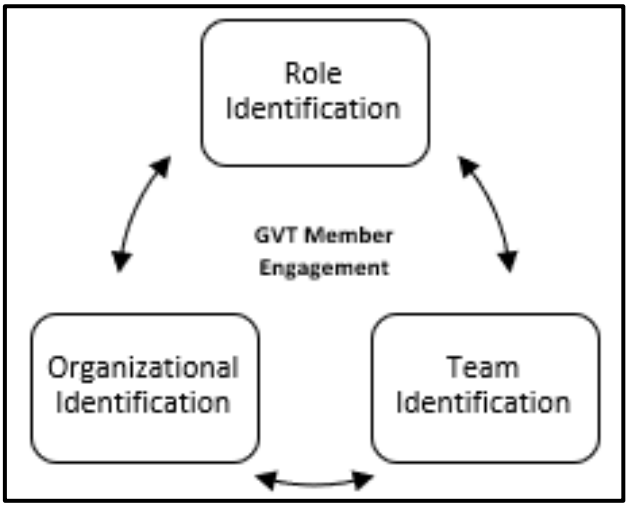

Figure 5: Role, Team, and Organizational Identification of a GVT Member

Engagement is often "a positive, fulfilling, work-related, shared psychological state, which emerges from shared experiences of members of a work team" (Torrente et al., 2012, p. 107). We borrow from the ECT to conceptualize the "identification-based-engagement-contagion" mechanism. ECT states that different people can share and express their emotions, allowing them to spread from one individual to another (Barsade, 2002; Hatfield et al., 2009; Hatfield et al., 2014). When workers identify with another person on the same team based on gender, race, nationality, or job seniority, they may take that person as an emotional referent (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Bakker, 2009). Similarly, when group members identify with their interacting groups, they form a shared conception of each other (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Henry et al., 1999). Furthermore, when employees share many job-related experiences and job aspects, such as motives to work or any other common non-work characteristics, they enact a

categorization process and exhibit a bias in favor of similar members (Kooij et al., 2011; Posthuma & Campion, 2009; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Thus, these expressions of behavior and emotions within the team take the form of similar engagement, spreading, and sharing (Bakker Sanz-vergel., 2013).

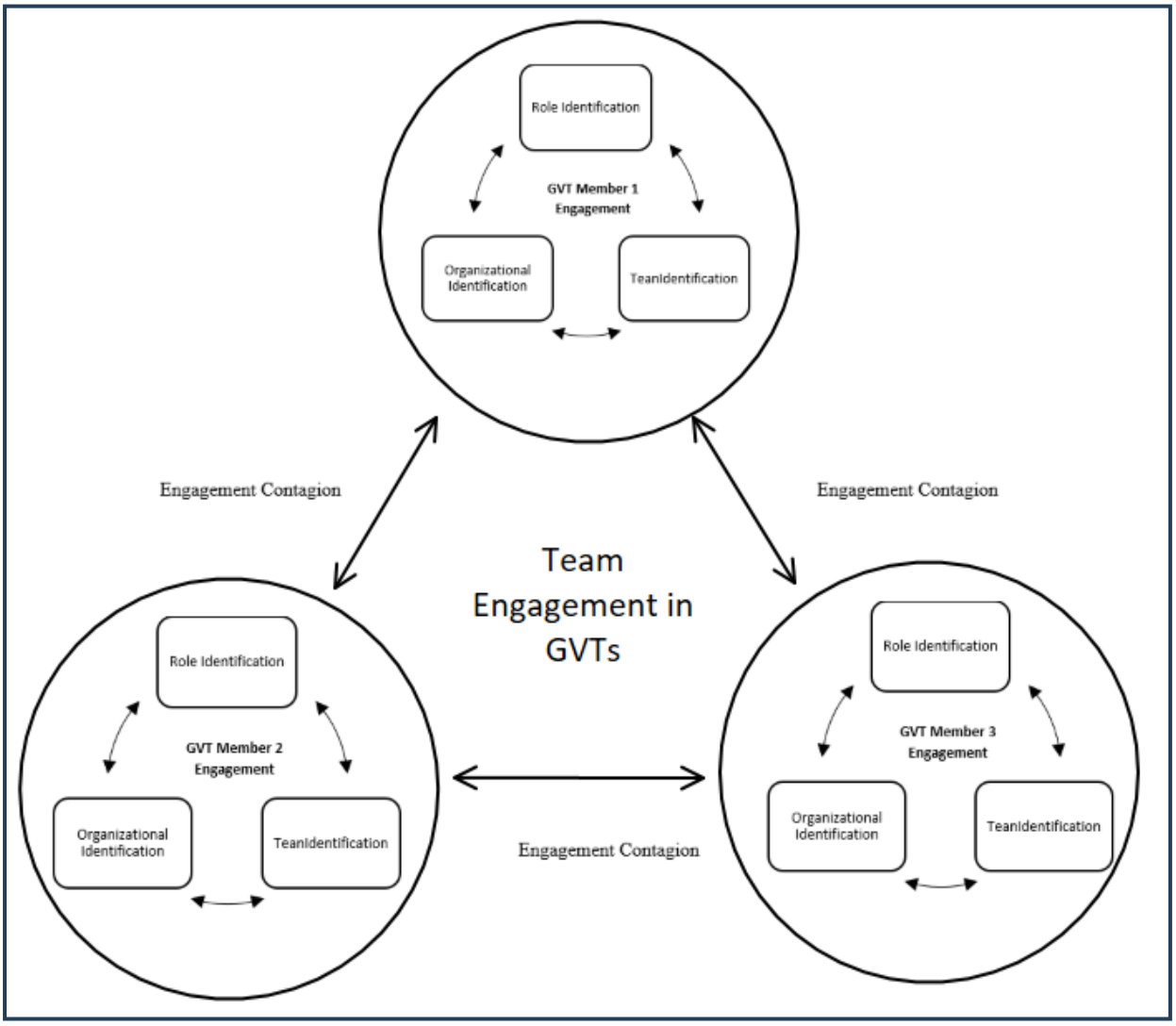

Figure 6: Identification-based engagement contagion in a GVT

Member engagement in GVTs is affected by their identification with their roles, teams, and organizations, leading to either gain or loss cycles of member engagement. We found that employees' increased gain cycles can have behavioral consequences for investing extra energy in jobs with higher persistence and dedication. This is transferable to the job setting and, therefore, shared with other team members, creating a positive contagion effect (Salanova et al., 2005; Torrente et al., 2013). Similarly, contagion can be initiated by loss cycles, causing a lack of energy investment and reduced team cohesion, which leads to a negative contagion effect. This could have implications for promoting shared engagement within a team. The novelty of our study lies in the context of GVTs and the understanding that engagement contagion is identification-based (role, team, or/and organization). Thus, we propose:

P3a. *Gain cycles across GVT members initiates a positive identification-based engagement contagion in a GVT.*

***P3b**. Loss cycles across GVT members initiates a negative identification-based engagement contagion in a GVT.*

7 Contributions and Conclusion

There is extensive adoption of GVTs in MNEs; thus, making GVT members perform at their highest potential is essential for team and MNE success. The challenges of managing a spatially, linguistically, and culturally diverse global team are well documented. However, the solutions require equal attention from the researchers. Considering this, our study suggests that GVT member engagement is a positive force multiplier for creating team-level engagement through identification-based contagion. As engagement is linked to several positive outcomes at the individual, team, and organizational levels, contagion through gain cycles could be a source of team and MNE success. Furthermore, the gain and loss cycles theorized in the framework bring team dynamics (instead of team statics) to the foreground (Cronin et al., 2011) to emphasize the need to capture global virtual team engagement as a dynamic and emergent construct (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). This phenomenon was delineated because of the lead author's deep ethnographic engagement with the focal organization. The propositions were drawn as a result of careful examination by the lead author as a member of the organization across multiple geographical locations, non-participant and participant observations, formal and informal conversations, meeting artifacts, interactions, and interviews.

Our findings contribute to the literature on IS, identification, and engagement in technology-mediated GVTs, and offer practical implications for MNEs using GVTs to organize work. Engagement literature scholars have theorized that individual engagement in GVTs is relatively unexplored (Gilson et al. 2015). Given the complexities and changes in context in GVTs, viewing GVT engagement through the lens of identification literature adds a new dimension to the existing literature on GVT engagement. We contribute to the literature on identification through our findings on the simultaneous multiple roles played by GVT members and their identification with each of these roles, which is a novel dimension. Scholars have worked on "work identification" (Lai et al., 2013), conceptualized it as "the aspects of identity and self-definition that are tied to participation in activities of work (i.e., job) or membership in work-related groups, organizations, occupations, or professions" (Dutton et al., 2010, p. 266). However, we found that work identification is an overarching conceptualization of an employee's entire work as part of their job. We broke this into three identifications to highlight the nuances of GVT functioning. We felt the need for this

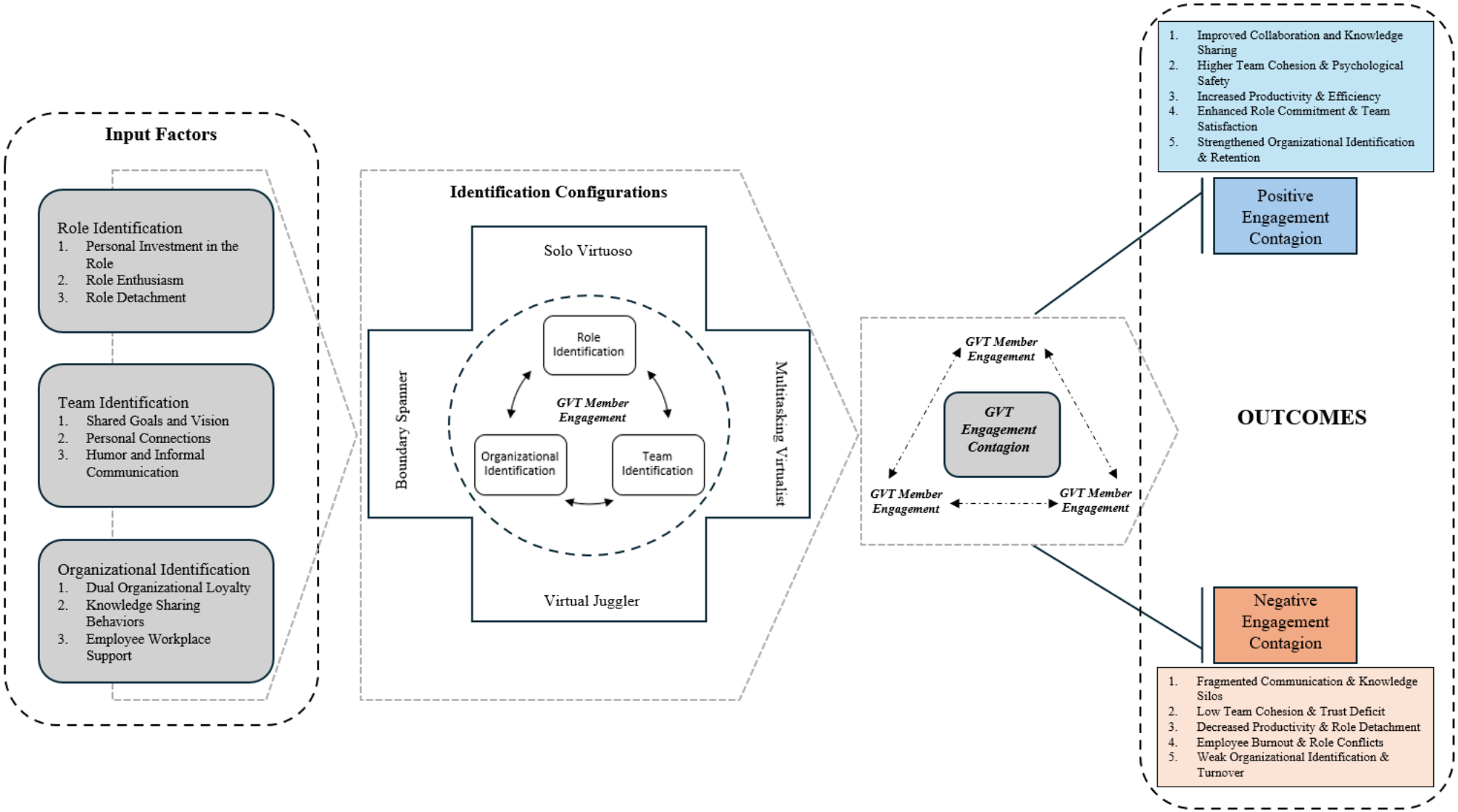

Figure 7: Process Flow Model of Identification-based GVT Engagement Contagion

distinction for GVT members, as they perform multiple roles and belong to multiple teams and organizations. Here, we also address the call by Atewologun et al. (2017) for further exploration of this work, focusing on identification in various contexts. We contribute to the literature on team identification using an interpretative lens focusing on dynamics.

8 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the theoretical landscape of team engagement in GVTs by challenging and refining the key assumptions of the JD-R model and ECT. Although these theories have been instrumental in explaining engagement processes in traditional work settings, they require modifications to account for engagement dynamics in virtual and hybrid team environments. This study provides empirical evidence that engagement in GVTs is not solely a function of individual job resources or emotional contagion through direct interactions but rather an identification-driven process that shapes engagement contagion at the team level (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Dick et al., 2004).

The JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) posits that engagement occurs when job resources (e.g., autonomy, supervisor support, and task clarity) outweigh job demands (e.g., workload, time pressure, and emotional strain). Although this framework effectively explains individual engagement dynamics, this study challenges its applicability to GVTs in three ways. First, the JD-R model primarily focuses on tangible job resources such as access to support systems and clear task expectations. However, we find that social identification (role, team, and organizational) is an intangible but critical job resource for virtual teams (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Dick et al., 2004). Employees who strongly identify with their teams and organizations remain highly engaged even when traditional job resources are limited, whereas those with weak identification experience disengagement despite having access to structural resources. This study extends the JD-R framework by positioning identification as a psychological job resource essential for engagement in distributed work environments. For example, employees working in a fully remote environment may lack access to the same physical resources and leadership support as their on-site colleagues but remain engaged if they feel deeply connected to their team's mission, values, and goals (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Dick et al., 2004). In contrast, employees with weak identification, even if they have access to job autonomy and digital support systems, are more prone to disengagement, suggesting that psychological identification is a stabilizing factor in engagement. Thus, future models of engagement should integrate identification as a core job resource that can offset some of the structural challenges associated with remote and hybrid work.

Second, the JD-R model assumes that job demands such as workload and time pressure are primarily structural. However, we argue that job demands can also be psychological and identity-driven in GVTs. Employees in client-facing roles, for example, experience dual identification conflicts (e.g., balancing loyalty between a client and their parent organization), which creates an engagement strain not accounted for in the traditional JD-R model (Reade, 2001; Ramarajan, 2014). For instance, employees working for a multinational consulting firm may be assigned to a client project, requiring them to balance loyalty to the parent organization and client expectations. This dual identification conflict creates an engagement strain that is not typically accounted for in the existing JD-R models. Employees experiencing identity misalignment often feel disengaged, emotionally detached, and unable to fully commit to their roles, even if their workload is manageable. Therefore, this study suggests that identity strain

should be formally recognized as a job demand in engagement models, particularly for remote and hybrid teams where competing identifications are common. This study highlights identity misalignment as a novel job demand in virtual teams, which can increase disengagement, even when the workload remains stable.

Third, the JD-R model treats engagement as an individual-level outcome resulting from personal experiences with job demands and resources. However, our findings show that engagement is a socially contagious process in GVTs, shaped by team-level identification interactions (Costa et al., 2017; Yun & Beehr, 2024). Engagement is a team-level phenomenon that spreads through shared identification mechanisms. Therefore, we propose an extension of the JD-R model that incorporates identification-based engagement contagion as a key driver of team-level engagement dynamics in virtual settings.

The ECT (Hatfield et al., 1993) suggests that emotions and engagement are spread through social interactions, nonverbal cues, and behavioral mimicry. In traditional work settings, contagion occurs through face-to-face interactions in which employees unconsciously mirror each other's emotions. However, in virtual environments, such physical cues are absent or highly mediated through digital communication. Our study redefines engagement contagion in GVTs, emphasizing that shared identification, rather than emotional mimicry, is the primary mechanism for engagement spread (Barsade, 2002). First, in virtual teams, engagement contagion occurs through identification alignment rather than through direct emotional exchange. In co-located teams, emotional contagion is facilitated by in-person interactions, body language, and spontaneous communication (Barsade, 2002). However, in GVTs, team members influence each other's engagement levels through their shared sense of identity with the team or organization. Those who identify strongly with a team are more likely to positively influence others' engagement levels, even in asynchronous work settings. For example, if a highly engaged team member regularly shares motivational messages, best practices, and proactive problem-solving approaches in a virtual setting, other team members who feel a sense of belonging to the same group are more likely to reciprocate it, even in the absence of direct emotional interactions (Costa et al., 2017; Yun & Beehr, 2024). However, when identification weakens (e.g., due to poor leadership, unclear team goals, or frequent turnover), disengagement spreads more quickly and pervasively, as there are fewer informal social mechanisms to re-engage employees. This study extends ECT by incorporating identification-based engagement contagion as a digital mechanism in GVTs.

Second, our findings reveal that negative engagement contagion is amplified in virtual teams due to a lack of informal social interactions. In traditional teams, disengaged employees can be re-engaged through spontaneous conversations, managerial interventions, or peer support (Rockmann & Pratt, 2015). However, disengagement can spread rapidly in GVTs because there are fewer opportunities for real-time intervention. This study highlights the fact that identification weakens or strengthens engagement contagion in digital work environments, suggesting that interventions should focus on enhancing shared identity to counteract negative contagion effects. Third, emotional contagion does not follow clear hierarchical structures in virtual teams, where employees often navigate multiple overlapping identities (e.g., project-based teams, regional teams, and organizational affiliations). Unlike traditional work environments where emotional contagion typically flows downward from leadership, engagement contagion follows identification strength rather than a hierarchical structure (Fiol

& O'Connor, 2005; Reade, 2001). Employees in highly engaged subgroups may sustain engagement even when organizational-level engagement is low and vice versa.

8.1 Managerial Implications

A survey by the Society for HRM indicates that firms use virtual teams to reduce costs and improve productivity. However, as Evren Essen, the manager of SHRM's survey center, stated: "When virtual teams work, their productivity can be impressive, … But getting them to function can be a challenge" (The Association for Talent Development, 2012). The survey also indicated that building team relationships was a significant reason for the failure of virtual teams. Therefore, team-level engagement in the GVTs is crucial. MNEs working with GVTs should help team members identify their roles, teams, and organizations. Role identification can be achieved by providing better role clarity, whereas team identification can be improved through productive team interactions. Tangible and intangible benefits accrued by employees can help develop organizational identification. Positive identification with roles, teams, and organizations fosters team engagement through a virtuous cycle, leading to positive outcomes linked to GVT engagement. Organizations can make policy-level changes and have ground rules for the HR department, GVT managers, and corporate leaders to approach employees in GVTs differently from their existing approaches. This enables identification among GVT members to affect team engagement.

Digital technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) transform the work configurations and identification processes in GVTs. Enhanced communication platforms such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom facilitate the seamless integration of various features, potentially increasing roles, teams, and organizational identification through improved visibility and informal communication channels (Bapista et al., 2020; Rockmann & Pratt, 2015). AR and VR technologies, through platforms such as Spatial or AltspaceVR, create immersive team experiences and virtual office environments and strengthen connections among GVT members. These technologies enable role simulation and project-based work, enhancing role identification through virtually tangible experiences (Choudhury et al., 2021; John et al., 2024). AI-powered tools include personal assistants and chatbots, streamlined onboarding, role clarity, and team coordination. NLP technologies facilitate cross-cultural communication, whereas sentiment-analysis tools monitor team morale. AI-enhanced analytics support informed decision-making, potentially strengthening roles and organizational identification (Malhotra & Majchrzak, 2014). These technological integrations can accelerate engagement and disengagement contagion, making identification processes more complex. Managers must carefully consider how technological interventions affect team engagement in GVTs.

8.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study has a few limitations. First, the study was conducted in a single multi-national service-focused enterprise headquartered in India with a global presence. While this study explored the nuances of team-level engagement using several data artifacts from multiple geographical sites and teams, exploring the variances in team-level engagement across organizations of different sizes and industries would be interesting. To study team engagement, we delineated four scenarios of team member identification across GVTs along with their roles, teams, and organizations. Future studies can explore these scenarios to understand team-level concepts, such as cohesion, commitment, and team learning, from

several perspectives, including sense-making, organizational development, learning and development, and information sharing. It is interesting to explore how such constructs manifest in GVTs under these configurations.

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Appendix

Table 1: Representative quotes for the cascading effect of role, team, and organizational identification, leading to employee engagement contagion in GVTs

Sno.	1st-Order Codes	2nd-Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions	Verbatim Excerpt
1	When role aligns with company goals, commitment improves	Alignment of Role with Organization	Higher identification with the role cascade to a higher organizational identification	"When my work aligns with what the company is trying to achieve, it's easier to stay committed. It's not just about completing tasks—it's about knowing that what I do actually contributes to something bigger. When there's a clear connection between my role and the company's direction, I feel more invested in the work. I remember when Cyient shifted some of its HR and payroll processes, and we had to adjust how we handled benefits here in Hartford. At first, it felt like just another change being pushed down from leadership. But once it became clear how our work was helping streamline operations across locations, it made a difference. I wasn't just processing numbers—I was part of something that made things better for employees across different sites. That kind of alignment makes you want to give your best, because you see the impact beyond just your desk."
2	Feeling valued in role leads to organizational commitment	Feeling Valued in Role	Higher identification with the role cascade to a higher organizational identification	"When I first started handling immigration at Cyient, it was just me figuring things out. My boss was in India, and for years, we never even met in person—everything was over calls or Webex. There were moments where I wondered if anyone even noticed the work I was putting in. But over time, when people started reaching out to me directly, trusting me to make decisions, and I saw how my work was actually making a difference, that's when I really started feeling a sense of belonging. It wasn't just about processing paperwork—it was about making sure people transitioning from India to the U.S. had a smooth experience. When the company backed the work I was doing, whether it was through autonomy or just acknowledging the effort, it reinforced that I wasn't just another employee—I was part of something bigger. And I see this with others too—once they know their work is seen and valued, they stop feeling like they're just doing a job and start feeling like they truly belong."
3	Team bonding activities strengthen work relationships	Team Cohesion	Higher identification with the role cascade to a higher team identification	"Sometimes, when we take time to do activities outside of our regular tasks, it really helps build stronger connections with the people we work with every day. It's easy to get caught up in project deadlines and customer requirements, but when we step away from that, even for a short time, it makes a big difference in how we collaborate. I remember last year when our team in Connecticut organized a small outing after wrapping up a major project for Pratt & Whitney. It wasn't anything big—just a casual dinner—but that one evening helped us connect beyond just work. We got to know each other better, shared a few laughs, and the next time we were troubleshooting an issue together, things felt smoother. When you have that bond, you're more comfortable reaching out, asking for help, and working

				together as a unit. It's those little moments that help strengthen the way we work as a team."
4	Positive peer influence boosts team motivation	Peer Influence	Higher identification with the role cascade to a higher team identification	"When you're working in a close-knit team like we have here in Georgia, the energy of the people around you really sets the tone for how you feel about your work. If you're surrounded by people who are engaged, pushing hard to meet goals, and willing to step in when needed, it makes a huge difference. It's not just about getting the work done—it's about feeling like you're all in it together. I remember when we were up against a tight deadline on a project for Pratt & Whitney, and it was one of those all-hands-on-deck situations. Nobody was just clocking in and out—we were all invested. Seeing my teammates put in the effort, troubleshoot together, and support each other even when things got stressful made me want to give my best too. And that kind of motivation spreads. When one person brings energy, it lifts the whole team. That's why the people you work with daily matter so much—your team's mindset shapes how you approach your own work."
5	Smoother workflow when closely working with the team	Team-Based Workflow	Higher identification with the team cascade to a higher organizational identification	"When we have regular interactions and stay in sync with each other, everything moves more smoothly. There's less back and forth, fewer misunderstandings, and overall, things just get done more efficiently. When everyone is on the same page, the workflow naturally improves. I remember a time when we were working on a complex update for Pratt & Whitney's systems. Initially, there were delays because we weren't coordinating properly—offshore and onsite teams were working in silos, and things kept getting lost in translation. But once we set up daily check-ins and made sure everyone was aligned, the process became so much easier. We weren't waiting on clarifications or redoing work because of miscommunication. When you work closely with your team, you don't just finish tasks faster—you work smarter, and the entire process becomes more seamless."
6	Better problem-solving skills within closely-knit teams	Problem-Solving within Teams	Higher identification with the team cascade to a higher organizational identification	"I remember this one time at Cyient when one of our engineers in India was stuck on a modeling issue. He'd been working on it for days, trying different approaches, but nothing seemed to click. Finally, during one of our regular team calls, he mentioned it almost in passing. Within minutes, someone from the U.S. team jumped in with a suggestion—something similar they'd dealt with a few months back. That tiny exchange solved the problem in less than 10 minutes, something that would've otherwise taken him another few days to figure out on his own. And I see this happen all the time. When people work in silos, progress slows down, but when we openly discuss roadblocks, things move a lot faster. It's not just about making an individual's job easier—it creates a mindset where people naturally reach out, share ideas, and think beyond their immediate tasks. And the impact goes beyond just the team. When you develop that habit of seeking input

				and working through challenges collectively, it makes collaborating with other departments and even clients much more effective. That's when you're not just solving problems—you're building stronger connections across the organization."
7	Clear expectations reduce ambiguity	Clear Expectations	Higher identification with the team cascade to a higher role identification	"when things aren't clear from the start, it slows everything down. Instead of focusing on the actual work, you spend time chasing answers, double-checking details, or fixing things that weren't right the first time. But when expectations are laid out properly, you can just get on with it without second-guessing yourself. I remember when we were working through changes in payroll processing here in Hartford. At first, there was a lot of back and forth because we weren't sure exactly what was needed from us—the instructions were broad, and we kept running into errors. But once we had a structured process in place, with clear guidance for each step, everything became much more efficient. When you don't have to constantly stop and ask for clarification, you can focus on doing the work right the first time."
8	High personal investment in role performance	Personal Investment in Role	Higher identification with the team cascade to a higher role identification	"When my work has real value and I can see how it contributes to something meaningful, I naturally push myself to do more. It's not just about meeting deadlines—it's about knowing that my efforts matter, and that makes all the difference in how I approach my work. I remember when we were handling a complex integration project for Pratt & Whitney. There were late nights and unexpected challenges, but what kept me motivated was knowing that my contributions were critical to making the transition seamless. No one had to tell me to stay a little longer or double-check my work—I wanted to because I knew it would have a real impact. When you truly connect with what you do, you don't just complete tasks—you take ownership and give it your best."
9	Feeling lost due to lack of organizational guidance	Organizational Disorientation	Reduced identification with the role cascade to reduced organizational identification	"When you come here from India to the U.S., it's not like you have someone constantly guiding you on what to do or how things work. The company gives a briefing, sure, but after that, it's mostly figuring things out on your own. Like, when I first joined Cyient, I didn't even meet my boss in person for seven years! Everything was over calls or Webex. So, when people land here, they naturally turn to whoever they know—other colleagues, friends who've been here longer—because otherwise, it's easy to feel a bit lost. Especially when you're sitting at the customer site, not in a Cyient office, it's like you're neither here nor there. The HR folks do try to check in, you know, with lunch meetings or potlucks to remind people that they still belong to Cyient, but beyond that, it's mostly on you to navigate things."

10	More engagement with team members than the larger organization	Team-Centered Focus	Reduced identification with the role cascade to reduced organizational identification	"Day-to-day, my focus is really on the people I work with directly. That's who I talk to, who I rely on, and who I feel most connected to. Beyond that, Cyient as a whole feels distant—decisions get made, policies change, but we're not always looped in or given much context. It's like we're just expected to go along with whatever comes next. I remember when they rolled out changes to our payroll system. Those of us handling payroll in the U.S. had to figure things out as we went because a lot of the setup was done with India's processes in mind, not ours. It was frustrating because while my team here in Hartford worked together to solve the issues, we weren't getting much support from the larger organization. That's when you really feel the difference—you trust and rely on your immediate group, but beyond that, it's harder to feel like you're truly part of something bigger."
11	Unclear role expectations reduce team collaboration	Unclear Role Expectations	Reduced identification with the role cascade to reduced team identification	"I remember a conversation with someone at Cyient who was frustrated with how things were running. He told me, 'I'm doing my part, but I don't know if I'm doing it the right way or if it even fits with what others are doing. Half the time, I don't even know who's responsible for what, so we just end up working in silos.' And that's a real problem. At the clinic, I saw the same thing. When expectations weren't clear—when one person assumed a task was theirs while another thought the same—it created confusion. People would either duplicate work or leave gaps because they weren't sure where their role ended and someone else's began. And when that happens, collaboration takes a hit. Instead of working together, people hesitate to ask questions, afraid they might step on someone's toes or look like they don't know what they're doing. Over time, this leads to disengagement. When no one is sure of their role, they start pulling back, and soon enough, the whole team dynamic starts to break down."
12	Weak team association affects organizational commitment	Weak Team Bonds	Reduced identification with the role cascade to reduced team identification	"I was speaking with an engineer from Hyderabad the other day, and he told me, 'Mohan, I do my work, but beyond that, I don't really talk to anyone. My manager is in the U.S., my colleagues are on different projects, and honestly, I wouldn't say I feel particularly connected to the company. I could be working anywhere, and it wouldn't make much of a difference.' And that hit me because I've heard similar things before. I've seen this happen across different locations—Hyderabad, Connecticut, and even Bangalore. When people don't have strong working relationships, they start feeling like they're just completing tasks instead of being part of something bigger. It's not about whether they like the work—it's about whether they feel a sense of connection to the people they work with. And when that connection is weak, their commitment fades. They don't push themselves as much, they stop participating in discussions, and eventually, they start looking elsewhere. Once that starts, it spreads—because when one person disengages, it affects the people around them, and before you know it, the whole team feels disconnected."
13	Employees see better growth	Restricted Career Growth	Reduced Identification	"One of the biggest hurdles we have—especially with employees working at the customer site in places like

	opportunities with customers		with the Role Cascades to Reduced Team Identification	Connecticut or Florida—is that they start viewing the customer as the place where real career growth happens. It's not necessarily that Cyient doesn't offer opportunities, but because they're embedded in the customer's environment every day, they see firsthand how career paths unfold there. They notice people getting promoted, moving into new roles, and that makes it feel like the better option. Meanwhile, they're not as exposed to what's happening within Cyient, so they don't see a clear path forward here. And this thinking doesn't just stay with one person—it spreads. Others in similar roles pick up on it, and soon, you've got an entire team that feels like Cyient is just a stepping stone rather than a place to grow. That's when engagement drops, and retention becomes a real challenge."
14	Communication barriers due to time zone differences	Time Zone Constraints	Reduced Identification with the Role Cascades to Reduced Team Identification	"Sometimes, we have calls kicking off at 7 a.m. Eastern time, and I've got someone on the team—key to the discussion—who's out in Oregon, and for her, it's 4 a.m. That's just how it is when working across different time zones. And then, at the same time, folks in India are joining in, and it's late evening for them. You know, it's not just about getting people on the call; it's about how engaged they actually are. I mean, someone who's been at work all day in India might just be drained by the time we're getting started, and then someone else is rolling out of bed in the middle of the night just to be there. So, naturally, there's this kind of disconnect—not that people don't care, but because everyone's running on a different clock. That makes it tough to feel like you're all really in sync as a team."
15	Minimal peer collaboration lowers role connection	Peer Isolation	Reduced identification with the team cascade to reduced organizational identification	"Not working closely with my peers makes my job feel isolated. In a global organization like Cyient, where teams are spread across the US, India, and Germany, when I don't have regular interaction with colleagues, it becomes difficult to feel connected to the team's overall goals. I've experienced this when I worked on a project with colleagues in different locations, and there were days when I felt disconnected from the group's efforts because we weren't collaborating closely. For example, when my peers and I weren't engaging frequently, it felt like I was working alone, even though I was part of a bigger team. This lack of peer collaboration made my work feel less meaningful because I couldn't see how my efforts fit into the broader picture. Over time, I started feeling less motivated, and I noticed others feeling the same way. This isolation from my peers didn't just impact me; it spread across the group. When collaboration is minimal, it's harder to build connections with others, and that lack of interaction weakens my overall engagement with the company's mission. The more isolated we feel from our peers, the harder it becomes to stay invested in our work and aligned with the organization's objectives."
16	Lack of teamwork reduces individual engagement	Reduced Team-Based Engagement	Reduced identification with the team cascade to reduced	"I was talking to someone at Cyient who had been there for a while, and she told me, 'Honestly, some days, I just log in, do my work, and log out. I don't really feel like it matters if I'm here or not because there's no real collaboration—everyone just does their own thing.' That really hit me because I've seen the same thing happen in different places.

			organizational identification	At the clinic, for example, I noticed that when people worked together—sharing responsibilities, bouncing ideas off each other—they were more involved. Even if the work was tough, they stayed engaged because they felt like they were part of something. But in teams where there was no real collaboration, where people just worked in their own little silos, motivation dropped. When there's no back-and-forth, no shared effort, work starts feeling mechanical. People stop going the extra mile, they stop feeling invested, and over time, they check out mentally. It's not that they don't want to be engaged—it's just that when there's no real interaction, there's nothing holding them to the work beyond a paycheck."
17	Low role clarity diminishes team participation	Role Clarity Deficiency	Reduced identification with the team cascade to reduced role identification	"I was talking to one of the guys from the Hyderabad office the other day, and he told me, 'Mohan, sometimes I'm not sure what exactly is expected from me. I get tasks, but there's no real clarity on where my role begins and ends. So, I just do what's assigned and leave it at that.' And that really stuck with me because I've seen how that kind of uncertainty affects the way people work. I've noticed this in different places—whether it's at Cyient in Connecticut or in Bangalore. When people don't have a clear sense of their role, they hesitate to step up. Instead of actively contributing, they wait for instructions. They don't share ideas, they don't take initiative, and slowly, they pull back from engaging with others. And once that happens, it spreads. If one person is unsure about their responsibilities, others start feeling the same way, and soon, the whole group becomes less collaborative. It's not that people don't want to contribute—it's just that without clarity, they don't know how to."
18	Weak job identification affects team belonging	Job Identification Weakness	Reduced identification with the team cascade to reduced role identification	"When I don't feel connected to my job, it makes me feel like I don't quite belong within the team. This is particularly true in a global company like Cyient, where teams are spread across different countries like the US, India, and Germany. As the conversation shared, working in such dispersed teams often means that job roles can become less clear, which in turn makes it difficult to feel integrated within the group. For example, when roles are not well defined or when the connection to one's tasks feels weak, as discussed in the transcript, it creates a sense of being 'out of place.' Without a strong understanding of how my individual work contributes to the team's goals, it becomes harder to connect with my colleagues on a personal level. This sense of misalignment leads to a decreased sense of belonging, not only with the team but also with the larger objectives of the organization, as it weakens the identification with the job itself."
19	Lack of employee engagement makes retention harder	Employee Retention Barriers	Reduced Identification with the Team Cascades to Reduced Organizational Identification	"One of the challenges we face—especially with folks working at the customer site, whether in Connecticut or Florida—is that they start seeing more career opportunities with the customer than with Cyient. And I get it. When you're immersed in the customer's environment every day, you see the promotions happening there, the new roles opening up, and it just feels like there's a clearer path forward. On the other hand, because they're not as plugged

				into what's happening at Cyient, they don't always see the career tracks we offer internally. And when one person starts thinking this way, it spreads—others begin questioning their own future here, and suddenly, you have an entire team that feels like Cyient is just a temporary stop. That's when retention becomes really difficult."
20	Emails are often misinterpreted, leading to communication breakdowns	Virtual Communication Gaps	Reduced Identification with the Team Cascades to Reduced Organizational Identification	"I've seen team members hesitate to send emails because they're worried about how their words might come across. One time, a colleague from India sent a message that was meant to be direct and to the point, but the person in New York read it as rude. It turned into this whole thing where people started second-guessing whether they should even email at all. Instead of clarifying things quickly, they'd hold back, wait for a call, or just let issues linger. Over time, that kind of hesitation makes it harder for people to feel connected to the larger team at Cyient. When you're constantly worrying about being misunderstood, you start pulling back from discussions, and that affects how much people really feel like they belong to what we're doing."
21	Feeling disconnected makes it harder to stay motivated	Workplace Isolation	Reduced Identification with the Team Cascades to Reduced Role Identification	"You know, when you're working remotely or stationed at a customer site, like in Florida, it's easy to feel like you're on your own. You do your work, attend meetings, send updates, but if you don't see how your contributions fit into the bigger picture at Cyient, motivation starts to slip. It's not about the workload or the tasks—it's about feeling connected to something larger than just a to-do list. I had a guy on my team who was great at what he did, but after a while, I could tell something was off. He was getting things done, but there was no enthusiasm. When I finally asked him what was wrong, he just shrugged and said, 'I don't know, I just feel like I'm working in a bubble.' That stuck with me. He wasn't struggling with the technical work—he was struggling because he felt isolated. And honestly, I get it. When most of your interactions are just task-based, and there's no real connection to the broader team or company, it becomes harder to stay engaged. Eventually, that lack of connection starts affecting not just motivation, but the way people see their work entirely."
22	Isolation reduces overall job satisfaction	Workplace Isolation	Reduced Identification with the Team Cascades to Reduced Role Identification	"One of the toughest things about employees working at customer sites—whether in Germany or Canada—is that they start feeling cut off from the larger Cyient network. When most of their daily interactions are with the customer's team, they begin operating in a bubble. That isolation wears on them—job satisfaction dips, motivation fades, and morale declines. I've seen it happen. Someone like Priya, stationed in France, starts out excited but slowly drifts. She follows the customer's schedule, attends their events, and after a while, Cyient just feels like a name on a paycheck. Same with Rohan in Canada—he once told me, 'Honestly, I've been here so long, I already feel like part of the customer's team.' When the customer offers a job, it's an easy decision because, mentally, they already left Cyient long ago. And that mindset spreads. When one person disengages, others notice, and before you know it, you've got an entire team questioning why they're still here."

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