

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Master's degree in  
Management from the Nova School of Business and Economics.

**Negotiating the In-Between:**

How Job Transitions Open Third Spaces Between Newcomers and Existing Teams for  
Socialization and Organizational Value Creation

Zoe Charlotte Peifer - 64750

Work project carried out under the supervision of:

Helena Martins

30/01/2026

## **Abstract**

This study examines how job transitions create in-between spaces where newcomers' experiences, skills, and perspectives encounter established team routines and norms. Addressing a critical gap at the team level of organizational socialization research, it applies Bhabha's Third Space Theory to 28 qualitative interviews with newcomers. The analysis traces how ambiguity is negotiated within reconfigured team constellations through sensemaking and boundary work, enabling the hybridization of meanings. In teams characterized by psychological safety, openness, and recognition, these Third Spaces foster newcomer socialization and integrative collaboration by supporting mutual learning, identity development, co-creation, and innovation, underscoring their critical strategic importance for organizations.

## **Keywords**

Job Transitions, Third Space, Intercultural Dynamics, Team Dynamics, Ambiguity, Negotiation, Organizational Socialization, Hybridization, Value Creation

## **Acknowledgement**

This work was supported by the infrastructure and resources provided by NOVA School of Business and Economics. Special acknowledgements are extended to Helena Martins for her guidance throughout the writing of this thesis.

# 1. Introduction

In an age in which globalization, digitalization, and the accompanying growth in connectivity continue to intensify, companies find themselves in a state of constant change (Abawari et al. 2024; Alkharafi and Alsabah 2025; Meyer, Li, and Brouthers 2023). Strategies are subject to iterative adjustments, teams are restructured, employees change companies, and knowledge is transferred across functional and departmental boundaries. However, these changes affect not only organizational processes and structures but also routines, meanings, and the identities of the people who shape them (Harikkala-Laihinén 2022; Khaw et al. 2023).

Previous studies indicate that every organizational change entails both opportunities and risks: new impulses foster knowledge expansion and innovation, but they also result in tension, uncertainty, and identity conflicts among employees. Particularly during job transitions, newcomers face the challenge of generating added value while at the same time integrating themselves smoothly into the new department without disrupting existing team dynamics (Khaw et al. 2023; Zhao et al. 2023). It quickly becomes evident that such a change involves not only an organizational but also individual, cultural, and interactional dimensions. Thus, at the intersection of different ways of thinking and acting, inter- and intrapersonal tensions may arise, while new forms of collaboration and creative problem-solving can also emerge (Van Maanen and Schein 1979).

Although some research has already been conducted on job transitions, socialization, integration processes, and cultural differences (Yu, Ren, and Singh 2025), one aspect remains largely unexplored: the potential of in-between spaces that emerge when, in the course of a job transition, the prior experiences, routines, and perspectives of the newcomer encounter those of their new colleagues in the existing team. Such situations of intercultural encounters create a space in between, in which meanings, roles, and practices within the new team constellation can be renegotiated (Ollila and Yström 2025). Referring to Homi K. Bhabha's *Third Space Theory* (1994), this dynamic of joint interaction and negotiation within ambiguous, overlapping

contexts holds the potential for the emergence of something new that creates substantial added value for collective team collaboration. So far, however, Bhabha's thesis has primarily been explored in relation to the cultural identity formation of children, taken up in higher education research for the analysis of hybrid roles and institutional structures, and mentioned in the organizational context only at the macro level of multinational corporations (e.g., Frenkel 2008; Laughlin 2021; Tatham 2025; Whitchurch 2012). Yet precisely where the individual experiences and perspectives of a newcomer are brought into an existing team, a particularly intriguing space opens up at the meso level of organizations, in which negotiation processes take place and new possibilities can potentially emerge (Ollila and Yström 2025).

By transferring Bhabha's Third Space model (1994) to the context of meso-organizational change, this research seeks to deepen the understanding of the contributions that job transitions can bring to new team constellations. Particular attention is given to the potential of in-between spaces, emerging through the interplay of intercultural perspectives, to influence newcomer socialization and enable value creation (Ollila and Yström 2025). This leads to the following research question: *How do in-between spaces emerging during job transitions into existing teams influence newcomers' organizational socialization and the potential for value creation?*

Addressing this question, the study, for which a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews has been chosen, uses Bhabha's Third Space Theory (1994) as an analytical lens to examine job transitions in organizational settings and the dynamics of in-between spaces emerging within the new team composition. In doing so, it contributes to academic discourse on organizational change, socialization, and intercultural dynamics by showing how Third Spaces at the team level shape newcomer socialization and how they can be purposefully leveraged to foster collaboration, innovation, and value creation. Thus, it offers practical guidance for managers and practitioners on how to make constructive use of such in-between spaces in intercultural work environments (Yu, Ren, and Singh 2025).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Job Transitions and the Socialization of Newcomers

The entry of employees into new organizations, as well as the internal movement of staff across departments or functions, is a key driver of organizational learning and innovation. The influx of new members not only brings additional skills and perspectives but also challenges established assumptions and routines. Such transitions stimulate reflection and adaptation, enabling organizations to renew their knowledge base and remain responsive to change. Through the circulation of experiences across boundaries, cross-functional learning and collaboration are fostered, thereby contributing to greater organizational resilience (Dickson and Isaiah 2024; Liao, Zhou, and Yin 2022; Mirkov and Tankosić 2025). However, these dynamics can only unfold through effective organizational socialization, “the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (Van Maanen and Schein 1979, 211). In practice, newcomers find themselves navigating unfamiliar tasks, social dynamics, and cultural codes while balancing the need to contribute quickly with the desire for orientation and connection (Yu, Ren, and Singh 2025).

Central to understanding this process is the question of uncertainty reduction. Especially during the first weeks after a transition, newcomers seek information that helps them comprehend tasks, roles, and expectations. Onboarding programs, feedback loops, and mentoring therefore serve as essential instruments to reduce role ambiguity and foster security. In this context, it is important that organizations approach socialization as a continuous process that actively cultivates knowledge acquisition and role clarity (Ashforth, Sluss, and Saks 2007; Berger and Calabrese 1974; Cai et al. 2023; Cooper-Thomas and Burke 2012).

Extending this focus on information seeking and task clarity, socialization also comprises identity work, in which newcomers signal belonging and reconcile personal and organizational values. People strive for acceptance and construct their sense of self through ongoing,

purposeful interaction and networking with relevant groups. Entering a new work environment therefore involves reciprocal negotiation between personal and organizational values rather than a one-sided adjustment, as newcomers seek to signal belonging without relinquishing individuality (Tajfel and Turner 1985; Dai and Fang 2023).

At the same time, organizational socialization emerges as a process of mutual expectation fulfillment. Organizations provide resources, support, and recognition, while newcomers, in turn, are required to demonstrate commitment, loyalty, and the ability to generate value. When this psychological, implicit agreement is reinforced, mutual commitment deepens. Yet these exchanges unfold within existing power dynamics that sometimes privilege certain expectations. The relationship between newcomers and their new team is therefore by no means static but rather a dynamic web that evolves based on experiences perceived as fair, enriching, or even harmful (Korte 2010; Lapointe, Vandenberghe, and Boudrias 2013; Rousseau 1989).

Moreover, experiences during job transitions are shaped by newcomers' individual resources. Cultural competencies, adaptability, prior knowledge, personal resilience, and social networks facilitate entry into a new environment and enable individuals to actively shape emerging contexts. Successful socialization thus depends not only on organizational structures but also on individual dispositions to build and leverage human and social capital (Batistič and Kaše 2022; Fang, McAllister, and Duffy 2017; Luthans and Youssef 2004; Morrison 2002).

Consequently, successful socialization grounded in respectful engagement with cultural differences is associated with higher job satisfaction, improved performance, and lower turnover, while failure in this process increases the prospect of identity conflicts, productivity losses, and early exits (Korte 2010; Saks, Uggerslev, and Fassina 2007; Yu, Ren, and Singh 2025). To classify potential risks and strategies for navigating intercultural encounters, researchers have developed models such as Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, which distinguishes between integration (maintaining one's own culture while simultaneously

adapting), assimilation (complete adaptation), separation (adherence to one's own culture), and marginalization (loss of both references). Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) six socialization tactics for newcomers likewise suggest that incorporation into organizations follows structured mechanisms, including contrasting approaches such as investiture versus divestiture, which addresses whether the newcomer's existing identity is affirmed or deliberately altered.

Applied to job transitions, such models offer valuable guidance for dealing with diversity but remain static as they rely on fixed categories of adaptation or separation. In practice, however, hybrid forms of collaboration emerge that cannot be clearly classified. These in-between dynamics, characterized by ambiguity, negotiation, and mutual reinterpretation, reveal the limits of conventional socialization theories and call for a perspective that captures transformation more explicitly (Korte 2010; Ollila and Yström 2025). This is where Bhabha's (1994) concept of the Third Space becomes relevant, conceptualizing intercultural encounters as in-between spaces that allow new meanings and hybrid practices to emerge.

## **2.2. Third Space Theory**

The Third Space Theory developed by Homi K. Bhabha (1990, 1994) is a cultural-theoretical framework that conceptualizes in-between spaces of cultural encounter and was originally applied in the colonial context between colonizer and colonized. The Indian literary and cultural theorist assumed that cultural identity, particularly in asymmetrical colonial relationships, does not remain static, but is shaped by resistance, intercultural negotiations, and translations, and is continually being reshaped within the discursive Third Space that emerges between the actors involved (Bhabha 1994; Bhandari 2022). This notion of identity, however, does not denote monocultural, fixed categories but ongoing processes of identification that are relational, ambivalent, and never complete (Begun 2025; Bhabha 1994).

Although Bhabha (1994) developed his theory within the colonial discourse, the Third Space is not limited to this constellation in further research. Rather, it is considered a theoretical tool

that can be applied to all intercultural encounters between people, revealing ambiguities and power relations, which consequently trigger negotiations among the actors. Furthermore, it should be noted that intercultural encounters do not only involve the exchange between national cultures, but also, more generally, interactions among different socially shaped life worlds, meaning shared everyday practices, assumptions, and interpretations. In this sense, culture can be understood as the body of learned behaviors and their results that are collectively shared and transmitted within a social group (Bhabha 1994; Linton 1945). Particularly in research on children's identity development, in higher education, and in macro-organizational research, Third Space has been used to examine processes of identification, hybrid roles, and knowledge transfer across different cultural contexts (e.g., Frenkel 2008; Tatham 2025; Whitchurch 2012). Central to this is Bhabha's interpretation of the Third Space as an in-between arena where ambiguity, understood as the instability and doubleness of cultural signs, creates conditions for negotiation among actors from different cultural backgrounds (Bhabha 1994). Through these processes, hybridization emerges, deconstructing rigid dichotomies between Self and Other and opening space for "affiliative solidarities" (Bhabha 1994, 230) forged across differences. Culture thus does not appear as closed, but rather as a polyphonic, ambiguous, and dynamic interplay of meanings that are reinterpreted within the Third Space (Routledge 1996). "It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (Bhabha 1994, 37). In this in-between space, new hybrid identities emerge that cannot be assigned to either pole but instead produce something third and thus something new. This fluidity is also reflected in Bhabha's notion of mimicry and translation, where the act of imitation becomes a form of transformation that destabilizes fixed meanings (Bhabha 1994). Nonetheless, the Third Space, which functions not only as a site of cultural encounter but often also as a field of power, is not free of conflict. Rather, it is characterized by ambivalence, power

imbalances, uncertainty, and contradictions, which, however, can become productive through the renegotiation of meanings, roles, and practices, a dynamic this study examines in organizational settings (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999; Bhabha 1990, 1994; MacDonald 2019).

### **2.3. The Third Space Theory in Organizational Research**

While Third Space Theory has been applied in various institutional contexts such as higher education research (e.g., Tatham 2025; Whitchurch 2012), its application within corporate and work organizations remains limited. One of the most influential contributions in this area is Frenkel's (2008) work, which conceptualizes the multinational corporation (MNC) as a Third Space, an arena where different intercultural and institutional logics converge. Indeed, while every culture has access to the same spectrum of potential solutions, they emphasize and evaluate them in distinct ways. When these differences meet within MNCs, they inevitably surface as diverging cultural orientations, priorities, and preferred approaches to problem-solving. Thus, rather than functioning as neutral sites of knowledge transfer, MNCs become spaces in which ambiguity arising from cultural differences and asymmetrical power relations between headquarters and subsidiaries, or between so-called First World and Third World contexts, are enacted (Frenkel 2008; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961). Drawing on Bhabha (1990, 1994), Frenkel emphasizes that such processes are not linear transmissions of best practices but are marked by negotiation and mimicry. This opens space for both control and resistance, as well as for the emergence of new, hybrid practices (Frenkel 2008). "In contrast to the conventional view of the MNC as the aggregate of encounters between different, distinct, and homogeneous cultures, it should be seen as an arena of [...] hybridization" (Frenkel 2008, 933), which enables the creation of new patterns of interaction, innovative practices, and evolving identities within the in-between space that emerges between organizational actors (Bhabha 1994; Frenkel 2008).

Frenkel (2008) and Bhandari (2022) add an important critical dimension by stressing that such Third Spaces often reproduce inequalities rather than dissolve them. They show how MNCs create transnational contact zones that resemble Third Spaces, but in practice frequently privilege powerful Western actors. Instead of enabling equal negotiation, these spaces can perpetuate neocolonial exploitation by marginalizing the voices and resources of less powerful nations and groups. To use the Third Space as an inclusive and fair arena, it must be applied, following Leonhard et al. (2016, 92), as “a place in which all actors are willing to have their positions questioned, to collaborate as equals, and to allow a dialectical relationship” (author’s translation) between diverse knowledge traditions, emphasizing actor-level, eye-level negotiation despite underlying power asymmetries. Accordingly, the Third Space highlights not only cultural negotiation and hybridity, but also the structural risks of reinforcing dominance and exclusion, underscoring the need for fair and power-conscious implementation.

Taken together, these works demonstrate the value of applying the Third Space Theory at the macro-organizational level. They draw attention to how organizations operate as discursive and hybrid entities in which ambiguity and asymmetric power dynamics condition the continual renegotiation of identity and knowledge (Bhabha 1994; Bhandari 2022; Frenkel 2008). At the same time, this focus on multinational corporations leaves open the question of how such dynamics unfold on micro and meso levels of organizational life. While hybrid dynamics have already been implicitly suggested at both levels, for instance in cross-sector and multi-professional arrangements that are assumed to foster hybrid professional identities and working environments, there is still a lack of explicit studies addressing these processes in this context. Particularly during job transitions, when newcomers bring their prior experiences, routines, and perspectives into existing teams, similar in-between spaces emerge that can be understood as Third Spaces in which identities, practices, and meanings are redefined (Lam 2011; Mäkinen and Mesko 2023; Ollila and Yström 2025; Thorpe and Partridge 2024; Whitchurch 2012).

## 2.4. Conceptual Framework: Third Spaces in Job Transitions

Building on the preceding literature, this study conceptualizes job transitions as meso-level in-between spaces in which newcomers' experiences, skills, and interpretive frameworks encounter the established practices, routines, and culturally shaped meanings of their new teams. Drawing on Bhabha's (1994) Third Space Theory, these encounters may form an in-between space characterized by ambiguous roles, expectations, and meanings and shaped by formal and informal power relations. As newcomers and existing team members navigate ambiguity and power dynamics through ongoing negotiation, mimicry and meaning translation unfold and jointly reshape roles, expectations, and ways of working. Together, these processes give rise to hybrid practices and evolving identities that may underpin newcomer socialization and enable collaboration to generate economic, relational, and cultural value, while also carrying the risk of tension, withdrawal, or exclusion (Bhabha 1994; Frenkel 2008; Ollila and Yström 2025; Thorpe and Partridge 2024).

Figure 1 visualizes this conceptual model by illustrating how established and incoming repertoires intersect within the Third Space and may consolidate into institutionalized hybrid routines, challenging static cultural and socialization models. Although such Third Spaces are jointly constituted by newcomers and existing members, this study primarily examines how newcomers experience and enact these in-between spaces during their entry into new teams.

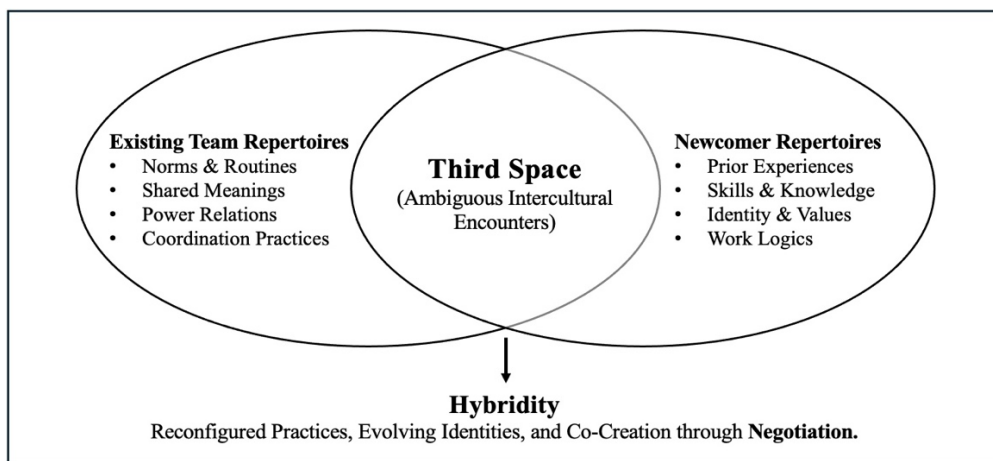


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Third Space in Job Transitions (Author's Own Elaboration).

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Research Design**

To address how in-between spaces emerging during newcomers' job transitions influence their socialization and potential to create organizational value, this study builds on Bhabha's Third Space Theory as its conceptual perspective and adopts a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews. This format balances comparability and openness, allowing participants' meanings and narratives to surface and revealing how newcomers and teams negotiate these Third Spaces (Bhabha 1994; Blandford 2013; Thorpe and Partridge 2024).

### **3.2. Sample**

A total of 28 participants (see Appendix 1) were recruited through purposeful and snowball sampling strategies. Participants were identified via direct outreach within the researcher's own professional network, personal referrals, and LinkedIn, ensuring access to individuals with relevant recent experiences. The inclusion criterion was an external job transition within the past three years, thus ensuring the recency of experiences. Beyond this, the sample intentionally remained heterogeneous in terms of gender, age, professional roles, industries, and national contexts to capture a diverse range of perspectives. In total, the sample included 15 women and 13 men aged between 24 and 58 years, working across diverse industries and holding roles in functional areas such as IT, marketing, human resources, finance, and consulting.

### **3.3. Data Collection**

Interviews, conducted between 2 and 25 November 2025, lasted approximately 40-60 minutes and took place either online or in person, depending on participants' location and preference. Conversations were held in German, audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English with AI assistance. Interview quotations originally spoken in German and cited in this thesis are listed with their English translations in Appendix 2.

Participants were briefed on the study's aims and data use; ethical safeguards included secure data storage and anonymization of all identifiers prior to analysis (Kang and Hwang 2023).

The interview guide (see Appendix 3) translated key Third Space concepts into the context of job transitions, inviting participants to reflect on how they navigated expectations, relationships, and moments of ambiguity during their early weeks, and how these processes shaped collaboration, learning, and value creation within their teams. Given that qualitative interviews are the primary methodological approach in most empirical studies on Third Space Theory (Bhabha 1990, 1994; Thorpe and Partridge 2024), the structure and focus of the questions were also informed by prior work on cultural negotiation in related contexts (e.g., Johnston et al. 2021; Thorpe and Partridge 2024; Whitchurch 2008, 2010).

### **3.4. Data Analysis Techniques**

The interview data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) in line with Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). Following initial familiarisation with the material, open, inductive coding - informed by sensitizing concepts from Third Space Theory (Blumer 1954) and supported by AI-based language tools - moved into iterative cycles of theme construction and refinement, with codes progressively consolidated into overarching themes that linked participants' accounts to key Third Space ideas while remaining open to data-led insights. These themes were then interpreted in light of the research question to understand how participants negotiated boundaries, identities, and collaboration within emerging Third Spaces. Rather than seeking reliability through intercoder agreement, the analysis prioritised reflexivity, transparency, and theoretical depth, in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) approach to RTA. To enhance trustworthiness, the analytic process was documented through reflexive memos, an audit trail, and peer-debriefing sessions (Lincoln and Guba 1985). A detailed account of the RTA-based data analysis procedure is provided in Appendix 4.

## 4. Analysis of Interview Findings

Building on the analytical approach of this study, codes emerging from participants' accounts were iteratively clustered into six themes (Appendix 5) that each highlight different facets of the same emergent in-between process: (1) *Ambiguity* captures moments of uncertainty, fluidity, and openness in role and identity formation; (2) *Team and Power Dynamics* refer to how formal hierarchies and informal team relationships shape newcomers' authority, legitimacy, sense of belonging, and voice and agency during transitions; (3) *Negotiation* encompasses the active work of mediating expectations, meanings, challenges, and boundaries between newcomers and established members; (4) *Mimicry and Translation* describe practices of adapting, reinterpreting, and rearticulating organizational norms as individuals negotiate new cultural and professional settings; (5) *Identity Work and Belonging* capture how newcomers reconfigure their sense of self and position within the team, shaping participation, legitimacy, and feelings of inclusion in evolving Third Spaces; and (6) *Hybridization and Co-creation* capture the joint generation of new practices, knowledge, and forms of collaboration by newcomers and existing members. Due to the inherently fluid, overlapping, and relational nature of Third Space dynamics, these themes are not mutually exclusive but interconnected (Bhabha 1990; Ollila and Yström 2025; Tajfel and Turner 1985; Yu, Ren, and Singh 2025).

### 4.1. Ambiguity

Ambiguity was a defining characteristic of participants' early weeks in the new organization. Newcomers consistently described this phase as one in which they were formally equipped with information yet lacked a deeper understanding of how things really worked in practice. Many reported that onboarding provided tools and terminology, while the actual meanings, priorities, and informal rules remained ambivalent and opaque, creating a sense of "culture shock" (P04) as they tried to orient themselves in the new setting (P01 P10; P12). One participant summarized this gap by noting that he "understood the terms but not their actual meanings" (P16).

Participants experienced ambiguity on multiple levels. In terms of role ambiguity, several participants noted that they initially knew their formal position but only gradually figured out what their concrete responsibilities and expected contributions entailed in everyday practice, including when and how they were expected to contribute and whom to approach with questions or concerns (P03; P05; P10; P19). On a linguistic and symbolic level, participants described the challenge of following conversations shaped by internal jargon, abbreviations, and references to prior projects that were unfamiliar to them (P04; P24). One person compared this to understanding a language without speaking it fluently, as she could follow parts of the discussion but felt she was always slightly behind the pace of others (P24). On an identity level, ambiguity arose when personal professional convictions collided with organizational expectations, for example when reflective approaches to learning met a strong emphasis on measurable outcomes and key performance indicators (P10; P16; P24). In addition, relational ambiguity played a central role, as newcomers encountered interaction patterns where it was often unclear who could speak when, whose contributions would be acknowledged or ignored, and how subtle alliances and informal influence shaped participation in meetings, leaving them unsure what to say, to whom, and when (P03; P10; P21; P27).

Overall, participants portrayed ambiguity as a persistent feature of their early transition experiences. Rather than disappearing once formal procedures became familiar, ambiguity remained present in everyday interactions and decision-making.

## **4.2. Team and Power Dynamics**

Team and power dynamics played a central role in shaping newcomers' early experiences, as they navigated ambiguous interactions, formal hierarchies, and informal influence structures within their new teams. Across interviews, participants described that power appeared in multiple forms, often clearly linked to formal positions and reporting lines, at other times emerging through experience, expertise, personality traits, or established relationships (P03;

P08; P18; P23). Several newcomers observed that everyday decision-making was often guided by colleagues with long organizational tenure or strong reputational capital, whose influence, though rarely exercised as explicit authority, subtly oriented discussions by shaping which arguments were taken up and whose views ultimately informed decisions (P10; P13; P17; P19). These formal and informal dynamics substantially shaped newcomers' willingness to contribute, creating constellations of authority and influence that hindered the expression of dissent and other forms of constructive input. Many initially held back their perspectives out of concern that their views might conflict with those of more established colleagues or overstep social expectations, even when they had relevant knowledge or alternative ideas (P07; P14; P19; P28). For some women entering male-dominated environments, this hesitancy was further amplified by gendered expectations and perceptions, as they felt their legitimacy or expertise was more readily questioned or required additional demonstration (P01; P05; P12).

However, power dynamics were not experienced solely as constraining. Several participants recounted situations in which support from someone in a higher position was described as legitimizing their contributions and strengthened their sense of belonging. When senior colleagues engaged with newcomers' ideas or publicly endorsed them, this enhanced their visibility and confidence, and in some cases shifted how others perceived their role in the team (P08; P10; P15; P19). In addition, newcomers described influential colleagues as role models for how to speak up, handle disagreement, and navigate team discussions (P07; P11).

For those entering as leaders of existing teams, questions of legitimacy and acceptance became particularly pronounced (P04; P21). One interviewee explained that stepping into a department with an established team meant balancing authority with sensitivity, as some colleagues had hoped for the role themselves or were wary of yet another change. This created a cautious atmosphere in meetings and required careful positioning to lead without overstepping (P21).

Beyond power relations, team dynamics also shaped newcomers' experiences in more interpersonal ways. Several participants described initial interactions marked by cautious politeness, uncertainty about personal boundaries, and a gradual process of learning how humor, feedback, or disagreement were handled within the group (P03, P10). Some reported early support or encouragement that strengthened their sense of belonging, while others experienced subtle rivalry or comparison with colleagues who had joined around the same time (P14, P17). These interpersonal dynamics influenced how easily newcomers connected with colleagues and integrated into the team's everyday rhythm.

Overall, participants described team and power dynamics as an important backdrop for their early socialization, shaping how they interpreted expectations, chose to contribute, and positioned themselves within the team.

### **4.3. Negotiation**

Newcomers' early experiences, characterized by ambiguity and shifting team and power dynamics, unfolded through ongoing negotiation as they interpreted expectations, calibrated legitimacy and role boundaries, and gradually established their position within the team. Newcomers emphasized that formal role descriptions rarely translated directly into everyday practice. Instead, they had to clarify how much autonomy was appropriate, when it was legitimate to make suggestions, and which expectations were open to adjustment. Rather than focusing on immediate action, this initial phase centered on making sense of role-related boundaries and expectations before acting, involving observation of established routines and selective questioning (P02; P03; P10; P19; P20). Several participants described using these cues to develop an initial orientation, inferring expected responsibilities and acceptable autonomy, as well as when input was legitimate and how decisions were typically justified, before contributing more visibly (P03; P13; P10; P21).

Negotiation became particularly visible in moments where newcomers probed expectations and encountered resistance. Many described quickly realizing that introducing ideas too forcefully or prematurely could generate pushback, revealing not only the limits of acceptable participation but also latent team dynamics and informal influence structures (P03; P10; P19; P25). Consequently, they tested suggestions incrementally, often first in one-to-one conversations with trusted or influential colleagues, where uncertainties could be explored and tacit alignment built before raising ideas in wider team settings (P04; P17; P21; P28).

Through these interactions, newcomers learned how participation was expected to unfold more generally, including appropriate levels of directness, norms of feedback, and acceptable ways of expressing disagreement. One newcomer (P01) described the early weeks as experimental, noting that “I kept testing how far I could go, and only then did I begin to understand the space available for my own actions.” Others similarly reported calibrating what they shared, with whom, and when, using selective disclosure as a way to gauge reactions and adjust their positioning within the team (P03; P21; P22).

Taken together, these negotiations demonstrate that ambiguity, while initially experienced as disorienting, became a resource that some newcomers learned to navigate strategically. As their understanding of interaction norms and decision logics deepened, they began to work with ambiguity more deliberately, using it productively to time contributions and expand their perceived room for action by reframing ideas, posing open-ended questions, and creating opportunities for broader participation in team discussions (P01; P14; P17). In this context, negotiation was not a single act but an ongoing, often tentative process of sensemaking and adjustment shaped by persistent ambiguity and evolving team dynamics.

#### **4.4. Mimicry and Translation**

As these negotiations unfolded under conditions of ambiguity, newcomers attuned themselves to local practices through subtle acts of mimicry and translation, thereby enabling participation

in their new teams while gradually shaping the environment around them. Participants described how they oriented themselves by adopting elements of the local “organizational language” (P04), such as jargon, abbreviations, and preferred ways of framing ideas. These linguistic and symbolic patterns often appeared self-evident to long-standing colleagues, which made it necessary for newcomers to adjust their vocabulary and communicative style in order to be understood and recognized as competent (P03; P15; P18).

Mimicry further unfolded in interactional behaviour. Interviewees explained that they adapted tone, directness, and levels of formality to align with the implicit expectations of their teams. Some moderated their usual clarity in favour of more diplomatically framed contributions (P14; P18), while others learned to read when emotional attunement was required (P10; P17).

These adjustments did not constitute full assimilation. Newcomers selectively enacted imitation, retaining aspects of their established working identities while experimenting with new forms of participation (P10; P14; P17; P18). As one person put it, “I do not want to change everything, but I selectively bring my ways of working” (P04), describing this as an ongoing calibration aimed at integrating without losing his professional character. This selective imitation often entailed both deliberate and tacit translation work between different professional logics and prior repertoires, as newcomers drew on approaches that had proved useful in earlier roles and adjusted them to fit local routines, constraints, and vocabularies (P03; P05; P06). At times, this translation work relied on knowledge that complemented existing expertise in the team. They supported colleagues with different backgrounds in understanding technical or strategic issues by presenting complex details and underlying rationales in more accessible terms (P06; P21; P28), positioning themselves as “learners, but also teachers” (P05).

Through this combination of selective mimicry and situated translation, newcomers developed hybrid ways of working that legitimized their participation and enabled subtle influence, gradually reshaping routines, expectations, and meanings in everyday interaction.

## 4.5. Identity Work and Belonging

During this organizational socialization process, newcomers engaged in identity work to make sense of who they were becoming in an unfamiliar environment. Participants described their early weeks as a period in which their inner sense of self felt unsettled, often shifting between confidence, doubt, and a search for orientation. Several noted that they oscillated between feeling experienced and capable and feeling unexpectedly unsure of themselves, shaped by the situations they encountered and the reactions they received (P02; P03; P10; P14; P23).

Identity work unfolded in moments when newcomers confronted the question of how they fit into a team whose routines, histories, and relationships predated them. Some described feeling initially out of place, unsure how they should act, speak, or decide in ways that still felt consistent with their sense of self (P04; P17; P19). Others spoke of realizing that certain habits or convictions from previous roles no longer aligned with the new environment, prompting reflection about which parts of themselves were stable and which were open to change. One participant described this phase as finding “a way of working that stayed true to my own nature” (P01), even while acknowledging that some internal adjustments were needed to feel grounded in the new context (P10; P14; P17).

Belonging emerged as an inseparable part of this identity work. Participants emphasized that feeling included or excluded shaped how they understood themselves within the team. Small signs of recognition, such as colleagues remembering details from previous conversations, asking for their opinion, or inviting them into informal routines, made them feel more settled (P03; P14). In contrast, moments of silence, missed cues, or feeling peripheral in discussions reinforced uncertainty about their place in the team and whether they could connect (P21; P26). At the same time, several participants emphasized that this process of questioning and reorientation also contributed to their personal and professional development. Confronting ambiguity, experimenting with new ways of working and receiving recognition from others

enabled them to test their own capacities, feel a sense of pride in overcoming challenges, and perceive themselves as maturing in their roles and as professionals (P01; P03; P10; P14; P22). Overall, identity work and belonging co-evolved as newcomers navigated ambiguity, exposing them to both challenging and developmental experiences that shaped how confidently and meaningfully they understood their new roles and contributed within the team.

#### **4.6. Hybridization and Co-creation**

Through ongoing negotiation and moments of mimicry, newcomers' personal dispositions, prior experiences, and working preferences intersected with the established practices of their teams, giving rise to hybrid forms of working and co-creative practices. Rather than following a linear progression, these dynamics unfolded gradually as both sides learned how their respective ways of working could be aligned (P01; P17). In practice, newcomers selectively adopted existing norms and routines while also introducing familiar approaches from previous roles, such as preferred tools, communication habits, or ways of structuring tasks. These elements were taken up, adapted, or occasionally maintained alongside established practices, resulting in blended arrangements that reflected both individual preferences and team expectations (P03; P04; P10).

Participants emphasized that the emergence of hybrid practices depended strongly on the conditions under which collaboration unfolded. Hybridization occurred most readily when team members demonstrated openness, asked clarifying questions or showed curiosity about newcomers' perspectives (P10; P14; P22). In contrast, when routines appeared rigid or colleagues seemed protective of established approaches, newcomers reported holding back ideas or contributing only selectively (P03; P10; P12; P14; P21). These patterns highlighted that hybridity was not solely the product of individual initiative but relied on relational receptiveness, psychological safety, and the recognition of newcomers' prior experience as legitimate (P08; P10; P15). Under supportive conditions, boundaries between old and new

practices became flexible enough to allow the emergence of shared solutions; in more constrained environments, hybridization remained partial or stalled (P14; P20; P21; P25).

As these blended practices took shape, collaboration increasingly shifted toward co-creation. Participants described instances in which newcomers and team members jointly experimented with new workflows, redistributed responsibilities, or combined contrasting practices into workable compromises, sometimes drawing on approaches from previous roles, such as more structured digital toolsets, streamlined project templates, or clearer feedback routines, which broadened the team's repertoire and occasionally improved existing workflows (P10; P14; P20; P22; P24; P27). One participant noted that "Collaboration, however, was not always harmonious. There were frictions and differing opinions, yet it was precisely these tensions that became productive" (P28). Such developments were rarely formalized but evolved through iterative exchanges and the practical need to coordinate effectively. For some newcomers, especially those in leading positions, co-creation became a way to integrate their own perspectives into existing workflows, coordination practices and role structures without imposing change unilaterally (P04; P21). In some cases, newcomers also observed shifts in the team's interpersonal climate, as their personal character and working style subtly influenced everyday interactions and gradually contributed to the evolving team culture (P01; P09; P15). Overall, when newcomers felt able to bring in their dispositions and teams made room for mutual adjustment rather than simple compliance, emerging hybridization offered strong potential for value creation through co-creation and innovation (P12; P14; P17; P27).

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Theoretical Contributions**

This study advances theory by reconceptualizing job transitions as meso-level Third Spaces, dynamic cultural arenas in which newcomers' perspectives and prior experiences encounter established team norms and routines. While existing research deploys Third Space Theory

primarily to examine macro-organizational and educational contexts (e.g., Frenkel 2008; Tatham 2025), the present study demonstrates that consequential forms of hybridity and cultural negotiation are enacted in everyday team interactions. In doing so, the study positions Third Space at the meso-level of team relations as a central arena of socialization and value creation. A central theoretical insight is that ambiguity operates as a potentially generative condition rather than a barrier to socialization. In line with Bhabha's view that meaning arises in moments of instability (1990, 1994), the findings show that ambiguity enables reflective experimentation and the reconsideration of established routines. Rather than hindering socialization, uncertainty enables newcomers and incumbents to explore alternative interpretations and ways of working. The findings further challenge linear socialization models (e.g., Berry 1997) by demonstrating that newcomers do not simply assimilate or resist; instead, they engage in selective mimicry and translation that reconfigure, rather than merely fit into the team's cultural patterns (Bhabha 1994). This positions hybridization as a central mechanism through which socialization and value creation become intertwined: by blending incoming and existing practices, teams expand their repertoire of meanings and routines and thereby enhance their capacity to collaborate and innovate, resulting in better coordination, mutual learning, and more adaptable workflows. The findings also reveal that Third Space dynamics are inherently power-laden. Newcomers' opportunities to contribute are conditioned not only by formal hierarchies, but also by informal coalitions, reputational capital, and subtle everyday interaction patterns. Recognition or silence from these different sources of power actively legitimize or marginalize their voice, affirming critical interpretations of Third Space as simultaneously enabling and constraining. Finally, the findings foreground job transitions as culturally situated identity processes: newcomers reconstruct their identities through ongoing negotiations of belonging, legitimacy, and coherence in everyday team interactions. Experiences of recognition or marginalization in these moments shape both their emerging sense of self and their perceived ability to contribute.

Together, these insights conceptualize job transitions as sites of cultural encounter with inherent innovative, relational, and economic value potential, extending both socialization research and Third Space Theory by highlighting the interactional foundations of meso-level hybridity.

## **5.2. Practical Implications for Organizations**

The findings provide actionable guidance for organizations seeking to leverage the generative potential of job transitions. A key implication is the importance of embracing structured ambiguity. Instead of over-standardizing onboarding, organizations can cultivate guided openness that encourages newcomers to question assumptions and co-shape evolving practices. Communicating that ambiguity is expected reduces anxiety and fosters proactive engagement. Another important consideration concerns power dynamics. Leaders need to make these dynamics both transparent and inclusive by offering early recognition, explicitly inviting newcomers to contribute, and visibly supporting their input in group settings. Such practices accelerate socialization and psychological safety, legitimize newcomers' perspectives, and may help counterbalance dominant voices within informal hierarchies.

These practices create the conditions for working constructively with mimicry, translation, and hybridization. Rather than pushing for rapid assimilation, teams can actively explore how newcomers' previous routines or cultural repertoires enrich existing workflows. Short reflection rituals or collaborative meaning-making sessions can help institutionalize this practice.

In addition, leaders require Third Space competencies, including skills in navigating uncertainty, reading cultural grammars, facilitating dialogue across differences, and supporting identity transitions. Leadership development programmes should therefore include cultural reflexivity, power awareness, and negotiation of meaning as core components.

Finally, organizations can support belonging by offering relational anchors, acknowledging the emotional intensity of transitions, and fostering climates in which vulnerability and curiosity are legitimate, thereby enabling newcomers to feel sufficiently safe and valued to contribute.

Cultivating such conditions reframes job transitions from fragile periods into opportunities for collective renewal and more sustainable newcomer socialization.

### **5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This study's qualitative and retrospective design provides deep insight into newcomers' experiences, yet several limitations should be acknowledged.

Because participants reflected on past events, early moments of ambiguity, identity destabilization, and negotiation may have been reshaped through hindsight. Prospective or longitudinal designs could capture these dynamics as they unfold and offer a more immediate account of the emergence of Third Spaces. The analysis also draws solely on newcomers' viewpoints. While this perspective offers rich access to their meaning-making, it does not include incumbents or supervisors who play a central role in shaping, enabling, or constraining these in-between spaces. Future research could therefore adopt multi-actor designs to illuminate how Third Spaces are co-created within everyday team interactions. Although the sample spans a wide range of industries, roles and ages, participants were largely highly educated professionals working in German-speaking contexts. This relative homogeneity limits the transferability of the findings to other labour markets, organizational forms, or educational profiles. More diverse and representative samples could increase applicability across contexts. In addition, the analysis treats newcomers as one analytical group and does not unpack potential differences linked to individual characteristics such as age, gender, seniority, professional trajectory, or national background. Future research could examine whether and how such characteristics moderate experiences of job transitions and organizational socialization.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study examined how in-between spaces emerging during newcomers' job transitions shape their socialization and potential to create organizational value. Drawing on Bhabha's (1990, 1994) Third Space Theory, it shows that job transitions constitute dynamic arenas in which

ambiguity, negotiation, mimicry, identity work, and hybridization unfold as intertwined processes. Rather than simply hindering socialization, these in-between spaces can become productive when newcomers and established team members use them to question assumptions, reinterpret routines, and experiment with alternative ways of working. Through such interactions, hybrid practices and expanded repertoires of collaboration emerge that enable teams to create value beyond the sum of established and incoming practices.

The findings advance existing research by situating Third Space dynamics at the meso level of everyday team encounters and demonstrating that cultural negotiation and identity reconstruction take place not only at macro-organizational or educational boundaries, but within the relational textures of work groups. Within these relational arenas, newcomers' integration is shaped by formal hierarchies as well as by informal interaction patterns and subtle power dynamics, which together determine whether ambiguity opens space for mutual learning and co-creation or instead reinforces hesitation, withdrawal, and marginalization. Ambiguity therefore does not automatically foster hybridity; it becomes generative only when team members show curiosity, acknowledge newcomers' prior experience, and create sufficient psychological safety for experimentation.

Building on this, the study highlights the emotional and identity-related intensity of job transitions. Navigating uncertainty, testing boundaries, and experiencing recognition or silence influence how newcomers position themselves, their sense of belonging, and how teams evolve through their presence. Taken together, these insights suggest that organizations can actively cultivate Third Spaces by treating ambiguity as a potentially generative condition, making power dynamics more transparent, encouraging mutual translation of working practices, and actively supporting identity development during transitions. In doing so, they can turn job changes from fragile adjustment into generative cultural encounters, where difference becomes a shared resource and new, collective ways of working are allowed to take root and endure.

## References

- Abawari, A. M., Tessema, M. T., Mohammed, M. A., and Nurfeta, B. A. 2024. "The Effects of Organizational Culture on Change Management through Leadership Styles." *Cogent Business and Management* 11(1): 2375623.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2375623>.
- Alkharafi, Naeimah, and Miriam Alsabah 2025. "Globalization: An Overview of Its Main Characteristics and Types, and an Exploration of Its Impacts on Individuals, Firms, and Nations." *Economies* 13(4): 91
- Ashforth, Blake E., David M. Sluss, and Alan M. Saks. 2007. "Socialization Tactics, Proactive Behavior, and Newcomer Learning: Integrating Socialization Models." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 70(3): 447–462.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2007.02.001>.
- Bassnett, Susan, and Harish Trivedi. 1999. *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40155056>.
- Batistič, Saša, and Rok Kaše. 2022. "Emergence and Persistence of Work Relationships in Early Socialization: Contrasting Interpersonal and Organizational Perspectives." *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 31(6): 894–907.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2022.2050220>.
- Begun, Mukhammadi O. 2025. "Truly Emergent? A Critique of 'Third Space' in Cross-Cultural Context." *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education* 33: 1–9.  
<https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.vi33.1236>.

Berger, Charles R., and Richard J. Calabrese. 1974. "Some Explorations in Initial Interaction and Beyond: Toward a Developmental Theory of Interpersonal Communication."

*Human Communication Research* 1(2): 99–112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1975.tb00258.x>.

Berry, John W. 1997. "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation." *Applied Psychology* 46(1): 5–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1990. *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bhandari, Nirvik B. 2022. "Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space Theory and Cultural Identity Today: A Critical Review." *Prithvi Academic Journal* 5(1): 171–181.

<https://doi.org/10.3126/paj.v5i1.45049>.

Blandford, Ann. 2013. "Semi-Structured Qualitative Studies." In *The Encyclopedia of Human-Computer Interaction* (2nd ed.), edited by Mads Soegaard and Rikke Friis Dam. Aarhus: Interaction Design Foundation.

Blumer, Herbert. 1954. "What Is Wrong with Social Theory?" *American Sociological Review* 19(1): 3–10.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77–101.

<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2019. "Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis."

*Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 11 (4): 589–597.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>

Cai, Duo, Zhi Li, Lixia Xu, Ling Fan, Shujun Wen, Feng Li, and Yanjun Guan. 2023.

"Sustaining Newcomers' Career Adaptability: The Roles of Socialization Tactics, Job Embeddedness, and Career Variety." *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 96(2): 264–286. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12423>.

Cooper-Thomas, Helen D., and Susan E. Burke. 2012. "Newcomer Proactive Behavior: Can There Be Too Much of a Good Thing?" In *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Socialization*, edited by Cameron K. S. and M. L. Martin, 56–77. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dai, Xiaoyu, and Fang Yuan. 2023. "Does Inclusive Leadership Affect the Organizational Socialization of Newcomers from Diverse Backgrounds?" *Frontiers in Psychology* 14: 1138101. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1138101>.

Dickson, Rachel K., and Oyeinkorikiye S. Isaiah. 2024. "An Exploration of Effective Onboarding on Employee Engagement and Retention in Work Organizations." *Researchjournali's Journal of Human Resource* 9(1): 1–20.

Fang, Ruolian, Daniel J. McAllister, and Michelle K. Duffy. 2017. "Down but Not Out: Newcomers Can Compensate for Low Vertical Access with Strong Horizontal Ties and Favorable Core Self-Evaluations." *Personnel Psychology* 70(3): 517–555. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12177>.

- Frenkel, Michal. 2008. "The Multinational Corporation as a Third Space." *Academy of Management Review* 33(4): 924–942. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2008.34422002>.
- Harikkala-Laihinen, Riikka. 2022. "Organizational Identity (Dis)Continuity during Strategic Change." *International Journal of Project Management* 40(3): 262–277. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2022.03.004>.
- Kang, Eungoo, and Hee-Joong Hwang. 2023. "The Importance of Anonymity and Confidentiality for Conducting Survey Research." *Journal of Research and Publication Ethics* 4(1): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.15722/jrpe.4.1.202303.1>
- Johnston, David H., Karen Foy, Aideen Mulligan, and Rachel Shanks. 2021. "Teaching in a Third Space during National COVID-19 Lockdowns: In Loco Magister?" *Irish Educational Studies* 40(2): 359–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2021.1916563>.
- Khaw, Kok Weng, Abbas Alnoor, Hamad Al-Abrow, Victor Tiberius, Yogeswary Ganesan, and Nisrin A. Atshan. 2023. "Reactions Towards Organizational Change." *Current Psychology* 42(22): 19137–19160. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03070-6>.
- Kluckhohn, Florence R., and Fred L. Strodtbeck. 1961. *Variations in Value Orientations*. Evanston: Row Peterson.
- Korte, Russell. 2010. "First, Get to Know Them." *Human Resource Development International* 13(1): 27–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13678861003588984>.
- Lam, Alice. 2011. "University-Industry Collaboration." *International Journal of Strategic Business Alliances* 2(1–2): 135–145. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSBA.2011.038137>.

Lapointe, Élodie, Christian Vandenberghe, and Jean-Sébastien Boudrias. 2013.

“Psychological Contract Breach, Affective Commitment to Organization and Supervisor, and Newcomer Adjustment: A Three-Wave Moderated Mediation Model.”

*Journal of Vocational Behavior* 83(3): 528–538.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2013.07.008>.

Laughlin, Lisa M. 2021. “Third Space, Partnerships, and Clinical Practice.” *Professional*

*Educator* 44(1): 21–33. <https://doi.org/10.47038/tpc.44.01.05>.

Leonhard, Tina, Uwe Fraefel, Sabine Jünger, Jan Kosinar, Corinna Reintjes, and Bea

Richiger. 2016. “Zwischen Wissenschafts- und Berufspraxis.” *Zeitschrift für*

*Hochschulentwicklung* 11(1): 79–98. <https://doi.org/10.3217/zfhe-11-01/05>.

Liao, Gaofeng, Jing Zhou, and Jun Yin. 2022. “Effect of Organizational Socialization of New

Employees on Team Innovation Performance: A Cross-Level Model.” *Psychology*

*Research and Behavior Management* 15: 1017–1031.

<https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S359773>.

Lincoln, Yvonna S., and Egon G. Guba. 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Linton, Ralph. 1945. *The Cultural Background of Personality*. New York: Appleton-Century-

Crofts.

Luthans, Fred, and Carolyn M. Youssef. 2004. “Human, Social, and Positive Psychological

Capital.” *Organizational Dynamics* 33(2): 143–160.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2004.01.003>.

MacDonald, Malcolm. 2019. “The Discourse of ‘Thirdness.’” *Language and Intercultural*

*Communication* 19(1): 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2019.1544788>.

- Mäkinen, Eeva I., and Timo Esko. 2023. "Nascent Academic Entrepreneurs." *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation* 24(3): 167–177.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14657503211063896>.
- Meyer, Klaus E., Jing Li, and Keith D. Brouthers. 2023. "International Business in the Digital Age." *Journal of International Business Studies* 54(4): 577–589.  
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-023-00618-x>.
- Mirkov, Milica, and Jelena Vapa Tankosić. 2025. "Internal and External Recruitment Process in Support of Sustainable Business Development." *Journal of Agronomy, Technology and Engineering Management* 8(2): 1527–1535. <https://doi.org/10.55817/XLRE2200>.
- Morrison, Elizabeth W. 2002. "Newcomers' Relationships." *Academy of Management Journal* 45(6): 1149–1160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3069430>.
- Ollila, Susanna, and Anna Yström. 2025. "In-Between Spaces for Collaborative Innovation." In *Spaces for Creativity and Innovation Within and Across Organizational Boundaries*, edited by Anders Örténblad, 21–43. Emerald.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20250000091015>.
- Rousseau, Denise M. 1989. "Psychological and Implied Contracts." *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 2: 121–139. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01384942>.
- Routledge, Paul. 1996. "The Third Space as Critical Engagement." *Antipode* 28(4): 399–419.
- Saks, Alan M., Karen L. Uggerslev, and Neil E. Fassina. 2007. "Socialization Tactics and Newcomer Adjustment." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 70(3): 413–446.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2006.12.004>.

- Tajfel, Henri, and John C. Turner. 1985. "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior." In *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin, 7–24. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Tatham, Charles. 2025. "A Systematic Literature Review of Third Space Theory." *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 33(3): 867–886. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2023.2283798>.
- Thorpe, Karen, and Helen Partridge. 2024. "The Third Space in Higher Education." *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-024-00374-z>.
- Van Maanen, John, and Edgar H. Schein. 1979. "Toward a Theory of Organizational Socialization." *Research in Organizational Behavior* 1: 209–264.
- Whitchurch, Celia. 2008. "Shifting Identities and Blurring Boundaries: The Emergence of Third Space Professionals in UK Higher Education." *Higher Education Quarterly* 62(4): 377–396. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2008.00387.x>.
- Whitchurch, Celia. 2010. *Optimising the Potential of Third Space Professionals in UK Higher Education*. London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.
- Whitchurch, Celia. 2012. *Reconstructing Identities in Higher Education*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203098301>.
- Yu, Lin, Hui Ren, and Rita Singh. 2025. "Newcomers' Organizational Socialization." *International Journal of Management, Economics and Social Sciences* 14(1–2): 23–53. <https://doi.org/10.32327/IJMESS/14.1-2.2025.2>.

Zhao, Tian, Jinlong Liu, Anna M. Zawacki, Jennifer S. Michel, and Huajing Li. 2023. “The Effects of Newcomer Proactive Behaviors.” *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 96(1): 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12407>.

\*Chat GPT (artificial intelligence editing tool). Accessed December 14, 2025.  
<https://chatgpt.com>.

\* AI was used for translation, coding support, and editing assistance for readability purposes; all theoretical considerations, analytical decisions, and conclusions presented in this study are the author’s own.

# Appendices

<b>Appendix 1.</b> Interview Partner Sampling Information .....	35
<b>Appendix 2.</b> German–English Translation of Transcript Quotations .....	37
<b>Appendix 3.</b> Interview Guide (Main Questions Including Probes) .....	38
<b>Appendix 4.</b> Data Analysis Procedure: Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019) .....	41
<b>Appendix 5:</b> Analytic Theme Structure: Six Themes of Third-Space Dynamics .....	43

## Appendix 1. Interview Partner Sampling Information

Interviewee Code	Age	Gender	Time since Job Transition	Current Industry and Function	Previous Industry and Function
P01	27	Female	1 year	Automotive Industry; Product Communication	Consulting; Strategic Communications
P02	24	Male	2 years	Automotive Industry; Software Development	Research and Development; Software Development
P03	55	Female	2 years	Pharmaceutical Industry; Quality Management	Pharmaceutical Manufacturing; Production / Quality Control
P04	58	Male	1 year	Automotive Industry / Financial Services; Head of IT, In-House (Captive) Bank	Professional Services; Management Consulting (M&A Advisory)
P05	34	Female	5 months	Tech / Software Industry; Software Engineer in a Multinational Corporation	Tech / Software Industry; Software Developer in a Mid-Sized Company
P06	26	Male	8 months	Climate-Tech Industry / Renewable Energy; Product Marketing Manager at a Start-Up	Energy Sector; Strategic Marketing
P07	38	Female	3 months	Public Sector (Municipal Administration); Communications Officer	NGO Sector; Communications and External Communications Manager
P08	41	Female	1 year	Medical Technology; HR Business Partner	International Corporate Environment; HR Recruiting Specialist
P09	25	Female	9 months	Creative Agency for Sustainable Brand Communication; Creative Strategist	Small Creative Studio in Marketing; Copywriting
P10	45	Male	1.5 years	Non-Profit / Social Innovation; Project Manager	Corporate Sector; Development Manager
P11	27	Male	3 months	Automotive Industry; Communications (Focus on Supply Chain)	Media and Advertising; Marketing and Communications Specialist
P12	24	Female	2 months	Real Estate Industry; Architect Sales Assistant	Architecture Industry; Architect (Technical Drawing Tasks)

<b>P13</b>	41	Male	10 months	International Management Consulting; Senior Consultant	Mid-Sized Consulting Firm; Consultant
<b>P14</b>	52	Female	7 months	Tech Industry; Learning and Development	Tech Industry; Learning and Development
<b>P15</b>	36	Male	11 months	Social-Tech Start-Up; Product Manager	International Law Firm; In-House Corporate Lawyer
<b>P16</b>	46	Female	3 years	Insurance / Corporate Sector; Learning and Development	Public Education; School Teacher
<b>P17</b>	32	Male	1 year	EdTech; Employee in an Education-Technology Context	Dance / Performing Arts; Professional Dancer and Artistic Workshop Facilitator
<b>P18</b>	38	Male	9 months	Energy Sector; Project Coordinator for Sustainability and Process Innovation	Manufacturing; Logistics Supervisor
<b>P19</b>	33	Female	6 months	Mechanical Engineering; Junior Office Manager	Retail; Sales Assistant in a Fashion Store
<b>P20</b>	55	Female	2.5 years	Public Sector; Project Manager in Internal Communications	Marketing Agency; Team Assistant
<b>P21</b>	42	Male	11 months	Healthcare Services; Head of Customer Care & Service Excellence	Tech Company; Team Lead in Customer Operations
<b>P22</b>	27	Male	7 months	Startup in the Handwerk Sector; Founders Associate	Investment banking; Junior Analyst
<b>P23</b>	28	Male	9 months	Investment Banking, Analyst	Investment banking, Analyst
<b>P24</b>	34	Female	8 months	Tech Industry; Senior Content Marketing Manager	Non Profit Sector; Communications and Community Engagement
<b>P25</b>	31	Male	11 months	Consulting; Strategy Consultant	Corporate Finance; Junior Analyst
<b>P26</b>	28	Female	6 months	Consumer Goods Industry; Brand Marketing Manager	Digital Agency; Social Media Strategist
<b>P27</b>	35	Female	1 year	Consulting; Senior Organizational Transformation Consultant	Human Resources, Learning and Development Specialist
<b>P28</b>	31	Female	1.5 years	IT sector, Senior User Experience Researcher	IT sector, Frontend Developer

## Appendix 2. German–English Translation of Transcript Quotations

German Original Quote	English Translation
“Kulturschock” (P04)	“culture shock” (P04)
“[...] Begriffe verstanden, aber nicht deren eigentliche Bedeutung [...]” (P16)	“[...] understood the terms but not their actual meanings [...]” (P16)
“Ich habe immer wieder getestet, wie weit ich gehen kann und erst dann habe ich begonnen zu verstehen, wie viel Spielraum mir für mein eigenes Handeln zur Verfügung steht.” (P01)	“I kept testing how far I could go, and only then did I begin to understand the space available for my own actions.” (P01)
“Unternehmenssprache” (P04)	“organizational language” (P04)
“Ich möchte nicht alles ändern, aber bringe meine Arbeitsweisen selektiv ein.” (P04)	“I do not want to change everything, but I selectively bring my ways of working.” (P04)
“[...] Lernende, aber auch Lehrende [...]” (P05)	“[...] learners, but also teachers [...]” (P05)
“[...] eine Arbeitsweise, die meiner eigenen Art treu blieb.” (P01)	“[...] a way of working that stayed true to my own nature.” (P01)
“Die Zusammenarbeit war aber natürlich nicht immer harmonisch. Es gab Reibungen und verschiedene Meinungen, aber genau diese Spannungen waren dann produktiv.” (P24)	“Collaboration, however, was not always harmonious. There were frictions and differing opinions, yet it was precisely these tensions that became productive.” (P24)

### *Appendix 3. Interview Guide (Main Questions Including Probes)*

<b>Warm Up</b>
Could you describe your current role and position, and outline the main responsibilities you have?
<b>Motivation &amp; Expectations</b>
What motivated you to move to this new organization, and what expectations did you have when you made this decision? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Probe: Which factors weighed most in your decision?</li><li>▪ Probe: What did you hope to keep from your previous role, and what did you hope to change?</li></ul>
<b>First Experiences/ Impressions</b>
How would you describe your first weeks in the new environment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Probe: Was there anything that surprised you early on?</li><li>▪ Probe: Where did reality differ from your expectations?</li><li>▪ Probe: From your last workplace to this one, what changed most?</li></ul>
<b>Onboarding</b>
How was your onboarding structured? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Probe: What support helped you ramp up to productivity?</li><li>▪ Probe: Where were the gaps in clarity, tools, or access?</li><li>▪ Probe: How did you seek out information or connections yourself?</li></ul>
<b>Orientation and Uncertainty</b>
In your first weeks, which situations felt unclear, unfamiliar, or confusing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Probe: What made these moments challenging (e.g., norms, tools, expectations)?</li></ul> How did you navigate those situations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Probe: How did you decide what to do, and whom to involve?</li></ul>
<b>Social Integration</b>
Thinking about your social integration: what helped you feel accepted and part of the team?

- Probe: Which small gestures or interactions made you feel welcome (e.g., informal chats, shared jokes, check-ins)?
- Probe: Who was involved in your integration process (helpful or hindering) and in what ways?

What made it harder to feel accepted or included?

- Probe: Which small behaviors or interactions made you feel excluded?
- Probe: Who was involved (helpful or hindering), and in what ways?

### **Transfer & Adaptation**

How did your previous experiences, routines, or values shape collaboration with your new colleagues?

- Probe: What lessons from past challenges or missteps have helped you collaborate more effectively in this team?

Describe moments when your way of working or thinking was different from the team's approach.

- Probe: What exactly happened, and who was involved?
- Probe: What was negotiated (roles, routines, tools, boundaries)?

After those moments, what did you choose to adapt, and what did you keep from your usual ways of working or thinking?

- Probe: What guided your choices about what to keep vs. adapt?
- Probe: Can you think of a situation that shows how you balanced fitting in and staying true to your own style?

### **Agency**

Can you tell me about situations where you suggested or introduced changes to existing practices?

- Probe: What prompted you to do so?
- Probe: What were you hoping to improve (speed, quality, clarity, ownership, handoffs)?
- Probe: Who did you involve early, and why them?

### **Power Dynamics**

How, if at all, did power dynamics in the team influence your ability to contribute and be heard?

- Probe: How did these dynamics affect how confident or cautious you felt in contributing?
- Probe: Were there moments when hierarchy or seniority helped or limited your ability to speak up?

### **Collaborative Approaches and Co-Creation**

When did collaboration with your new team lead to shared learning, new approaches or solving problems together?

- Probe: What exactly improved (cycle time, outcomes, relationships)?
- Probe: What made it possible (people, routines, leadership, tools)?
- Probe: If no outcome: What potential did you notice, and what would have helped to realize it?

### **Identity Development**

How, if at all, has your self-perception in your professional role changed during this transition?

- Probe: What moments most shaped this change?
- Probe: How did this affect your role in the team?
- Probe: In what ways do you think others' perceptions of you have shifted?

### **Sustainable Impact**

Looking back, what impact has this job change had on you, your team, and your organization?

- Probe: What, if anything, endures from these changes (practices, relationships, outcomes)?

### **Open Reflection / Uncaptured Aspects**

Is there anything we haven't talked about that you feel is important to your experience of this job transition?

## *Appendix 4. Data Analysis Procedure: Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019)*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Description (Braun and Clarke 2006)</b>	<b>Application in this study</b>
<b>Phase 1: Familiarization with the Data</b>	Initial immersion in the data by reading and re-reading the material and noting first analytical observations.	All interviews were transcribed verbatim and, where necessary, translated from German into English with the use of AI and manually checked for accuracy. The transcripts were read multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences of job transitions and emerging in-between spaces, while initial reflexive notes on potential meanings and links to Third Space Theory were recorded.
<b>Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes</b>	Systematically producing initial codes that capture relevant features of the data across the entire dataset.	An inductive, data-driven coding process was applied, supported by AI-based language tools. Statements were coded line by line and organized in an Excel sheet. Codes were based on semantic content. Concepts from Third Space Theory (e.g., ambiguity, negotiation, mimicry) served only as sensitizing concepts that guided attention but did not predetermine categories.
<b>Phase 3: Searching for Themes</b>	Collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each candidate theme.	Related codes were grouped into broader candidate themes that reflected recurring patterns in participants' accounts. At this stage, tentative relationships between these themes and the research question on socialization and value creation in Third Spaces were outlined.
<b>Phase 4: Reviewing Themes</b>	Checking whether the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the full dataset and refining the thematic map.	The preliminary themes were repeatedly compared with the coded data segments and the dataset as a whole. Themes that proved too heterogeneous were split, while overlapping themes were merged or discarded. Decisions and evolving interpretations were documented through reflexive memos and discussed in peer-debriefing sessions to enhance analytical rigor.
<b>Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes</b>	Refining the specifics of each theme, identifying its core meaning, and generating clear names.	For each theme, the analytical focus and contribution to understanding Third Spaces in job transitions were

clarified. This process resulted in six overarching analytical themes: Ambiguity, Team and Power Dynamics, Negotiation, Mimicry and Translation, Identity Work and Belonging, and Hybridization and Co-creation. Each defined by a concise description and a set of representative sub-aspects.

**Phase 6: Producing the Report**

Finalizing the analysis and integrating the findings into a coherent narrative.

Findings chapter, the finalized themes were integrated into an analytic narrative that links participants' accounts with Third Space Theory and the guiding research question. Illustrative quotes were selected for each theme to demonstrate how newcomers and existing team members co-create in-between spaces during job transitions and how these dynamics shape socialization processes and organizational value creation.

## *Appendix 5: Analytic Theme Structure: Six Themes of Third-Space Dynamics*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Conceptual Description</b>
<b>Ambiguity</b>	Bhabha (1994) describes cultural encounters as marked by ambivalence and the instability of signs, which unsettles fixed meanings and opens space for reinterpretation. In this study, ambiguity in job transitions reflects such a Third-Space condition: expectations, routines, and roles are not yet stabilized, creating a moment in which newcomers and incumbents can question assumptions and explore alternative interpretations.
<b>Team and Power Dynamics</b>	For Bhabha (1994), Third Space emerges “under the eye of power” (p. 120), meaning that asymmetries shape who can speak, be heard, and define meaning. In this study, team and power dynamics capture how hierarchies and informal alliances condition newcomers’ ability to participate in meaning-making, thereby shaping whether the in-between space becomes inclusive or marginalizing.
<b>Negotiation</b>	Bhabha (1994) conceptualizes Third Space as a site of discursive negotiation, where cultural positions and meanings are continuously re-articulated rather than transferred intact. Here, negotiation reflects how newcomers and incumbents actively mediate expectations and interpretations, using the transitional space to adjust norms and co-define how work is understood.
<b>Mimicry and Translation</b>	In Bhabha’s terms (1994), mimicry is an “almost the same, but not quite” mode of imitation (p. 89) that subtly shifts meaning, while translation is a process of rewriting cultural signs to generate new readings. In this study, mimicry and translation describe how newcomers selectively adopt and adapt team routines, thereby preserving surface forms while gradually altering their meaning and enactment.
<b>Identity Work and Belonging</b>	Bhabha (1994) emphasizes that identity is never complete, but formed in the interstitial spaces of cultural encounter, as a relational and negotiated process. This study interprets job transitions as such Third Spaces in which newcomers’ identities evolve through recognition, silence, and everyday interaction, shaping their emerging sense of belonging and legitimacy.
<b>Hybridization and Co-creation</b>	Hybridity, for Bhabha (1994), denotes the emergence of a new third form that exceeds its origins through cultural encounter. In this study, hybridization refers to how newcomers’ prior repertoires combine with established team routines, producing new collaborative practices and expanded ways of working that go beyond either original pattern.