



Workers and the Pursuit of Social Objectives in Organizations

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Workers and the Pursuit of Social Objectives in Organizations

Presented by **Julie Yen**

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Date: April 23, 2024

WORKERS AND THE PURSUIT OF SOCIAL OBJECTIVES IN ORGANIZATIONS

A dissertation presented

by

Julie Yen

to

Julie Battilana
Lakshmi Ramarajan
Daniel Schneider

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of Organizational Behavior

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WORKERS AND THE PURSUIT OF SOCIAL OBJECTIVES IN ORGANIZATIONS

Abstract

This dissertation presents three papers that explore intersections between workers and the pursuit of social objectives in organizations. Organizations, especially for-profit companies, face increasing pressure to account for their influence on society and the environment. In the Introduction, I situate workers within this context, first as intended beneficiaries of organizations' social interventions, and second as the people who carry out the work of pursuing social goals. Chapters 1 and 2 draw on an 11-month ethnographic case study of TableTech, a socially oriented start-up that implemented a four-day workweek and a flexible work policy with the aim of enhancing worker well-being. Chapter 1, "Navigating Tensions Between Well-being and Productivity: How Win-Win Framing Contributed to the End of a 4-day Workweek Trial," investigates how the simultaneous pursuit of productivity alongside worker well-being shaped contestation over whether to continue TableTech's four-day workweek. Chapter 2, "Changing the Workweek to Enhance Worker Well-being: Shorter or More Flexible?", explores how two organizational interventions—the four-day workweek and a flexible work policy—differently shaped workers' time use and well-being, suggesting that a shorter workweek may have advantages over flexible work in enabling workers to manage work-life conflict. Chapter 3, "Defining Who You Are by Whom You Serve? Strategies for Prosocial-Professional Identity Integration with Clients" (co-authored with Lakshmi Ramarajan), draws on interviews with 84 architects and designers to identify strategies through which individuals integrate their prosocial and professional identities in their work, with implications for power relations between professionals and their clients.

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INTRODUCTION

A confluence of social, environmental, and political crises is increasingly salient in the 21st Century. Inequality is on the rise; in the United States, for example, the compensation of the typical worker grew by 18.1% between 1978 and 2021, while pay for the top 0.1% of earners grew 385%, and CEO pay grew by 1,460% (Bivens and Kandra, 2022). For many people, working conditions have become more precarious, with implications not only for financial security but also for health and well-being (Kalleberg, 2011). Climate change poses an increasingly visible challenge to societies around the world (Klein, 2014; IPCC, 2021), as do political instability and threats to democracy (Freedom House, 2022).

Organizations have played a key role in generating and perpetuating these problems. Research shows that they are a primary mechanism through which inequality is created and perpetuated (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt, 2019; Amis, Mair, and Munir, 2020), that for-profit companies in particular have played a major role in creating the climate crisis (Slawinski et al., 2017; Wright and Nyberg, 2017), and that organizations shape the political sphere and our governments (Barley, 2010; Adler et al., 2023). But organizations do not only create problems—they also can and must play a central role in solving them, given their immense influence in shaping our world.

In this context, organizations, and especially for-profit companies, face rising expectations to positively impact society and the environment, and researchers are turning their attention to understanding how organizations can successfully pursue social and environmental objectives in addition to financial ones (Kaplan, 2019; Henderson, 2020; Serafeim, 2022). Many areas of research have developed to investigate organizations' pursuit of social and

environmental aims, such as the literatures on corporate social responsibility (Margolis and Walsh, 2003; Carroll and Brown, 2018), stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Freeman, Parmar, and Martin, 2020), hybrid organizing (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Battilana, Besharov, and Mitzinneck, 2017), social innovation (Beckman et al., 2023), social change agents within organizations (Heucher et al., 2024), sustainability (Bansal and Song, 2017), environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues, and more. These literatures explore a wide range of organizational activities, such as providing services to low-income customers, making charitable donations, and reducing pollution and carbon emissions. Broadly, they share an interest in the intersection between organizations and society, though they lack a shared definition of what constitutes a social objective. Indeed, there are many understandings of the term “social” (Barman, 2016: 7–8), and parties with different viewpoints and values may reasonably disagree about whether a goal ought to be considered a social one.

In this dissertation, I conceptualize social objectives as goals that aim to enhance the welfare of human beings, and I contribute to research on organizations’ pursuit of social objectives by focusing on the role of workers, which has at times been overlooked. Across three chapters, I investigate how people and organizations pursue goals that they understand as enhancing human welfare. I explore two ways through which workers are central to the impact that organizations have on society: first, as intended beneficiaries of organizations’ socially oriented aims, and second, as the individuals who carry out socially oriented work in organizations.

Worker Well-being as an Organizational Social Objective

How organizations treat workers is one of the primary ways through which they impact individuals and society, but workers are often overlooked in conversations about corporate social

performance and sustainability. Research on these topics, as well as companies' sustainability and social responsibility initiatives, typically focus more on the natural environment or on social constituencies external to the organization than on workers (Pfeffer, 2010; G. Spreitzer, Porath, and Gibson, 2012; Yen, Battilana, and Aguirre, 2022). Yet work organizations have a profound influence on multiple dimensions of workers' lives, including their health and well-being, their financial circumstances, and their lives outside of work (Kalleberg, 2011; Anderson, 2017; Pfeffer, 2018; Lovejoy et al., 2021). As such, organizations have significant influence over both individuals and society via the workplace policies and practices they adopt.

Troublingly, recent research highlights the tendency for modern management practices to have negative consequences for workers' well-being. Despite advances in health and safety regulations, work still poses risks to many workers' physical and mental health (Schnall, Dobson, and Roskam, 2009; Pfeffer, 2018; Rosado-Solomon et al., 2023). Studies of service sector workers show that common scheduling practices have deleterious consequences for workers and their families, such as psychological distress, poor sleep quality, unhappiness, and unstable childcare arrangements (Schneider and Harknett, 2019; Harknett, Schneider, and Luhr, 2020). And precarity, overwork, and work-life conflict have been shown to negatively impact workers in many occupations across the class spectrum. Low-wage workers often suffer from both overwork and a lack of sufficient hours to earn a living wage (Kalleberg, 2011; McCallum, 2020). Meanwhile, white collar professionals suffer from chronic time strain, as technological advances have exacerbated a culture of work devotion and "always-on" expectations (Schor, 1993; Blair-Loy, 2003; Moen et al., 2013; Beckman and Mazmanian, 2020).

The first two chapters of this dissertation investigate how organizations can help to address some of the work-related problems facing workers, with a particular focus on time.

Many workers today live in a near-constant state of feeling overloaded and overwhelmed, lacking the time they need to lead flourishing lives (Moen et al., 2013; B. Schulte, 2014; Kelly and Moen, 2020; Beckman and Mazmanian, 2020). This time scarcity is not only a problem for individuals and their families; it is also a problem for society, because citizens who lack free time are unable to build healthy, meaningful social relationships and cannot engage constructively in a democratic society (Rose, 2016; McCallum, 2020; Herzog, 2024). I investigate one organization's attempt to intervene in this problem through an ethnographic case study of TableTech, a start-up that implemented a four-day workweek and a flexible work policy with the aim of enhancing workers' well-being. Over the course of 11 months, I followed TableTech as the company implemented a 4-day workweek, rolled it back, and replaced it with a work policy that encouraged "flexible" work on Fridays.

The idea that well-being interventions can enhance both worker well-being and organizational performance has led many organizations to frame them as a "win-win," suggesting that there is a "business case" for well-being. In Chapter 1, "Navigating Tensions Between Well-being and Productivity: How Win-Win Framing Contributed to the End of a 4-day Workweek Trial," I draw on the case of TableTech to investigate how such a win-win approach shapes the trajectory of these interventions. TableTech implemented the 4-day workweek with the dual goals of improving well-being (a social goal) and improving productivity (a financial goal). There was consensus that the intervention improved well-being, and administrative data showed neither large increases nor large decreases in productivity; however, promoters and resisters contested whether the intervention was successful and should be continued, drawing on two different narratives. Promoters argued that the 4-day workweek was indeed a win-win, while resisters argued that the 4-day workweek was a tradeoff between well-being and productivity. I

show how ambiguity in the measurement and the meaning of productivity fostered this debate, with ambiguity enabling resisters and constraining promoters. This study contributes to scholarship on worker well-being in organizations by showing that the use of a win-win framing to motivate well-being interventions can contribute to their fragility.

Chapter 2, “Changing the Workweek to Enhance Worker Well-being: Shorter or More Flexible?”, turns to the question of how the two different organizational approaches that TableTech took to addressing the problem of work-life conflict differently shaped workers’ experiences and well-being. Drawing on TableTech’s sequential implementation of a four-day workweek and a flexible work policy, I find that a shorter workweek better enabled workers to overcome both psychological and structural barriers to reducing their worktime. I identify enabling features of a shorter workweek and show that a shorter workweek was more supportive of work-life balance and well-being because it enabled psychological disengagement from work, increased the quality of non-work time, and enabled workers to engage not only in caregiving and domestic labor but also leisure activities. This study contributes to scholarship on work-life conflict, work redesign, and worker well-being by comparing the benefits of flexible work and a shorter workweek and by highlighting the importance of free time as distinct from non-work time.

The Role of Workers in Pursuing Social Objectives

Chapter 3, “Defining Who You Are by Whom You Serve? Strategies for Prosocial-Professional Identity Integration with Clients,” shifts to consider a different perspective on the role of workers in the pursuit of social objectives, as well as a different empirical context.¹ Whereas Chapters 1 and 2 consider how organizations can adopt enhancing the lives of workers

¹ This paper is forthcoming in *Administrative Science Quarterly* (Ramarajan and Yen, 2024).

as a social aim, Chapter 3 considers how individuals who aspire to create positive social impact carry out work they hope will benefit others in the context of the architecture profession. This chapter, co-authored with Lakshmi Ramarajan, contributes to scholarship on the role that individuals play in shaping organizations' pursuit of social change (Meyerson and Scully, 1995; Briscoe and Gupta, 2016; Gond and Moser, 2021; Heucher et al., 2024).

Drawing on interviews with 84 architects who aspire to make a positive contribution to society—people for whom a prosocial identity as one who helps and benefits others is an important part of their self-understandings—this paper investigates how professionals integrate their prosocial and professional identities as they pursue social aims. We show how in some professional contexts, prosocial identity and professional identity can come into conflict, because serving elite clients is considered the apex of professional achievement but is at odds with some individuals' desire to work with lower status clients. We develop theory about how professionals navigate these tensions, and with what consequences for their work with clients. Specifically, we identify four prosocial–professional identity integration strategies that combine different approaches to client status and the knowledge and skills viewed as required in one's professional work. We reveal how these strategies shape professionals' approach to power relations with their clients in ways that maintain or diminish the professional's power in the professional-client relationship. We further find that professionals with marginalized social identities are more likely to embrace working with low-status clients in ways that aim to reduce power differentials between professionals and clients. Our findings highlight the role of status in shaping how professionals approach doing work that they believe will benefit society, with potential implications for inequality within and external to organizations.

Together, the papers presented here aim to highlight the central role of workers in the relationship between organizations and the social good. Organizations can shape the world through their impact on workers' lives, and in turn, individual workers are the people who enable organizations to realize social aims. Chapters 1 and 2 explore a case in which an organization's leaders recognized their power to shape the lives of workers and explicitly adopted improving workers' lives as part of the organization's social mission. Yet like many organizations, TableTech struggled to sustain the pursuit of its social goals. My research drawing on TableTech's experience helps to extend our knowledge about the processes through which social interventions—specifically an intervention to improve worker well-being—are contested in the organizations that implement them, and to deepen our understanding of how specific organizational practices shape workers' experiences. Chapter 3 highlights individual workers' ability to shape the content and the meaning of prosocial action at work, and sheds light on the interplay between individuals' personal identities and aspirations and the societal, professional, and organizational contexts in which they are embedded. I conclude by highlighting common themes and directions for further research raised by the studies presented.

CHAPTER 1

Navigating Tensions Between Well-being and Productivity:

How Win-Win Framing Contributed to the End of a 4-day Workweek Trial

The seductive idea that well-being interventions can enhance both worker well-being and organizational performance has led many organizations to frame them as a “win-win,” suggesting that there is a “business case” for worker well-being (Bailyn, Fletcher, and Kolb, 1997; Hahn et al., 2010; Williams, Berdahl, and Vandello, 2016; Kaplan, 2020). Research shows that organizational work redesign interventions to support well-being can increase job satisfaction, productivity, and collaboration and can reduce work-life conflict, stress, and turnover (Moen, Kelly, and Hill, 2011; Perlow, 2012; Kelly et al., 2014; Moen et al., 2016; Fox et al., 2022; Kesavan et al., 2022; Schor et al., 2023). This evidence suggests that at least in some cases, well-being interventions can be mutually beneficial to both workers and firms. In the face of mounting public pressure to better support workers, many organizations are implementing well-being interventions with the hope of capturing these “win-win” benefits (Beauregard and Henry, 2009: 10; Ton, 2023).

Though proponents of social action often use idea that an initiative can generate both social and instrumental outcomes to justify its implementation, research has recently suggested that this approach is not universally beneficial (e.g., Georgeac and Rattan, 2023). Researchers have argued that organizations that adopt a win-win approach still struggle with tensions and tradeoffs between social and financial aims, as such conflicts are inherent in the pursuit of social goals (Hahn et al., 2010; Kaplan, 2019, 2020; King and Pucker, 2021; Battilana, Obloj, et al., 2022). Research on organizations that simultaneously pursue social and financial goals shows

that doing so successfully is challenging and involves carefully managing the conflict and contestation that can arise within the organization (Glynn, 2000; Pache and Santos, 2010; Ashforth and Reingen, 2014; Battilana et al., 2015). This research suggests that, though the idea of a win-win initiative may be appealing, the process of realizing win-win benefits from a social initiative may be far from straightforward.

To date, however, we know little about how using a win-win approach to motivate a social intervention shapes the processes that unfold within the organizations implementing them. In the case of work redesign interventions targeting benefits for workers and for organizations, research suggests that win-win benefits are within reach (Kelly and Moen, 2020; Kesavan et al., 2022), which might suggest that a win-win approach would encourage organizations to implement and sustain these interventions. Yet at the same time, research on the simultaneous pursuit of social and financial goals in organizations suggests that realizing these benefits is challenging (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Battilana, Obloj, et al., 2022), suggesting that a win-win approach might contribute to conflict within an organization. This paper therefore asks: how does having dual social and financial goals shape the trajectory of well-being interventions?

I investigate this question through an ethnographic study of “TableTech,” a company that piloted and later rolled back a four-day workweek (hereafter 4DWW). TableTech implemented this intervention with the dual goals of improving well-being (a social goal) and improving productivity (a financial goal). Yet the company ended its 4DWW despite clear evidence that it improved well-being, a lack of clear evidence that it diminished productivity, and support from workers and the CEO. I draw on interview, observation, survey, and archival data collected over the course of 11 months to analyze how the process of making sense of and evaluating the 4DWW unfolded within the organization.

I found that how people at TableTech negotiated the joint pursuit of a social goal and a financial goal played a key role in shaping contestation over the future of the 4DWW. The CEO used a win-win framing to motivate the 4DWW, and I found that promoters and resisters of the 4DWW developed narratives that aimed to uphold or refute the 4DWW's win-win potential to contest the success and the future of the initiative. Though there was consensus that the 4DWW improved well-being, promoters argued that the 4DWW also improved productivity, while resisters argued that there was a problem with productivity and that the 4DWW was therefore not a win-win as promised, but rather a tradeoff between worker and firm interests. I further found that ambiguity in the measurement and the meaning of productivity fostered this debate, with ambiguity enabling resisters to generate doubt and concern about the effect of the 4DWW on the business and constraining promoters in their ability to advocate for the 4DWW's success. I show how these dynamics contributed to the rollback of the 4DWW, despite continuing support from the CEO, his co-founder, and almost all of TableTech's employees.

To build theory from the case of TableTech, I integrate scholarship on redesigning work to support worker well-being (Perlow and Kelly, 2014) with scholarship on the simultaneous pursuit of social and financial objectives in organizations (Battilana and Lee, 2014). My findings suggest that to deepen our understanding of why work redesign is difficult to sustain, it is important to interrogate how organizations manage tensions between social and financial goals. Specifically, I build on research highlighting the unavoidability of social-financial tensions and tradeoffs in the pursuit of social objectives (Kaplan, 2019, 2020; Battilana, Obloj, et al., 2022) to show how these tensions can shape the trajectory of a well-being intervention that aims to generate both social and financial benefits. This study contributes to scholarship on the fragility of well-being interventions (Williams, Berdahl, and Vandello, 2016; H. Kim, Bailyn, and Kolb,

2017; Kelly and Moen, 2020) by showing how resisters can mobilize social-financial tensions to generate uncertainty and derail the successful pursuit of a social goal, thus tracing the political dynamics and power struggles that shape whether these interventions are sustained. It also contributes to scholarship on the limits of win-win thinking in the pursuit of social objectives (Hahn et al., 2010; Kaplan, 2020; Ely and Thomas, 2020; Battilana, Obloj, et al., 2022) by showing how the use of a win-win framing can itself contribute to the challenge of sustaining a social initiative.

ORGANIZATIONAL INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT WORKER WELL-BEING AND THE CHALLENGE OF DUAL GOALS

The Promise of Dual Agenda Work Redesign Interventions

In response to rising recognition of their profound influence on workers' health and well-being, organizations face pressure from workers and the public better support workers (P. A. Schulte et al., 2015; Pfeffer, 2018; Rosado-Solomon et al., 2023). Research shows that organizations can positively affect multiple dimensions of worker well-being through work redesign interventions (Perlow and Kelly, 2014; Lovejoy et al., 2021; Fox et al., 2022). Work redesign is implemented at the organizational, as opposed to individual, level and "shifts the focus from asking workers to adapt to their work environment regardless of how work is organized to reshaping work conditions and environments in ways that support employee well-being" (Lovejoy et al., 2021: 1788). In this way, work redesign is distinct from accommodation models, which make exceptions to organizational policies or norms for individual workers (Perlow and Kelly, 2014). Research has shown that individuals who receive flexible work accommodations face career penalties, and that fear of such penalties prevents workers from using accommodations available to them (Reid, 2015; Glass and Noonan, 2016; Gonsalves,

2020). By contrast, organization-level interventions have the potential to benefit all workers and to mitigate concerns that new work practices will penalize individuals. This paper focuses on work redesign interventions that seek to support worker well-being by implementing flexible work policies and changing scheduling practices (Fox et al., 2022).

Work redesign interventions often adopt what scholars have termed a “dual agenda” that combines worker and firm goals (Bailyn, Fletcher, and Kolb, 1997; Perlow and Kelly, 2014; Kelly and Moen, 2020; Ton, 2023; Kossek et al., 2023). Early, ground-breaking work linking these goals argued that though “traditional thinking tends to pit employee goals and business goals against each other,” it is possible to overcome this tension, stating, “the solution to this dilemma lies in *connecting* the two issues—people’s personal lives and strategic business issues—rather than treating them as a trade-off” (Bailyn, Fletcher, and Kolb, 1997: 11-12). In developing their model of work redesign, Perlow and Kelly (2014: 113) describe work redesign as espousing “the dual goals of improving work and personal lives” and discuss how it is often promoted to leaders as benefitting the business. For example, the Predictable Time Off initiative at the Boston Consulting Group sought to “simultaneously improve the work process and consultants’ lives,” and ROWE aimed “to propose changes that help the team and individuals reach their objectives while also benefitting employees’ personal lives” (Perlow and Kelly, 2014: 114-117). The underlying logic here is that workers who experience less work-life conflict are healthier, better rested, and happier, and will therefore be more engaged, effective, and efficient at work, which will in turn improve collaboration and creativity and reduce turnover (Moen, Kelly, and Hill, 2011; Perlow, 2012). Ultimately, it is anticipated that these benefits will enhance organizational performance.

Research on work redesign interventions has demonstrated that they can indeed generate “win-win” benefits, with prominent initiatives that aimed to improve well-being by enhancing flexibility (i.e., increasing control over when and where one works) generating positive outcomes for both workers and firms. The Results Only Work Environment (ROWE) intervention, which was implemented in the headquarters of Best Buy, aimed to rethink the organization’s culture and expectations to focus on work outcomes rather than time-based expectations (Ressler and Thompson, 2008). Researchers evaluating ROWE found that it enhanced schedule control and reduced work-family conflict, increased health-related behaviors (including significantly increasing sleep on work nights), and improved well-being (Kelly, Moen, and Tranby, 2011; Moen et al., 2011). It also reduced turnover (Moen, Kelly, and Hill, 2011), an important outcome for organizations. The STAR intervention, a group-randomized trial in the IT division of a Fortune 500 company, sought to give employees more control over work time and increase support for their personal lives. It also achieved improvements in well-being and reduced work-life conflict while simultaneously reducing turnover intention (Kelly et al., 2014; Moen et al., 2016; Kelly and Moen, 2020). The potential for “win-win” outcomes is exemplified by a recent paper showing that responsible scheduling practices improved both working conditions and financial performance at The Gap, Inc. The study, a randomized trial, showed that responsible scheduling practices raised store productivity by 5.1 percent by increasing sales, decreasing labor costs, and improving employee effort, with the authors arguing that “better schedules for employees can be better for business, too,” offering “evidence that it is possible to do well by doing good” (Kesavan et al., 2022).

In recent years, well-being interventions that reduce work time—including four-day workweeks, of which my empirical case is one example—have similarly garnered attention for

their potential to benefit workers and firms. Recent large-scale trials of four-day workweeks in Iceland (Haraldsson and Kellam, 2021), the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States (Schor et al., 2022, 2023) have found substantial benefits for workers, such as reduced stress and work-life conflict. They also found that performance, as measured by revenue (Schor et al., 2022, 2023) and productivity, as measured by caseload and service provision metrics (Haraldsson and Kellam, 2021), were stable or improved. Together with the literature on well-being interventions more broadly, these trials indicate that it is possible to improve worker well-being—and possibly also to benefit the organizations that employ them—by changing how work is organized.

Potential Challenges of a Win-Win Approach

Despite these encouraging findings, a separate stream of research on the simultaneous pursuit of social and financial goals in organizations suggests that achieving the promise of the dual agenda may not be straightforward. The idea of a “win-win”—the promise that an intervention will generate positive outcomes for both workers and firms, i.e., will generate both social and financial benefits—is associated with many kinds of social interventions beyond work redesign, both in research and in practice. This framing, also called a “business case,” “shared value,” “purpose and profit,” or “doing well by doing good” approach, arose within a business and cultural context that espouses shareholder value maximization as the taken-for-granted purpose of the firm (Friedman, 1970; Fligstein and Goldstein, 2022; for a discussion of the rise of these ideas, see Lynn, 2021). In this context, the pursuit of financial value is accepted as a firm’s core goal, and social goals are commonly considered to be at odds with financial value creation (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Battilana, Obloj, et al., 2022). Echoing the dual agenda view, a win-win perspective pushes back against the idea that social and financial goals are in tension

and argues that it is possible for the pursuit of social goals to enhance profits (Carroll and Shabana, 2010; M. E. Porter and Kramer, 2011; Kaul and Luo, 2018; Lynn, 2021; Serafeim, 2022). Today this perspective is commonly used to justify social interventions on topics ranging from diversity to environmental sustainability (Van der Byl and Slawinski, 2015; Georgeac and Rattan, 2023).

Yet organizations espousing a win-win approach still struggle with tensions and tradeoffs (King and Pucker, 2021). Scholars have argued that it is important to acknowledge and account for the conflicts and trade-offs inherent in the pursuit of social objectives (Kaplan, 2019, 2020; Battilana, Obloj, et al., 2022), suggesting that “trade-offs and conflicts between economic, environmental and social aspects in corporate management and performance represent the rule rather than the exception” (Hahn et al., 2010: 218). Research on the simultaneous pursuit of social and financial goals shows that organizations must carefully negotiate conflicts between their dual objectives (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Smith and Besharov, 2019). These findings underscore that though sustaining dual goals is possible, the tensions and tradeoffs organizations inevitably face often generate intraorganizational conflict and contestation (Glynn, 2000; Pache and Santos, 2010; Ashforth and Reingen, 2014). For example, in organizations that aim to provide services to disadvantaged groups and generate profit, tensions can arise between those who are more focused on the organization’s social aims and those who are more focused on financial performance (e.g., Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Battilana et al., 2015).

In the case of well-being initiatives, a win-win framing elides the potential for conflict between worker well-being and productivity, and for power struggles over these dual goals. Indeed, real-world evidence from organizations’ implementation of well-being interventions shows that proving that a win-win is successful is not sufficient to convince firms to adopt or

sustain well-being interventions (Williams, Berdahl, and Vandello, 2016). For example, ROWE had documented benefits for well-being (Moen et al., 2016) and reduced turnover (Moen, Kelly, and Hill, 2011), but Best Buy ended it after a leadership change, which critics attributed to “a short-term ‘get tough’ mindset” (Valcour, 2013). In their book on the STAR intervention, Kelly and Moen (2020: 191) discuss how both managers and employees believed STAR worked, yet it ended after a merger. The end of these seemingly successful interventions points to potential for conflict over work redesign interventions to arise even when they appear to be realizing the benefits of a dual agenda.

Moreover, conflict over well-being interventions can arise because worker interests like family and rest are at odds with the ideal worker norm and cultures of overwork (Acker, 1990; Blair-Loy, 2003; Malhotra et al., 2021). Previous research has shown that these norms are important to the identities of many high-status professionals, who may defend them and resist change efforts, generating conflict over efforts to implement work redesign or other worker-oriented changes (Kellogg, 2009; Williams, Berdahl, and Vandello, 2016; Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020). For example, two departments withdrew from ROWE at Best Buy after “high-status men vociferously challenged” it (Kelly et al., 2010: 297). Similarly, efforts to reduce the work hours of surgery residents (Kellogg, 2009) and to change work culture to improve gender equality (Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020) faced significant resistance from high-status organizational members that impeded successful implementation.

Taken together, prior research points to both the promise and the challenges of adopting a win-win approach combining social and financial goals. Yet how the dynamics around such an approach unfold within organizations that adopt work redesign interventions with the aim of

generating benefits for both workers and the organization remains largely unknown. This study begins to investigate this question.

METHOD

Drawing on interview, observation, survey, and archival data from the case of “TableTech,” a company that implemented and rolled back a four-day workweek (4DWW), I build theory on how the pursuit of dual social and financial goals shapes how well-being interventions are contested. I take an ethnographic, inductive approach, as appropriate for building theory in a nascent area of research (Edmondson and McManus, 2007; Charmaz, 2014).

Research Setting: TableTech’s 4DWW Trial

The setting for this study is TableTech, a socially-oriented start-up that makes software for the restaurant and hospitality industry. TableTech is headquartered in the United States, with a fully remote, distributed workforce. During the study period, it had recently closed a Series A funding round, which was led by an impact investment firm. The company was growing rapidly, doubling in size from 30 to 63 workers over the course of six months.

TableTech is a suitable research site for studying how a company pursued a worker-focused initiative with dual goals for several reasons. First, it actively tried to build a “people first” culture, making it a fruitful setting for studying how well-being interventions can be contested even in a supportive context. TableTech’s co-founders frequently discussed topics such as well-being, work-life balance, and flexibility, actively encouraged employees to take time off, and had adopted an unlimited paid time off policy that they viewed as supporting workers. Second, both social and financial goals were highly salient at TableTech. The founders and employees considered TableTech to be a purpose-driven company, and the company’s formal

mission was to improve the lives of workers in the food industry and to improve efficiency and sustainability. The CEO described the 4DWW as a way to enact this mission for the benefit of the company's own employees. Third, at the same time, being a start-up with minimal revenue and limited funding heightened financial pressure, exposing tensions between social and financial goals.

In this context, the implementation of a 4DWW was viewed as a significant initiative, but one that was consistent with the established culture and values of the firm. The CEO decided to trial a 4DWW in mid-2022. The 4DWW policy was described to employees as reducing the expected workweek from five days to four. Employees were encouraged, though not required, to take Fridays off. Pay, workload, and job expectations did not change.

TableTech is organized into three core teams (Sales, Engineering, and Customer Success), each of which took a slightly different approach to implementation. In Sales, managers told workers that they could take time off on Friday if they were on track to hit their weekly activity targets (number of calls and emails), which they tracked using a common customer relationship management platform. On the Engineering team, work groups were asked to set weekly goals and were permitted to take Friday off if they achieved their goals for the week. On the Customer Success team, most team members took Fridays off, but at least one person worked each Friday to ensure five-day availability to clients.

TableTech announced the 4DWW trial in June, and it began in August. In the first months, most employees and the co-founders expressed excitement and positivity, though some employees expressed skepticism about whether the 4DWW would work. The three executives who later argued to end the 4DWW expressed skepticism and resistance mixed with interest and optimism; all agreed to implement the trial. In October (three months into the trial), triangulation

between interview and survey data showed that 91 percent of TableTech employees were participating in the 4DWW. Of those 91 percent, about two thirds were taking a day off all or most weeks, and about one third were taking a day off about half of the time or working half days on Fridays. Table 1.1 presents a breakdown of 4DWW participation by team.

Table 1.1: Participation in 4DWW by Team

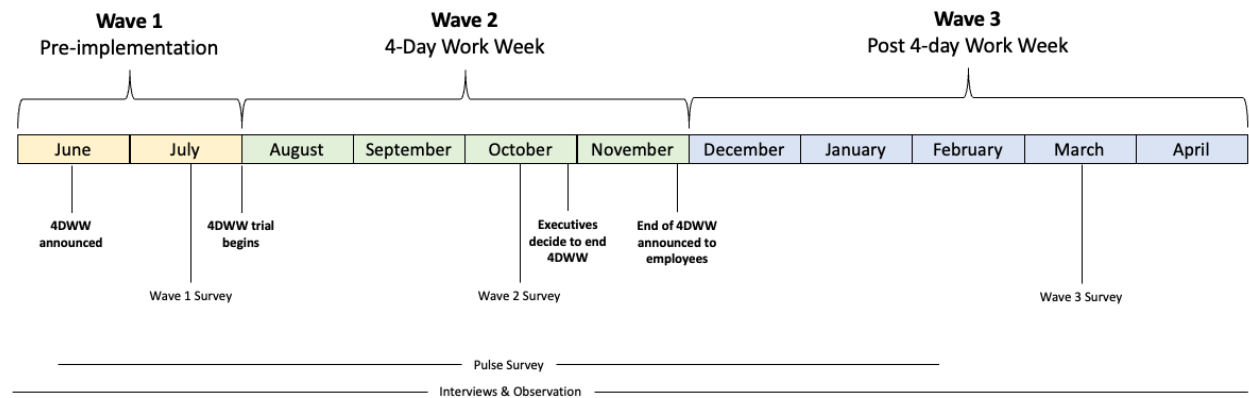
	YES (4DWW all or most weeks)	PARTIAL (4DWW about half the time or less, or working half days)	NO (not participating in 4DWW)
All (n=64)	37 (58%)	21 (33%)	6 (9%)
Leadership (n=5)	2 (40%)	0 (0%)	3 (60%)
Sales (n=11)	3 (27%)	6 (55%)	2 (18%)
Engineering (n=35)	25 (71%)	10 (29%)	0 (0%)
Customer Success (n=9)	5 (56%)	4 (44%)	0 (0%)
Other (n=4)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	1 (25%)

This table uses interviews, responses to the Employee Experience Survey (EES), and responses to the Pulse Survey to summarize the extent to which employees on each team participated in the 4DWW during the month of October. “Yes” was assigned for employees who verbally indicated they took a day off all or most weeks, and/or reported a 4-day week in 3 or 4 of the last four weeks in the EES. “Partial” was assigned for employees who verbally indicated they had a 4-day week about half of the time, indicated they consistently worked half days, and/or reported a 4-day week in 1 or 2 of the last 4 weeks in the EES. “No” was assigned for employees who verbally indicated they did not work a 4-day week or reported zero 4-day weeks in the EES. N=64 because employees who started working at TableTech after October 1 are excluded from this analysis.

By late September, some executives were expressing increasing resistance, while the co-founders and nearly all employees were supportive. These dynamics persisted until the end of October, when the executive team met to decide on the future of the 4DWW and decided to end it. One month later, the CEO announced the end of the 4DWW policy to employees and replaced it with a “Flexible Fridays” policy that encouraged working with fewer meetings and greater

ability to shift one's hours and take time for personal tasks on Fridays. See Figure 1.1 for a timeline of key events.

Figure 1.1: Timeline of Key Events and Data Collection



Data

The data for this study consist of interview, observation, survey, and archival data, which I collected in three waves over the course of 11 months. I gained access to TableTech through a collaborator who had been conducting research at TableTech as part of a study of purpose-driven start-ups since 2019. We collected data on the 4DWW trial and flexible work policies within the context of this longer-term study. Data for this paper were collected from June 2022 to April 2023, beginning the month the 4DWW trial was announced and concluding five months after it ended. The author collected all the data for this paper, with the collaborator on the larger study participating in some of the interviews (primarily with executives) and the design of survey instruments and attending key company meetings. Interview and survey data were collected in three waves: before (Wave 1), during (Wave 2), and after (Wave 3) the 4DWW (see Figure 1.1 for a timeline). Because the company is fully remote, all interviews and observations were conducted virtually via Zoom.

Interview data. I conducted 141 semi-structured interviews with 61 individuals, representing 78 percent of people who were employed full-time at TableTech during the study period. Most participants were interviewed longitudinally across waves: 27 individuals participated in three interviews, 14 in two interviews, and 20 in one interview. Interviews lasted 10 to 90 minutes (Wave 1 and Wave 2 interviews typically lasted about 60 minutes, and Wave 3 interviews typically lasted about 45 minutes). Almost all interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed, except in a few cases in which I took near-verbatim notes. Interviews followed a guide but were conducted as conversations (Weiss, 1994). Questions focused on participants' roles and daily work; their expectations for, experience of, and reflections on the 4DWW; how their experience of work and time use changed over time; experience of and desires for work-life conflict/integration; and their personal assessments and experiences of their own well-being and productivity. See Appendix A for interview protocols.

Observation and archival data. I observed over 140 hours of meetings, primarily focused on the weekly meetings of each of the core teams at TableTech (Sales, Engineering, Customer Success, and the executive team). I also observed company-wide meetings, trainings, and daily work such as coding in groups and calls with prospects and customers. I was granted access to TableTech's Slack workspace and closely followed the primary Slack channels for the Sales, Customer Success, and Engineering teams, as well as company-wide channels. I also gathered archival materials, such as slide decks and policy documents.

Survey data. I collected survey data in collaboration with TableTech. The researchers' ability to assist with surveys was one of the primary reasons executives invited them to study the 4DWW trial. Employees received a brief "pulse" survey weekly during Wave 1 and Wave 2, and bi-weekly during the first half of Wave 3 (25 weeks total, average response rate 60%). This

survey consisted of six to ten questions about topics such as job satisfaction, days worked, and satisfaction with work time and completion, measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Employees also received a longer survey once per wave (average response rate 96%). This survey covered around 60 questions about topics such as engagement, work/life conflict, well-being, perceived productivity, and experience with the 4DWW on a 5-point Likert scale. Both surveys also elicited open text responses. For a summary of data collected, see Appendix B.

Participants. Study participants consist of the 78 people who worked full-time at TableTech during the research period. All employees worked remotely, with 45% physically located in the United States (n=35), and 55% located overseas in Latin America (n=43). Participants were mostly men (86%). Most of the U.S.-based workers were White (83%). I lack reliable racial identification data for non-U.S. workers, because they lived primarily in Brazil, which has different racial schemas. I consider 64 of the 78 participants—those who joined TableTech on or before October 1, the half-way point—to have participated in the 4DWW trial.

Most participants worked in Sales (16 individuals), Customer Success (11 individuals), and Engineering (42 individuals). Four employees worked in other job functions, such as HR and Impact. There was a five-member executive team that was responsible for strategic decision-making, consisting of the CEO, the Chief Sales Officer (CSO), who was also a co-founder, the Chief Customer Officer (CCO), the Chief Technology Officer (CTO), and the Chief Financial Officer (CFO). For a summary of participant characteristics, see Table 1.2. Following quotations in the findings, I number each participant and indicate position in the organizational hierarchy using “E” for non-manager employees and “M” for managers. Members of the executive team are identified by their roles.

Table 1.2: Participant Characteristics

	All Participants		4DWW Participants*	
Gender				
Men	67	86%	54	84%
Women	11	14%	10	16%
Team				
Sales	16	21%	11	17%
Customer Success	11	14%	9	14%
Engineering	42	54%	35	55%
Executive Team	5	6%	5	8%
Other	4	5%	4	6%
Geographic Location				
United States	35	45%	28	44%
Brazil, Argentina, or Philippines	43	55%	36	56%
Race (US Workers Only)				
White or European	29	83%	23	82%
Hispanic or Latinx	3	9%	2	7%
Asian	1	3%	1	4%
Black or African	1	3%	1	4%
Two or More races	1	3%	1	4%
When joined TableTech				
Before 4DWW	36	46%	36	56%
During 4DWW**	33	42%	28	44%
After 4DWW	9	12%	--	--
TOTAL	78	100%	64	100%

* 4DWW participants are those who joined TableTech before October 1, and therefore experienced at least half of the 4DWW trial.

** Five workers joined during the 4DWW but after October 1 and not included among 4DWW participants

Analysis

I took an inductive, iterative approach to analysis. I first analyzed the data to determine which individuals adopted a 4DWW, to what extent, and the factors that enabled and constrained adoption. To do so, I triangulated between interview and survey data, relying primarily on participants' accounts of how they used their time from interviews and supplementing with survey responses when interview data were absent or unclear. I noticed that well-being and

productivity were two topics that arose frequently in the data, often in connection with each other, which drew my attention to how the idea of a win-win was used to frame the 4DWW. I also noticed that participants almost unanimously agreed that the 4DWW supported well-being but had widely varying perceptions about what was happening to productivity. Some perceived that productivity had increased during the 4DWW, some perceived that it was the same, and a minority—concentrated amongst executives—perceived it had decreased.

I conducted my own analysis of the administrative data received from TableTech (e.g., sales activity, number of code deploys). These data showed neither large increases nor large decreases, suggesting that there were no obvious problems with productivity associated with the 4DWW. However, I noticed that despite having access to these data, executives reported that they lacked sufficient data to assess the effect of the 4DWW on productivity. This discrepancy led me to focus on participants' accounts of their struggles to measure productivity and their subjective understandings of productivity, with the goal of better understanding why executives did not trust the data they collected and why individuals had such varied perceptions of the 4DWW's effect on productivity.

Focusing my analysis on how individuals made sense of productivity eventually led me to theorize that the ambiguity and subjectivity of productivity at TableTech played a key role in enabling resistance to the 4DWW. Inductive coding of interview data revealed that individuals' understandings and assessments of productivity were both varied and complex. I noticed that individuals who had positive and negative perceptions of how the 4DWW affected productivity associated productivity with different topics, which I came to understand as proxies for productivity. Further analysis of interviews revealed within-individual complexity: some individuals assessed the 4DWW as having an overall positive influence on their productivity, but

they sometimes referred to both positive and negative effects (e.g., an increase in energy but also decreased availability of coworkers). I also noticed that members of the Sales team often relied on activity metrics, which they considered to be a reliable measure of productivity, to back up their view that productivity was improving or stable. By contrast, I noticed that members of the Engineering and Customer Success teams struggled to measure their productivity. Engineers were especially worried about their perceived inability to reliably assess productivity and talked at length about how the variability and unpredictability of their work made productivity difficult to measure. To make sense of this finding, I turned to scholarship on the sociology of measurement (Espeland and Stevens, 1998; Mennicken and Espeland, 2019), which helped me conceptualize individuals' struggles to measure and assess productivity as associated with the complexity of their work (Ranganathan and Benson, 2020).

Next, I aimed to understand how perceptions of productivity contributed to the end of the 4DWW, which prompted me to take a process approach to analysis of the data. I employed the temporal bracketing approach (Langley, 1999) to investigate how perceptions of productivity changed and were used in conversations and decisions about the 4DWW over time. This analysis revealed that the idea that the 4DWW would improve productivity (that it would be a win-win) was central to motivating the 4DWW before its implementation. It also showed that attempting to assess and measure productivity was highly salient throughout the trial, that resisters generated and leveraged uncertainty about productivity, and that resisters referred to win-win expectations for the 4DWW in making their case to end it. I build on these insights to show how relying on a win-win framing to motivate a well-being intervention contributed to the decision to end it, despite evidence of improved well-being, a lack of evidence of decreased productivity, and near-unanimous support for continuing the initiative from the CEO and most workers.

FINDINGS

A Win-Win Framing for the 4DWW: Improving Well-being and Productivity

TableTech's implementation of a 4DWW was explicitly motivated by dual goals: improving worker well-being and improving productivity. The CEO rooted his motivation to prioritize well-being in the company's mission and values, explaining to other executives, "It's come up for me in [thinking] about company culture, company values...our 'why' is to improve the lives of workers in the food service industry. To me that starts with our own employees." When he announced the 4DWW to employees, he emphasized that he wanted to support health and employees' personal lives, saying, "To me the 4DWW is a perfect opportunity for businesses to demonstrate to their employees, that they care about them, they want them to be healthy, balanced. Wholly, not just focusing on career and your family...now...you [can] use that fifth day for whatever fills you up."

The CEO explicitly framed the 4DWW as having dual social and financial goals by linking the goal of improving employee well-being with the goal of improving organizational outcomes like turnover and quality of work: "we want you all to feel really fulfilled working here, to not feel burnt out, to feel balanced, and also have time to refill your cup and rejuvenate and refresh so when you are working, you are fully present, you're able to be really efficient, and that will ultimately lead to a net positive for everybody involved...ultimately that will lead to increased profitability and efficiency for the business." He used the imagery of "a positive flywheel" to explain his belief that the 4DWW would enable "compounding positive impact," i.e., that the 4DWW would be a win-win initiative that benefitted both employees and the business.

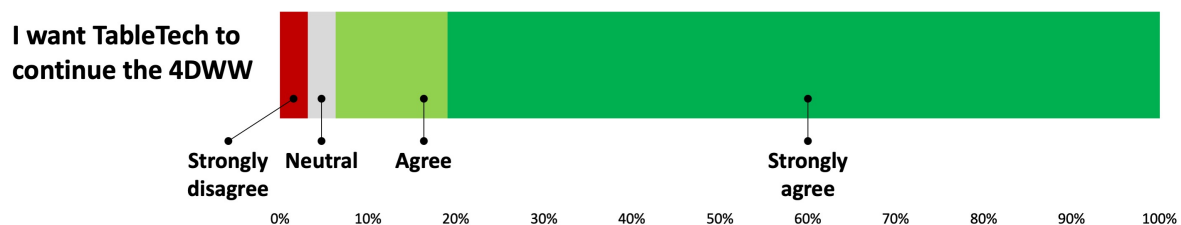
The potential for improved productivity was central to the CEO's justification for why the 4DWW would benefit the business. He stated that there would be no change in how much work employees were expected to do and suggested that a 4DWW could make it possible to accomplish more work in less time. He acknowledged that this idea "seems counterintuitive" but believed that taking time off to rest could increase creativity and energy such that "the four days that you're working, even if it's 32 hours, become more productive." When the CEO explained this logic to employees, he emphasized that productivity should remain the same or increase, saying, "I am also trying to make it clear that the expected productivity of the team is going to remain the same. I actually hope...that productivity actually increases. Teams become way more efficient because people are better balanced, happier, more satisfied, more at ease, just have less angst and crisis in their life...we're going to be able to get more done with less time." Underscoring his belief that the 4DWW would not harm and could even benefit productivity, and ultimately financial performance, he said, "This 4DWW, and us choosing to really demonstrate our desire for you all to have a balanced life, I believe is good business. Ultimately that is my fiduciary duty as the CEO."

Did the 4DWW Succeed or Fail? Promoters vs. Resisters

I found that three months into the trial, people at TableTech had separated into two groups: those who wanted to continue the 4DWW, whom I refer to as promoters, and those who wanted to end the 4DWW, whom I refer to as resisters. In response to a survey asking whether they agreed with the statement "I want TableTech to continue the 4DWW," all but four people—94 percent of those at TableTech—agreed, with 81% saying they strongly agreed (see Figure 1.2). Promoters of the 4DWW consisted of the CEO, the CSO, and all but one employee, while resisters consisted of the CTO, CCO, CFO, and one employee. Promoters expressed strong

enthusiasm for continuing the 4DWW, saying, for example, “I am hugely in favor of it” (G52, E) and “It’s just awesome. I love it” (G41, E). By contrast, the CTO, a key resister, said, “My sentiment is we shouldn’t be doing it...it’s hurting us more than helping us.” Next, I show how promoters and resisters developed competing narratives about well-being and productivity.

Figure 1.2: Desire to Continue the 4-Day Workweek (N=63)



Identity Enhancement vs. Identity Threat

Promoters and resisters had different responses to and experiences of the 4DWW, which shaped the narratives they used to advocate for and against it. Promoters experienced the 4DWW as identity enhancing, while resisters experienced it as a threat to their identity as a hard worker.

4DWW as identity enhancement. For most people at TableTech, the 4DWW enhanced their identities, especially their identities outside of work. For example, one employee described her reaction to the 4DWW, saying “To think that...I now get a Friday, Saturday and a Sunday to myself, as [Jenny] the person, not [Jenny] the employee, I was like, I might have picked the right job” (P31, E). Others talked about how the 4DWW gave them time to develop other aspects of their lives that were central to who they were or wanted to be, such as being a parent or a musician. For example, one employee stated, “I’m a surrealist artist,” and explained that “now that I have a little bit more free time, I’m able to dive into that” (P43, E). In addition, promoters talked about how they liked working for a progressive company that cared about employees and was aligned with their values.

4DWW as identity threat. By contrast, resisters experienced the company's embrace of a shorter workweek an identity threat. These individuals self-identified as "hard workers" or "workaholics." The suggestion that working long hours was no longer a badge of honor therefore destabilized these self-understandings. For example, the CCO said, "People do like [the 4DWW]. I do think the most motivated people, the hard workers...end up working it...I work it and it's not changing." He went on to describe his discomfort with the cultural change implied by the 4DWW, saying, "I'm old school, I used to work 50-60 hours a week, and hire people that I coached to expect that, so I'm still coming to grips with it personally." He reported feeling confused about what constituted a "good work ethic" after the 4DWW was implemented, and he experienced a tension between wanting to support employees and wanting to maintain his understanding of hard work. The CTO similarly described the 4DWW as "counterintuitive, against the ethos of a lot of people," saying, "we are going to lose high performers if we continue to do this." He identified as a hard worker who was willing to "sacrifice" to make TableTech successful and expressed frustration that others did not share this view: "I think joining a start-up is a sacrifice...I didn't join TableTech to have a perfect [work/life] balance. I enjoy the challenge and I thrive on that... I wouldn't want to do it any other way." This finding that changing work practices was threatening to the identities of high-status actors is consistent with prior research (e.g., Kellogg, 2011; Williams et al., 2016). I conceptualize these differing experiences of identity enhancement and threat as factors that shaped how people at TableTech experienced the 4DWW, as well as the arguments they made for and against it.

Win-win vs. Tradeoff Narratives

Promoters and resisters mobilized two different narratives in contesting the 4DWW. Promoters supported the idea that the 4DWW was a win-win, whereas resisters argued that the

4DWW was not a win-win as promised but was instead a tradeoff between well-being and productivity.

4DWW as a win-win. Promoters argued that the 4DWW was a “win” for both workers and the business, consistent with the dual agenda aims the CEO had initially used to explain the implementation of the policy. This win-win perspective cast well-being and productivity as synergistic, and promoters continued to draw on this idea to legitimize the 4DWW. For example, one employee wrote, “after having 3 days off last weekend, I did feel more recharged and refreshed going into a busy week. The 3 days off allowed me to perform at a higher level this week” (P07, M). Another said, “I would definitely love to continue the 4DWW, because I do feel we are delivering the things we need to deliver, and we are not leaving anything behind. So, the customer and the company, we will achieve their goals.... And on the other hand, I feel like there is a personal benefit because I have more rest and more energy for the week” (P04, E). By linking the personal benefits of the 4DWW with benefits for the company, these promoters argued that the 4DWW delivered on its win-win promise.

4DWW as a tradeoff. By contrast, resisters described the 4DWW as a tradeoff between workers’ interests and business interests; they believed the 4DWW sacrificed productivity for workers’ well-being. This narrative strategy often involved talking about the 4DWW as a cost and quantifying time as money—precisely the opposite of the win-win on which it was premised. For instance, the CTO said, “It’s a big benefit to the employees...we can incur that cost or not.” He translated this cost into dollar terms, saying, “we’re giving up a million and a half dollars over 18 months for 4DWW...if we want to worry about runway [before the business runs out of cash], we shouldn’t be doing a 4DWW.” He described the 4DWW as “a 20% giveaway...from our bottom line” and argued that such a tradeoff was unacceptable, especially for a start-up that

was not yet profitable: “when we are ‘profitable,’ which is to say money being returned to investors, you can say hey, I’m going to take these profits and use them how I want. And if I want to give back to employees as time on Fridays, maybe that is possible. Fundamentally at this stage I just disagree.” The CFO similarly described giving employees shorter work hours in terms of dollars, saying, “if they’re working...a 32 hour-week, they better be really productive in 32 hours or we’re losing money.”

Framing the 4DWW as a tradeoff was an ideological move that served to shut down debate. The CEO expressed frustration with the CTO’s assertion that the 4DWW was a tradeoff, describing “a fundamental difference” in their views:

Ultimately, I think he has a belief...his assumption is that our team will be 80% effective, we will lose 20% efficiency because we are losing a day. That fundamental assumption is where we differ...He sees the 4DWW as, take and not give. He thinks people are inherently greedy. This altruistic ideal that I have, if we give, people will give, he’s more cynical.... It’s a fundamental difference.

The CEO spent hours discussing the 4DWW with the CTO and trying to bring him on board. He described the CTO’s resistance as “one of the things I’m most disappointed about right now in terms of his performance and leadership,” yet lamented that “There’s only so much I can do.”

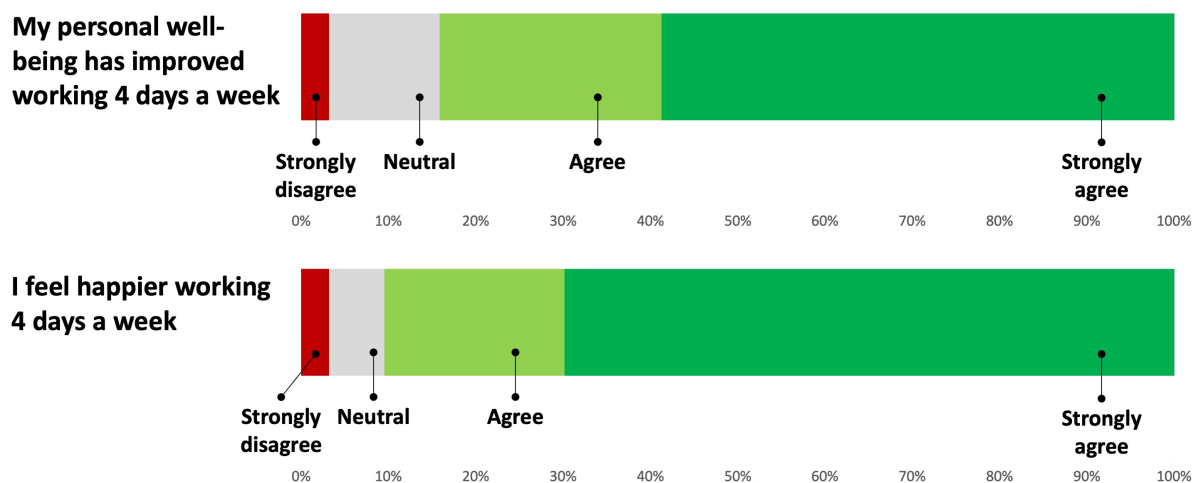
The CEO’s sense that there was a “fundamental difference” points to how promoters and resisters were essentially talking past each other because they had vastly different perceptions of and arguments about how the 4DWW was affecting TableTech. Next, I show how promoters and resisters mobilized different arguments about well-being and productivity, the 4DWW’s dual aims.

Contesting Well-being

Most people at TableTech thought the 4DWW trial achieved the goal of improving employee well-being. Such improvements would be consistent with evidence from prior research

on organizational interventions to increase flexibility or reduce work hours (e.g., Kelly and Moen, 2020; Schor et al., 2023). In a survey conducted during the third month of the 4DWW trial, 84 percent of people at TableTech strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “My personal well-being has improved working 4 days a week,” and 90 percent strongly agreed or agreed that “I feel happier working 4 days a week.” However, resisters were neutral or strongly disagreed. Figure 1.3 reports these findings. The perceived benefits of the 4DWW for both well-being and productivity were unevenly distributed across employees and executives, with a much smaller proportion of executives reporting benefits. Promoters viewed employees’ self-reported improvements in well-being as evidence that the 4DWW was successful and should continue. By contrast, resisters pointed to their own negative experiences and downplayed others’ reported improvements to argue that the 4DWW should end.

Figure 1.3: Perceived Changes in Well-being (N=63)



4DWW as enhancing well-being. In interviews, employees reported greater satisfaction with work-life balance and reduced work-life conflict; feeling better rested; less burnout; improved mental health; improvements in relationships; greater flexibility and choice; and

feelings of empowerment. For example, one employee reported that the 4DWW supported his mental health, saying, “For the past year and a half prior to this, I was struggling with mental health stuff...I’ve had bad mental health days, [but] I don’t think I’ve had a single one of those days since [the 4DWW] started, because I’ve felt energized and relaxed” (P41, E). Another described how the 4DWW enabled her to balance work and personal life, saying, “I have such an ease about my personal life, because I don’t feel like work takes up the entirety of my week. It’s so much more balance...I feel like I can say ‘yes’ a lot more because I’m not constrained by work being my determining factor” (P31, E). Executives who supported the 4DWW also pointed to the benefits for employees, with the CEO describing the data on how the trial affected well-being as “overwhelming feedback that this has been a really positive experience for everybody.”

4DWW as threatening well-being. Resisters, none of whom took Fridays off, reported that the 4DWW did not enhance and in some cases was detrimental to their well-being. In interviews both before and during the 4DWW, all five executives described long hours, including significant evening and weekend work; however, the CEO and CSO reported that they participated in the 4DWW and intentionally carved out personal and family time on Fridays and weekends, while resisters did not. In surveys, interviews, and meetings, resisters discussed how they were still working on Fridays and reported that they were working long hours and experiencing stress. For example, the CCO said, “I think I’ve maybe taken one of the days off since we’ve started this to be quite honest with you, and I still work Saturdays, some part of Sundays. Most of my people are taking it off. I schedule it off, but I end up working it.” The CFO stated, “I’m going to work it no matter what.” Their accounts suggested that they felt resentful that others had reduced their working hours, exemplified by the CTO’s statement in an executive team meeting about his personal experience: “I’m working on [projects] on Fridays

and Saturdays and Sundays...I can't personally keep working 18 hours a day to make up for everybody else's 4DWW...I'm just telling you, that's impacted me, I mean this has personally been a disaster from the standpoint of my ability to function."

Downplaying well-being improvements. Even among resisters, there was unanimous agreement that employees benefitted from the 4DWW—and that the initiative therefore achieved one of its dual goals, improving well-being. I observed, however, that executives rarely discussed these benefits, and that well-being received much less attention than productivity in their conversations about the 4DWW. When the executive team met to decide on the future of the trial, both promoters and resisters commented briefly that the survey data showing that employee well-being and satisfaction improved were "as expected." I observed that they then debated productivity for the rest of the meeting.

Moreover, resisters downplayed the success of the 4DWW by dismissing the data showing that employees benefited from and supported it. They referred to this evidence as "anecdotal" and "biased" to give it less weight. In response to data showing employees' positive feedback, the CFO said, "I just think in general giving this survey out we are going to get a lot of bias, because why wouldn't most of our employees be agreeable with a 4DWW?" The CTO argued, "I think we will always hear from employees that there is anecdotal evidence of it being a good thing." These comments show how resisters deprioritized well-being improvements relative to productivity improvements in their assessment of whether the 4DWW succeeded in achieving its dual aims.

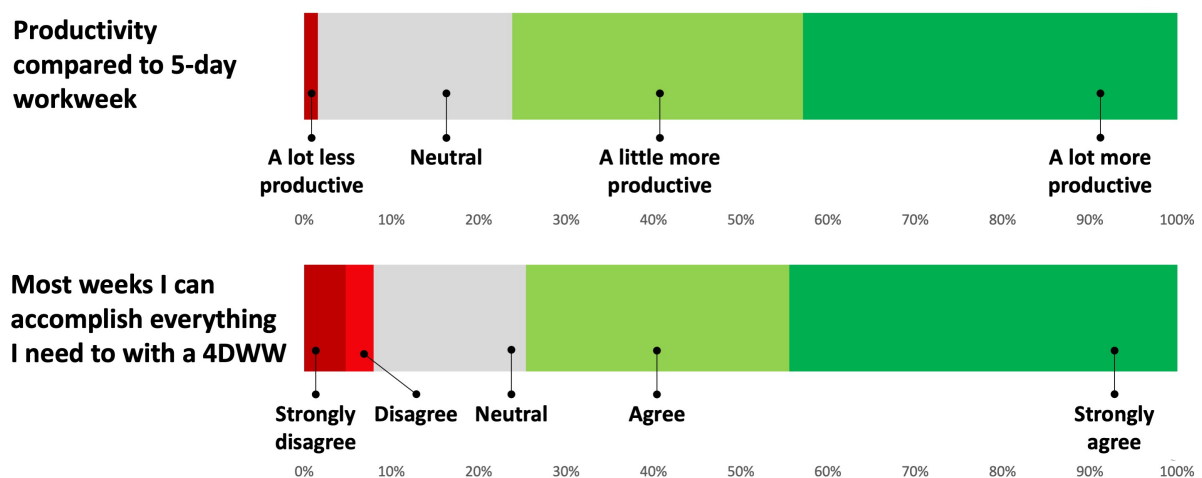
When asked why the conversation about the future of the 4DWW focused heavily on productivity, the CEO said, "I don't think that there's any disagreement across the exec team about the importance of those ideas [about well-being]. And so I focused on the productivity part

because I understood it to be the real sticking point...I think we all agree at an exec level that taking care of our people is important.” Yet the decision not to place more emphasis on well-being enabled resisters’ concerns about productivity to dominate the discussion, giving more airtime to concerns and downsides than to the improvements upon which all were agreed.

Contesting Productivity

Most people at TableTech perceived that the 4DWW improved productivity. In the survey conducted during the third month of the 4DWW trial, when asked to compare their productivity with a 4DWW to their productivity with a five-day workweek, 76 percent reported that they were “a lot more productive” or “a little more productive.” Similarly, when asked whether they agreed with the statement, “Most weeks I can accomplish everything I need to with a 4DWW,” 74 percent strongly agreed or agreed. Figure 1.4 reports these data. As with well-being, executives were less likely to report positive outcomes than employees, and resisters were the people who reported negative outcomes. Promoters and resisters mobilized contrasting views on productivity as evidence that the 4DWW was or was not working.

Figure 1.4: Perceived Changes in Productivity (N=63)



4DWW as enhancing productivity. In interviews, many employees discussed how they thought the net effect of the 4DWW on productivity was positive. For example, a member of the Customer Success team said, “Things have definitely been getting done at the same rate, if not a faster rate...we've never had any issues with things getting done...I haven't seen any negative effects” (P38, E). A software engineer noted the challenges of integrating new team members but said, “Our productivity overall, I think that’s good...we discuss more, we have more debates, we have more energy to put into our jobs. I think this is a great achievement of the 4DWW” (P13, E). The CEO and CSO also expressed satisfaction with productivity. The CSO explained to other executives that on this team “the culture is adopting an attitude of tracking and getting ready for the next week after hitting their requirements for the previous week” and said, “it’s been going really well...I am in big favor of keeping the 4DWW.”

4DWW as threatening productivity. Resisters, however, asserted that there was a problem with productivity. For instance, in a survey, the CTO wrote, “[the 4DWW] has destroyed productivity.” When they raised concerns about productivity, resisters sometimes invoked the win-win aims of the 4DWW trial; the win-win framing made productivity increases a necessary condition for deeming the 4DWW a success, thereby legitimizing concerns that it was not doing so as a reason to end it. For example, in conversation with the other executives, the CCO raised the idea that TableTech was not living up to the win-win premise, saying, “part of the goal was you’re more efficient in 32 hours; you do what you did in 40 hours.” He then argued that it was not possible to achieve this goal:

There [are] certain tasks [that are] only so fast with the tools you have. You’re going to get it done and there is so much work to do. I guess there’s an assumption that we were less efficient at 40 hours, right? . . . Because if we are putting the same load on the team, I just don’t see how you make up the time without people either working the extra time, or something gives, it gets pushed out to next week...I still have a hard time thinking you get the same amount of work in 32 hours that you got in 40.

The CTO similarly focused on hours to argue that his team was losing, not gaining productivity, saying, “I don’t think we’re seeing near as much productivity...if we’re going to continue the 4DWW we will see further loss of productivity towards our goals, because we’re not getting things done that we need to get done....I mean, we are working a 32-hour week.” By asserting that TableTech was losing productivity and that their teams could not do more work in fewer hours, resisters challenged whether the win-win was possible, thereby calling into question the core premise that had been used to justify the 4DWW. This strategy of asserting that there were problems with productivity was enabled by ambiguity surrounding productivity at TableTech.

The Ambiguity of Productivity: Measurement and Meaning

Productivity at TableTech was ambiguous in two ways: in its measurement, and in its meaning. The measurement of productivity was ambiguous because contextual factors at TableTech made it difficult to assess productivity using administrative data. The meaning of productivity was subjective because people at TableTech had different understandings of what it meant to be productive, and because they lacked a shared understanding of how to assess whether they were doing the right amount of work. This ambiguity enabled resisters and constrained promoters in asserting their beliefs about how the 4DWW affected the business.

Productivity data at TableTech. TableTech executives used surveys and administrative data to measure desired outcomes. Surveys, as discussed above, were designed to capture employee reports on both well-being (e.g., happiness, work-life conflict) and productivity (e.g., self-assessments of productivity, ability to accomplish work); they indicated improvements on both dimensions. From administrative data, executives collected data on eight organizational-

and department-level key performance indicators (KPIs). They believed that these KPIs would enable them to assess how the 4DWW was affecting productivity.

As noted above, the available administrative data indicate neither large productivity gains nor large productivity losses associated with the 4DWW. Executives defined two measures of financial performance as company-level KPIs: annual recurring revenue (ARR) and net dollar retention (NDR). ARR rose 12.6% from July (the month before the trial began) to October (the month executives decided to end it), and TableTech exceeded its quarterly ARR target. NDR decreased by 8.7%, but at 116% it remained well above 100%, the target executives identified as the threshold for success before the start of the 4DWW trial. In Sales, the chosen KPIs were number of emails and calls sent to prospective clients and number of meetings booked. These data varied from week to week but indicated neither a significant rise nor a significant fall over time. Engineering measured code releases per engineer per week and bug count. Code releases were quite variable but did not show any sustained decreases and were rising in October. Engineering system incidents, an automated measure of problems in the code base, were used as an imperfect proxy for bug count and were also quite variable but did not show a sustained rise. In Customer Success, average first response time to respond to a customer support request was measured starting at the end of August; these data showed a decrease in response time (an improvement in performance) between August and October. TableTech also defined two additional KPIs for which they did not gather any data: net promoter score (NPS), a common measure of customer satisfaction, and average resolution time for customer issues. Table 1.3 summarizes these KPIs.

Table 1.3: Summary of Data on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) Defined by Executives as Indicators of Productivity

KPIs	Level of measurement	Definition / rationale	Were the data collected?	What trend did the data show?	How did TableTech executives make sense of the data?
Annual Recurring Revenue	Company	The value of the recurring revenue of a business's term subscriptions normalized for a single calendar year; measure of financial performance	YES	Increased slightly	Considered successful
Net Dollar Retention	Company	Revenue growth or decrease over time from existing customers; measure of financial performance and customer satisfaction	YES	Fell slightly but remained above pre-defined benchmark for success	Considered successful; slight decrease was explained by loss of customers that were struggling financially
Net Promoter Score	Company	Common measure of customer satisfaction	NO	N/A	N/A
Number of emails sent to prospective clients	Sales team, individual level	Measure of activity	YES	Variable; no sustained increase or decrease	Considered successful; managers report individuals met activity targets
Number of calls prospective clients	Sales team, individual level	Measure of activity	YES	Variable; no sustained increase or decrease	Managers report salespeople booked fewer meetings than target; they believed this was due to new hires needing more time than anticipated to learn to sell the product
Number of meetings booked	Sales team, individual level	Measure of successful outreach to prospective customers	YES	Variable; no sustained increase or decrease	Managers report salespeople booked fewer meetings than target; they believed this was due to new hires needing more time than anticipated to learn to sell the product
Average first response time	Customer Success, team level	The average amount of time it takes a team member to respond to a support request for the first time	YES	Improved over time	Not observed
Average resolution time	Customer Success, team level	The average amount of time it takes a team member to fully resolve a customer issue	NO	N/A	N/A
Code releases per engineer per week	Engineering, individual-level average	Number of times code was deployed to production	YES	Fell in month 1; rose above pre-4DWW level and monthly average remained steady in months 2 and 3	Generally considered satisfactory; data were typically evaluated at the mob (work group) level not the individual level
Bug count	Engineering, team level	Number of bugs identified or introduced into the code base	Used system incidents as proxy	Variable; no sustained increase or decrease	CTO wanted this metric to be zero or close to zero and was dissatisfied when it was high

The CTO also established a new data-gathering process with the goal of tracking productivity at the work group level. Engineers at TableTech used a collaborative coding methodology called “mob programming.” “Mobbing” involved working online in Zoom rooms in teams of three people called “mobs” to write code together. After the 4DWW trial was announced, the CTO asked each mob to set daily and weekly goals and made the mob’s 4DWW conditional on the completion of these weekly goals. Mobs submitted a survey at the end of each week, in which they reported numerous mob-level performance and activity metrics.² The team reviewed these metrics in a staff meeting each Thursday, and those who had met their weekly goals were permitted to decide whether they would work on Friday or take the day off. These survey data showed that the average “on track” status rating improved over time, as did teams’ ability to complete their weekly goals. Appendix C contains further details about administrative KPI data and mob-level data.

TableTech prided itself on being “data-driven,” and executives initially believed that gathering these data on well-being and productivity would enable them to assess the impact of the 4DWW. However, I observed that these data did not feature in debates about whether to continue the 4DWW, suggesting that executives did not find them to be a reliable way to assess productivity. Next, I discuss how ambiguity in the measurement of productivity impeded people at TableTech from realizing their desire to make “data-driven” decisions.

Ambiguity in the measurement of productivity. People at TableTech believed that the available productivity data were insufficient or unreliable for assessing how the trial affected productivity. Several contextual factors contributed to this challenge: limited historical

² These metrics were: number of bugs fixed, number of hours spent on maintenance, number of deploys, errors introduced in the code, project phase, planned completion date, project status (on track=1 to behind=5), and whether Friday work was “required.” Appendix C reports the two metrics most directly related to work completion: project status and whether Friday work was required (a proxy for whether the mob completed its weekly goals).

administrative data, the rapid pace of hiring and change, and ambitious growth targets. First, TableTech had historical data on company financial metrics but did not start to capture any of the other metrics executives identified as important until around the time the 4DWW began. Executives acknowledged this absence of data, noting that they would lack baseline measures of most KPIs. As the CEO stated, “the unfortunate thing is that we don’t have a ton [of productivity metrics] right now. The only thing that we really concretely have is annual recurring revenue performance [and] growth.”

Second, about half of the employees at TableTech joined the company around the time that the trial began. The influx of new workers compounded the challenge of generating useful baseline measurements. The CFO said, “I mean, honestly, we’re not going to be able to measure [the trial] very well with productivity. It’s different when you’re going from an established company with, let’s say 40 salespeople, where you can see their productivity and have data on it. We don’t. We are just hiring our first salespeople...so we’re going to have a really poor way to measure it.” Beyond the absence of data, newly hired employees were learning how to do their jobs over the course of the trial, so their performance in their roles was evolving rapidly and was inconsistent. Moreover, TableTech is a small company; some teams consisted of fewer than ten workers distributed across varied roles. Small changes at the individual level, such as vacation, attending conferences, and changes in project phase, could have large effects. These factors all made interpretation of the available data more difficult.

Third, TableTech is a venture-backed start-up with ambitious growth targets. Rapid change and rapid growth were both expected, which made it difficult to assess which changes should be attributed to any one initiative. For example, the CCO said, “in a start-up environment where everything is changing rapidly, [we] don’t really have a baseline. It’s a continuous

improvement environment, always trying different things. You're comparing things that are in motion." As one engineer described:

What is going to be the tangible measure to see if we are more or less productive in four days versus five days?...I don't know how that thing is measured because the company is so dynamic. There are so many changes happening. It's almost impossible to take a picture of the company one month after the other one. They are very different things and that's how startups are, right? I'm not expecting that, but I'm saying that it's difficult to measure that. (P23, M)

These difficulties undermined TableTech's ability to conclusively assess whether the 4DWW was enabling them to do more work in less time. In the absence of concrete, quantitative measures, each person turned to their own understandings and subjective experiences to make sense of what was happening to productivity at TableTech.

Ambiguity in the meaning of productivity. Though productivity was often discussed at TableTech, organizational members lacked a shared understanding of this concept. Interview data revealed that employees associated a varied set of proxies with productivity, such as hours, metrics, energy, efficiency, and quality of work. Because people were looking to different concepts to make sense of how the 4DWW affected productivity, they could hold dramatically different views on the same situation, which generated conflict.

An inductive analysis of discussions of productivity revealed that positive and negative perceptions of productivity were associated with the use of different proxies for productivity. Positive assessments typically focused on efficiency, energy, motivation, and metrics. Those who supported the 4DWW commonly discussed these factors to explain why they thought the 4DWW enhanced their productivity. For example, describing a perception that the 4DWW increased efficiency and energy, which in turn enabled focus, higher quality work, and productivity, one member of the Engineering team said:

Since we've had this time off on Friday, on Monday everyone's got the hunger for work. Let's go. It's kind of like that vibe...with the full energy dedicated to work. It's the way that I feel and the way I see the team. They are so much [more] responsive and faster and participating...I think I've been so much more productive...the time that I am working, I'm just working...Just totally focused on what I need to do to deliver. (P04, E)

Focusing on metrics and motivation, a manager on the Sales team explained that she thought the 4DWW was not a concern for productivity because team members were meeting activity-based goals, and that the prospect of a day off incentivized them to do so:

They're hitting their dials, they're hitting their emails, they're hitting their follow-ups. So I don't see Friday as drastically swinging something in one direction or another because they are hitting their metrics. If they weren't hitting their metrics, then I would say okay, we've got to push a little bit harder. But because they are hitting their metrics, it's hard to say that not working on Fridays is the reason they didn't book a meeting. . . . I notice they are more consistently hitting those metrics throughout the week, and I think it's because they don't want me to say on Friday, 'What happened here?' (P14, M)

Negative assessments of how the 4DWW affected productivity typically focused on hours and availability. Resisters emphasized this perspective, and others also discussed these topics when evaluating potential risks or downsides of the 4DWW. For example, a salesperson explained why he felt it was a problem that his colleagues were participating in the 4DWW, saying, "Their Fridays are off, they're taking [extra time] to reply to an email instead of being responsive...[with a 4DWW] that means you have to work 10 to 12 hours during those four days. Instead, they're working eight hours...they're kicking their feet up, and it's the opposite of what they should be doing." He contrasted this perceived slacking with his own work habits, explicitly connecting hours to productivity: "I'm so productive because I'm a workaholic and I work six days a week" (P26, E). Explaining his understanding that availability was essential, an Engineering manager said, "Even if you work a lot of hours during four days, a problem may happen on Friday. And not being available to help [colleagues] or the customers...to solve the problems is a problem by itself" (P39, M). Highlighting the importance of availability focused

attention not on how much work was completed, but on creating the potential for work, responsiveness, or collaboration.

The use of many different proxies to make sense of productivity helps explain the variation in individuals' assessments of whether the 4DWW had a positive or negative effect. The lack of a shared understanding made productivity a difficult topic to assess and discuss, as different individuals looked to different signals upon which to base their evaluations. Resisters, for instance, could focus on how people were working fewer hours and draw the inference that productivity was down, while promoters could focus on how they felt more energized and efficient and draw the conclusion that productivity was up. In the absence of a shared understanding and lacking administrative data that were accepted as reliable, neither side could conclusively prove their position. This uncertainty benefitted resisters, as their assertion that productivity was insufficient was threatening to the business.

Output-based ambiguity: how much work is enough? People at TableTech also lacked a shared understanding of how much work was enough, which further compounded the ambiguity of productivity. The Engineering team struggled greatly with this question, and it also affected members of the Customer Success team. By contrast, the Sales team—which was the only team with clearly defined, quantitative measures—did not struggle to assess weekly output.

The challenge of assessing whether teams were getting enough done each week fueled concerns that the 4DWW could decrease productivity. Engineers in particular frequently discussed this issue but never reached a consensus about how to quantify their work or about how much was enough. They repeatedly discussed the difficulty of estimating how long work would take and the frequency with which unexpected problems, such as bugs or customer complaints, arose. As one engineer stated, “we cannot set a fixed goal...it sounds great but it’s

not doable. We work in IT. We know what happens. Shit happens” (P18, E). Another explained that even when the team felt like they had made a lot of progress, they felt pressured to continue working on Fridays due to uncertainty around work that remained: “this week we feel like we did a lot of progress on the project. But even though we feel that, there are many things that need to come. And there are a lot of uncertain things on next tasks for this project. So it is hard to tell” (P23, M). Teams also sometimes felt that even if they had not met their weekly goal, they had done a lot of work and had a productive week, as they had worked hard addressing bugs and unexpected problems that were important to solve. Yet in these situations, concerns about whether teams were still “on track” and had truly done enough persisted.

Difficulties in assessing whether the amount of work done was satisfactory were exacerbated by the perception that there would always be more to do than it was possible to accomplish. A product manager said, “I’m [in] this field for more than ten years now, and I am always feeling like I am leaving something behind. If I could work eighteen hours per day, I would have work” (P46, M). A manager on Customer Success similarly said, “There is without question more work to be done than there are hours within the week. But that was the case before 4DWW” (P07, M). Describing how the understanding of a week’s worth of work could change and might have a tendency to rise over time, one engineer said, “one of the things I’ve had trouble grasping is, if we get this much work done, and . . . we can get more efficient, so we get this much done, and that becomes the new bar, [then] actually we are always behind forever” (P11, E). Under these conditions, employees struggled to know when they had done enough and could stop working, and managers were continually concerned about the work that remained.

How the Ambiguity of Productivity Shaped Contestation

Ambiguity enables resisters. Uncertainty about how much should be done in a week enabled resisters because they were able to successfully argue that hours were the only feasible way to measure a week's worth of work. Resisters commonly expressed their concerns about productivity in terms of hours. For example, the CFO said of the engineers, "they're definitely less productive...they're just not working for eight hours." The CCO said, "I personally feel we're losing part of the workforce. We're taking a hit of fifteen to twenty percent of the whole team's time." When the executive team met to discuss the 4WW, the CEO became frustrated with resisters' focus on hours. He pushed back, challenging them to assess productivity based on output instead:

I keep hearing this "32 hours" concept...for me we never talked previously about like, oh, people are only working 40-hour weeks, do we need to be working 50-hour weeks? It's only when we [implemented the 4DWW] that we started then falling into the trap of talking about hours. So from my perspective, the 4DWW, if we are doing it right, it should not change our expectation on our employees. And that is what will keep them producing what we need them to produce...The risks of not getting as much productivity from them, I understand. And I wonder if that is a management problem to solve...we as management need to be even more dialed into setting appropriate expectations and holding the teams accountable to meeting those expectations.

In response, resisters argued that measuring productivity and assigning work based on outcomes was not possible, because appropriate expectations for a week are "very subjective." The CCO explained why it was difficult to set output-based goals and keep his team accountable to them, arguing that "it just comes down to the hours":

Once you get into the project, it explodes into more than you expected and you gotta get it done...we're not a manufacturing line, it's not like we just dial up the speed at which people do what they do. Every project is different...every time you go to attack something, you're like wow, I can do it the short, cheap way or the better way that is going to take more time, and when I got into it, it was bigger than I thought. I just think it's very subjective. It's difficult to say I can just piece out this amount of work to my team...it just comes down to the hours. I think we lose 20% of our workforce's time.

The only executive who did not object to assessing work based on output rather than hours was the CSO, who used concrete measures of sales activity to evaluate employees.

Thus, ambiguity in measuring productivity stemming from contextual factors, varied subjective understandings of how to assess productivity, and subjectivity and uncertainty around how to assess sufficient work output without using hours as a proxy enabled resisters' contention that productivity was insufficient and that it was necessary to revert to a five-day workweek to recover the hours necessary for sufficient output.

Ambiguity constrains promoters. The ambiguity of productivity not only enabled resisters but also made it difficult for proponents to counter productivity-focused resistance tactics. The complexity and subjectivity of individuals' understandings of productivity meant that even people who had overall positive assessments could readily accept uncertainty about how the 4DWW affected productivity. In addition, ambiguity made it hard for the CEO and other promoters to move past resisters' insistence that there was a productivity problem, because they could not "prove" that his perspective was correct.

Employees' discussions of productivity in interviews illustrate the complexity and subjectivity of evaluating it. Though overall most believed the net effect of the 4DWW on productivity was positive, employees often said that it was difficult to evaluate productivity and acknowledged uncertainty. For instance, one member of the Customer Success team said, "It's hard to say...the workload has been so high with new onboardings and the scale of customers, that it's hard for me to really say...if that's increased because we're on a 4DWW, or if it's because there's just a higher [amount] of work. I think that morale has been good, and the team has been working really well together...I think ultimately, it's beneficial in the sense that it really helps us streamline our work" (P01, E). Discussing how he felt about the volume of work his

team could accomplish and whether the 4DWW was the right thing for the company, a manager on the same team said, “I’ve gone back and forth. I’ve gone back and forth.” He stated that he thought his team did a good job accomplishing their tasks, but added, “I think my skepticism, my biggest question...[is] whether a 4DWW will create a culture of not going above and beyond” (P07, M). These quotes illustrate how individuals’ evaluations of the 4DWW’s effect on productivity encompassed multiple, potentially conflicting elements, here, accomplishing tasks and “going above and beyond.” Individuals could believe their productivity was overall improved but acknowledge that the potential for problems on certain dimensions still existed. For example, P07 was very supportive of the 4DWW and placed a high priority on worker well-being, but his uncertainty about how the 4DWW would affect productivity via team culture of “going above and beyond” opened the door to doubt about whether it should be continued. Having these doubts appears to have held supporters of the 4DWW back from speaking up to disagree with those who had more all-encompassing and severe criticisms of the 4DWW.

When resisters raised concerns about how the 4DWW was affecting productivity, the CEO tried unsuccessfully to shift their focus away from measuring and assessing it. At a company-wide meeting a few weeks after the trial began, he said that he had “underestimated” the extent of the change the 4DWW would entail and acknowledged that productivity might initially decrease, saying, “we have to recognize that this is going to cost, it’s going to be painful in the beginning, we probably will be less productive in the beginning.” He acknowledged that the productivity improvements he believed the 4DWW could deliver might not be possible to observe within the trial’s original three-month timeframe and argued for a “leap of faith” to achieve improved productivity in the long-term:

When I introduced it, I said the expectation was that you are going to be more productive. And that is true at the end of your learning curve...By the end of this 4DWW learning

curve, a couple months, maybe a couple quarters. That's when I expect us to be as or more productive, at least putting out more high-quality work. To get there we have to take a leap of faith...I am putting our biggest bet on our people, and I want to extend generosity, gratitude, love to all of you in the form of paying you the most valuable asset on earth, which is time. Because I want you to be a healthy individual, to show up with your whole self, with your creative mind at work. And I believe that requires taking care of yourself. And finding time to just do what you need to do as an individual. That's going to pay dividends in your work. That's a bet. It's yet to be proven.

Yet the CEO's call for a "leap of faith" did not stop resisters from continuing to contest productivity throughout the trial, especially as it came time to decide on its future. In an interview after deciding to end the 4DWW, the CEO stated that he believed the challenge of conclusively measuring productivity was the key factor that forced him to defer to resisters. He highlighted the absence of conclusive data and explained that his decision was driven by a need to demonstrate his trust in the judgements of his executive team:

I think that [the productivity problems others perceive] is an unseeable thing. To be honest, to a certain extent I think it's sort of a life lens. It might be almost like a generational thing...so it's one of those things that they're seeing it, I'm not, who's right? Well, let's look at the data. Well, there's no data so what am I gonna do about that? And what I'm gonna do about that is show my [executive] team that I hear them and I'm willing to trust them.

Having initially identified increased productivity as a desired outcome made it difficult for the CEO to shift the debate away from productivity, and he struggled to argue that resisters' productivity concerns were not a valid reason to end the 4DWW without conclusive evidence.

In the end, CEO was unable or unwilling to successfully advocate for continuing the 4DWW despite his own desire to do so. His decision to demonstrate "trust" in his executive team underscores how resisters mobilized productivity concerns to exercise their influence over him. The CEO had decision-making authority, but he depended on the executive team to run the business and for their industry experience and strategic advice. In an interview about halfway through the trial, the CEO underscored how his relationships with resisters, especially the CTO

(who was the most vocal), constrained his ability to assert his own viewpoint, saying, “I’m really struggling. This cannot be the thing that breaks my rapport and relationship with [the CTO]... I’m trying to stay levelheaded about it. I’m definitely not thrilled with what’s happened, but I can only push so hard.” He again cited ambiguity as a key factor when explaining how he felt highly constrained in his ability to push back against resisters: “it’s hard for me to empirically prove that this new way is more efficient and is better, because it is so difficult to measure...it’s like scientifically proving a diet works as preventative medicine...it’s unfortunate.” Thus, the ambiguity of productivity enabled resisters to exercise their influence over the CEO and to constrain his ability to refute their claims.

The End of the 4DWW at TableTech: Explanations and Employee Reactions

In the end, despite consensus that the 4DWW succeeded in improving well-being, the CEO’s continued support, his own perception that there was not a problem with productivity, and his willingness to take a “leap of faith” to achieve a win-win in the long-term, TableTech ended its 4DWW. When he explained the decision at an all-hands meeting, the CEO spoke about the ambiguity around productivity that resisters had raised:

Some of the downsides that we saw . . . [were], are we foregoing productivity? Are we not getting as much work done as we might be able to if we were working five days a week? There were a lot of questions around who is available when? What are the expectations around availability? And what are the expectations on the employees? Am I getting five days’ worth of work, or am I getting four days’ worth of work?...I think we’ve heard pretty clearly from the feedback that there was this sort of uncertainty.

This quote illustrates that to explain ending the 4DWW to employees, the CEO drew on the ambiguity resisters had mobilized to influence his decision: uncertainty about whether productivity was lower, and uncertainty about how many “days’ worth of work” employees were performing. At the same time, the CEO drew on the cultural norms valorizing hard work and

financial returns that resisters also mobilized, saying, “we are a start-up, and the economy is in a really rough place, so we need to be working really hard, and we need to convince ourselves and our investors and our future investors that we are for real and we’re not kind of just cruising.”

These concerns generated doubt about the success and appropriateness of the 4DWW.

Given the strength of employees’ enthusiasm for the 4DWW and their desire to keep it, I expected that the rollback might spark conflict. But though some employees expressed disappointment and frustration in the weeks following the announcement, most accepted the CEO’s explanation for his decision. For instance, one salesperson said, “I guess it is a little bit of a bummer...But I mean it’s not that big of a deal...I always grew up working five days” (P43, E). An engineer said, “because we are a startup, we are not [at] breakeven. We are searching for Series B...So I think that [ending the 4DWW] was a reasonable thing to do” (P39, M).

Several factors seem to have enabled this surprisingly smooth transition. As discussed above, employees’ own understandings of productivity were complex, and many people acknowledged that productivity was difficult to assess. They therefore readily accepted that others’ concerns could be legitimate. For instance, following the CEO’s announcement, one strong promoter of the 4DWW said that though she still thought she could accomplish her work in four days, ending the 4DWW was the right decision because she had become concerned about other teams’ productivity: “I feel like I’m able to get my work done in thirty-two hours personally. But you know...I want a lot of stuff from [the Engineering team], and they’re talking about how busy they are. I want them to be working forty hours” (P44, E). Another promoter acknowledged the possibility of problems he was not aware of: “I thought it was working fine, but higher up the chain there could be probably some other problems that I didn’t even notice” (P41, E). The ready acceptance of staunch supporters who had previously believed there was no

productivity problem suggests that the ambiguity and uncertainty that resisters mobilized spread throughout the organization, weakening support and disabling pushback against the rollback.

Several other tactics also enabled employees' acceptance. The executive team had been careful to frame the 4DWW as a trial, so employees knew from the start that it might not be a permanent policy. In addition, the CEO leveraged an increasingly challenging macroeconomic context in explaining his decision. He stated, "While we were running this 4DWW trial, there have obviously been some big changes in the market. We've seen the huge layoffs in Silicon Valley...we may or may not be heading into a recession.... That makes things more challenging for us as a business." He went on to explain that the executive team had decided to increase their sales and product development targets to be "really aggressive," and that this would require more work from the team: "it requires an incredible amount of effort and focus and urgency...the success of this business depends on you, and we want to just call a spade a spade, that there's a lot of work to get done." Employees accepted this rationale, and many understood that meeting these higher expectations might be necessary to avoid layoffs. Last, the CEO framed the change as a "rebranding" and formally replaced the 4DWW with a "flexible Fridays" policy. This new policy reasserted the expectation that employees would complete five days' worth of work each week but retained the goal of fewer meetings and setting one's own hours on Fridays, with the ability to take time off for personal tasks. This approach softened the transition and enabled some employees to continue working shorter Fridays, though work time on Fridays increased for most people.

DISCUSSION

The Fragility of Win-Win Framings: Tensions Between Social and Financial Goals and the Role of Ambiguity

Drawing on an ethnographic case study of a company that implemented and discontinued a 4DWW, this study theorizes that using a win-win framing to motivate the adoption of a social initiative can influence contestation over the initiative's success and contribute to the difficulty of sustaining it. The idea that a social goal—in this case, improving worker well-being—can be achieved while also enhancing a financial goal—in this case, improving productivity—is highly attractive, because it suggests that the tradeoffs often associated with the pursuit of social goals can be avoided (M. E. Porter and Kramer, 2011; King and Pucker, 2021). Win-win thinking is commonly used to justify the pursuit of social goals in business contexts that traditionally give priority to financial objectives (Fligstein and Goldstein, 2022), as establishing a “business case” for social goals legitimizes them by aligning them with financial gain. Yet the case of TableTech shows how using a win-win framing can enable resistance to and constrain support for an intervention.

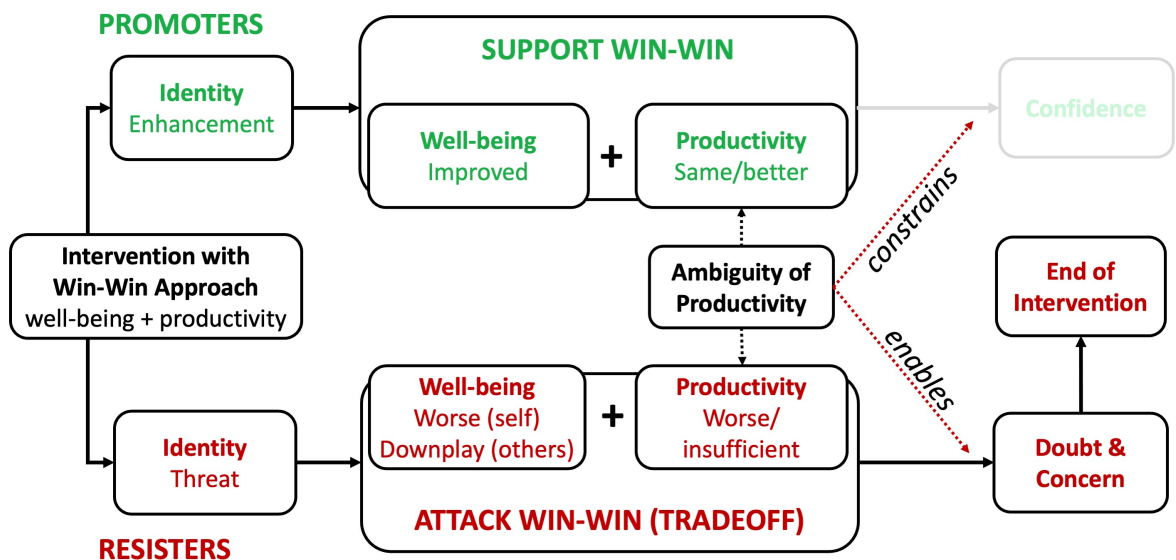
At TableTech the win-win aim of the 4DWW was to improve both well-being and productivity. I found that two groups—promoters and resisters—experienced the 4DWW differently, and in particular, differently experienced the 4DWW in relation to their personal identities, with promoters experiencing the initiative as enhancing their non-work identities and resisters experiencing it as a threat to their identities as hard workers (Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Kellogg, 2009; Williams, Berdahl, and Vandello, 2016). Though there was consensus that the intervention successfully improved employee well-being, promoters and resisters developed different narratives about the success or failure of the 4DWW. These narratives each referenced the win-win premise of the 4DWW: promoters argued that the win-win had been realized,

arguing that well-being had improved, and that productivity was the same or better. Resisters, by contrast, argued that the win-win had failed, and that the 4DWW was instead a tradeoff between well-being and productivity. They described their own negative experiences with the 4DWW, downplayed others' well-being improvements, and argued that productivity was worse or insufficient.

The conflict over the 4DWW's success hinged on promoters' and resisters' differing views on how the trial had affected productivity. My findings show how this conflict was enabled by ambiguity in the measurement and the meaning of productivity at TableTech. People at TableTech struggled to assess productivity based on measurements because of a lack of baseline administrative data, as well as rapid growth and change, which exacerbated the challenge of interpreting the available data. I found that in the absence of clear, objective evidence, people at TableTech turned to their subjective experiences of productivity to evaluate it. Yet people at TableTech lacked a shared definition of productivity and looked to different proxies for productivity to make sense of their experience. Those who positively evaluated productivity tended to rely on energy, efficiency, motivation, and metrics, whereas those who negatively evaluated it tended to rely on hours and availability. Moreover, people at TableTech—especially those on the Engineering and Customer Success teams—were engaged in knowledge work that was complex, varied, and unpredictable. As a result, they struggled to assess whether they were doing the correct amount of work, and lacked a shared understanding of how much work was enough. Resisters leveraged this ambiguity to argue that there was a problem with productivity, generating doubt and concern. At the same time, these factors impeded promoters from asserting their perspective that the 4DWW was working, because they more readily accepted uncertainty and could not conclusively prove that the initiative did not

threaten the business. These dynamics contributed to the end of the 4DWW at TableTech. Figure 1.5 summarizes these findings.

Figure 1.5: Summary of Findings: Contestation of a Dual Agenda Well-being Intervention



I theorize that the use of a win-win framing contributes to the fragility of social interventions by enabling resistance targeting the intervention’s financial goal and targeting how its social and financial goals are linked. Resisters argued to end the 4DWW using a resistance strategy that targeted both productivity and well-being and raised tensions between the two. They argued that productivity was insufficient, and they asserted that the 4DWW failed to deliver productivity improvements and that improving well-being necessitated trading off against productivity. They also downplayed well-being improvements and mobilized cultural norms valorizing hard work and financial success (Kellogg, 2009; Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020) to delegitimize prioritizing well-being. Together, these tactics drew attention to potential trade-offs between well-being and productivity to invalidate the win-win potential that the CEO had initially used to motivate the 4DWW.

These findings show that how organizations negotiate the simultaneous pursuit of social and financial goals has implications for whether social interventions are sustained. Most people at TableTech considered the 4DWW to be a successful win-win, or at least a win-neutral, yet the 4DWW was discontinued. The relative deemphasis of well-being relative to productivity contributed to the construal of the 4DWW as a failure despite consensus that it was a success on at least one of two key dimensions. Furthermore, the CEO's capitulation to resisters' arguments shows that even in contexts that espouse dual goals of well-being and productivity, risks to well-being are acceptable, but risks to productivity are not. This imbalance heightens the challenge of sustaining dual agenda initiatives; if a hint of possible productivity decrease is threatening and productivity is fundamentally difficult to assess, a win-win success will rarely be conclusively proven, and well-being initiatives will remain precarious. More generally, these findings suggest that win-win justifications for social interventions can delegitimize values-based decision-making in firms and can make it harder for firms to resist the primacy of productivity and financial objectives in business contexts.

Contributions to the Literature on Worker Well-being Interventions

This study makes several contributions to scholarship on how work can be organized to support worker well-being. First, I answer calls for research investigating why worker well-being interventions are “fragile flowers” (Williams, Berdahl, and Vandello, 2016). Scholars have previously documented the end of well-known interventions that “worked” (Valcour, 2013; Kelly and Moen, 2020), but the within-organization political processes that contribute to the end of well-being interventions are understudied. This paper begins to fill this gap through an empirical examination of the process through which well-being interventions are negotiated and contested within organizations. I draw on in-depth ethnographic data to trace how one

organization struggled to evaluate the success of its well-being intervention and negotiated differing viewpoints within the firm. This study thus contributes to the body of work on well-being interventions by investigating how they end despite supportive contextual factors and their potential to benefit both workers and firms.

Second, this study integrates scholarship on worker well-being with research on the simultaneous pursuit of social and financial objectives in organizations, uniting two research streams that have mostly been conducted separately. In doing so, it identifies the management of social-financial tensions as an underrecognized factor that shapes the trajectory of well-being interventions. Prior research has shown that leadership changes, concerns about collaboration, the counter-normativity of new practices (Kelly and Moen, 2020), ideological and status-based resistance (Kellogg, 2009, 2012; Kelly et al., 2010; Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020), staffing and cost challenges (Christian, 2023), a short-term mindset (Valcour, 2013), and managers' desire for control (H. Kim, Bailyn, and Kolb, 2017) can all pose a challenge to organizational changes that benefit workers. I show that in addition these challenges highlighted by prior research, how organizations navigate social-financial tensions plays a crucial role in implementing and sustaining well-being interventions. Furthermore, my findings show that even when organizations adopt a dual agenda, win-win, or business case framing, social-financial tensions nonetheless persist (Kaplan, 2019, 2020; Battilana, Obloj, et al., 2022).

Third, my findings contribute to research on how differences between workers and managers, as well as the distribution of power between these groups, can derail well-being interventions. Prior research shows that counter-normative institutional or cultural change efforts, including those that challenge norms of overwork, can create resistance, especially from those in positions of authority (Kelly et al., 2010; Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020; Battilana and

Casciaro, 2021; Malhotra et al., 2021). For example, in Kellogg's (2009, 2012) study of efforts to implement regulations reducing surgical residents' hours, high-status defenders of the traditional "iron man" culture in surgery resisted the change. By documenting resisters' experience of identity threat and their strong adherence to norms of hard work and long hours, I answer scholars' calls to increase attention to the role of identity threats in maintaining workplace norms (Petriglieri, 2011; Williams, Berdahl, and Vandello, 2016). Moreover, by documenting the stark differences between workers' and executives' experiences of the 4DWW, this study underscores the risk of excluding workers from decision-making about initiatives that are intended to benefit them. My findings suggest that when executive decision-makers do not personally benefit from work redesign, and when the workers who do benefit are not included in decision-making, work redesign initiatives may be more likely to be rolled back. Given that in most business contexts, workers are not structurally empowered to participate in strategic decisions (Anderson, 2017; Ferreras, Battilana, and Méda, 2022), the different experiences of workers and managers may often create headwinds for interventions that benefit workers.

Last, this paper contributes to the nascent body of research on the four-day workweek (Haraldsson and Kellam, 2021; Schor et al., 2022, 2023). To my knowledge, this is the first in-depth study of a failure case in which an organization implemented but did not sustain such an initiative. Though the majority of companies that have implemented a four-day workweek in recent trials have sustained it for at least a year (Schor, Fan, and Gu, 2023), it is important to develop our understanding of why and how these initiatives can fail to be sustained (Christian, 2023), especially given rising interest in implementing these initiatives from managers and legislators (Sanders, 2023; V. Kim, 2024).

Contributions to the Literature on the Pursuit of Social and Financial Objectives

This study also contributes to scholarship on the simultaneous pursuit of social and financial objectives in organizations. First, it identifies win-win thinking as a double-edged sword that can motivate the implementation of social initiatives but can also contribute to the challenge of sustaining them. In doing so, it builds on recent critiques of “business case” or “win-win” thinking. Kaplan (2020: 2), for example, has argued that business case justification “might do more harm than good,” writing, “the business case may not actually motivate managers to act, it may be alienating to those for whom the business case is being made, and it may create moral struggles for the people who feel they must make the business case in order to justify social action.” Others have critiqued win-win justifications for diversity (Ely and Thomas, 2020; Georgeac and Rattan, 2023), gender equality (Ely and Meyerson, 2000), and sustainability (Hahn et al., 2010) and have theorized that “business case” and “paradoxical” frames are associated with narrower thinking and less radical action (Hahn et al., 2014). This study extends this body of work by identifying an additional way in which win-win framing may create problems for social initiatives: win-win framing itself can contribute to the fragility of social initiatives by inviting assessment and contestation of both social and financial dimensions, and by enabling resisters to leverage the reality that tradeoffs are often inevitable (Kaplan, 2020; Battilana, Obloj, et al., 2022) to delegitimize the pursuit of social goals.

In addition, this study contributes to research on goalsetting and ambiguity in the simultaneous pursuit of potentially conflicting objectives. Prior research has found that goalsetting is key to sustaining the pursuit of both social and financial objectives over time (Ashforth and Reingen, 2014; Battilana, 2018; Battilana, Obloj, et al., 2022), highlighting in particular the importance of metrics for tracking social performance (André, Cho, and Laine,

2018; Ebrahim, 2019; Smith and Besharov, 2019). At the same time, prior research has shown that comfort with ambiguity, paradox, and tension can be helpful in sustaining multiple goals or logics (Battilana et al., 2015; Smith and Besharov, 2019; Levinthal and Rerup, 2020); because ambiguity creates space for multiple interpretations or viewpoints to co-exist (Sillince, Jarzabkowski, and Shaw, 2012; Anteby, 2013), it can aid organizations in sustaining the tensions inherent in maintaining hybridity (Gümüşay, Smets, and Morris, 2020). My findings build on this research by suggesting that there are situations in which ambiguity impedes rather than enables the pursuit of dual objectives. Specifically, my findings show that when it is unclear how social and financial performance are defined and measured, resisters can exploit this ambiguity to construct an initiative as a threat to the organization and mobilize to end it, thus creating room for one logic or goal to become dominant over another. These findings are resonant with ideas from research in the sociology of measurement and quantification, which shows how measurement and commensuration can be used to obscure complexity, nuance, and ambiguity and can be wielded as a source of power (Espeland and Stevens, 1998; Mennicken and Espeland, 2019).

This study also contributes to scholarship on the measurement of social value (Barman, 2016; Ebrahim, 2019). Research on this topic often highlights the lack of consensus on how to measure social performance and posits that social performance is more ambiguous and difficult to measure than financial performance (Déjean, Gond, and Leca, 2004; Nason, Bacq, and Gras, 2018; André, Cho, and Laine, 2018). My findings demonstrate that there can be ambiguity in assessing not only social but also financial performance, and that this ambiguity can impede the sustained pursuit of social goals. Specifically, I show that though well-being is commonly considered to be subjective, and productivity is commonly considered to be objective and

measurable, both can be ambiguous, subjective, and difficult to measure. By illustrating how knowledge workers grapple with the challenge of measuring productivity, and by tracing how they respond to failures or limits in their ability to do so, these findings also build on prior research documenting the challenge of quantifying complex work (Mazmanian and Beckman, 2018; Ranganathan and Benson, 2020).

Limitations and Future Research

This research has several important limitations and boundary conditions. First, this paper draws on a single case study; I approach the case of TableTech as a revelatory case (Yin, 2009) that enables rare insight into the process through which a well-being intervention is experienced, contested, and ultimately ends. This approach enables in-depth tracing of process to build theory about factors that can contribute to the fragility of social interventions, but it does not enable me to leverage cross-case comparison or examine a counterfactual outcome. It also does not enable a clean assessment of the relative importance of the multiple factors at play in the decision-making process; for instance, it is possible that different relational dynamics between the CEO and resisters could have led to a different outcome. My findings show how a win-win framing can be one among many factors that shapes the trajectory of an intervention. Future research drawing on other methods, such as a multiple case study, surveys, or experiments, is needed to test the theoretical ideas developed in this paper.

Second, I studied TableTech during a period of implementation and transition to a new policy, and my findings suggest that using a win-win framing may make it more difficult to sustain a well-being intervention beyond an initial trial period. However, my findings do not suggest that achieving win-win benefits is impossible; on the contrary, a significant body of rigorous research shows that in some cases, work redesign can benefit both workers and firms

(Moen, Kelly, and Hill, 2011; Fox et al., 2022; Kesavan et al., 2022). Moreover, evidence from Costco and other firms with longstanding “high road” employment practices (Ton, 2014, 2023) suggests that it is possible for worker-friendly practices not only to generate win-win benefits (regardless of whether they are framed as such) but also to be sustained over the long-term. Moments of transition are volatile, and the benefits of interventions take time to emerge; indeed, research shows that performance can fall before it rises when firms transition to worker-friendly practices (Rahmandad and Ton, 2020). My findings thus point to the potential challenges of win-win thinking in times of implementation, when challenges are likely to arise and benefits may not yet be clearly observed. Future research should investigate whether these findings transfer to steady-state periods following successful implementation.

Third, TableTech is an all-remote company, which may have been both an enabling and constraining factor. Remote work had been in place for over two years when TableTech began its 4DWW, which suggests a relatively high level of managerial comfort with flexible work practices and a supportive context for implementing worker-friendly policies. At the same time, research has shown that remote work can slow the integration and socialization of new employees (Petrilli, Galuppo, and Ripamonti, 2022), and people at TableTech cited onboarding many new hires as a factor that complicated the transition to the 4DWW. In addition, remote work can create a barrier to informal social interactions and to building interpersonal connections. Prior research has shown that it is important to coordinate and collectively mobilize across demographic and occupational boundaries to counter resistance to organizational change (Kellogg, 2009, 2012) and to maintain hybrid goals (Battilana et al., 2015), and remote work may have impeded these processes. Comparing the implementation of similar policies across in-person, hybrid, and remote work contexts is an important task for future research.

Last, the context of a purpose-driven, venture-backed software start-up also provides analytical benefits and limitations. These firms face especially intense pressure to scale quickly and generate returns for investors, and they face a high risk of organizational failure (Aguirre, 2021). These factors likely exacerbated the challenge of sustaining a reduced hours work policy, as norms about the importance of hard work and financial success are especially strong in the start-up context. TableTech's identity as a socially oriented company whose mission was aligned with improving worker well-being may have helped mitigate these pressures, but it was not sufficient to overcome them. Future research should seek to disentangle how social and financial pressures, as well as organizational size, maturity, and funding structure, shape the trajectory of well-being interventions. Future research is also needed in contexts outside of white-collar knowledge work. Challenges encountered in implementing a shorter workweek, especially those related to hours, productivity, measurement, and pay, would likely differ when work is more routinized or when workers are paid hourly, such as in retail or manufacturing.

Practical Implications

This paper offers implications for managers implementing new practices with the aim of supporting worker well-being. Beyond the specific case of a 4DWW, these implications may be relevant to managers implanting practices such as flexible, hybrid, and remote work (Barrero, Bloom, and Davis, 2023), as well as other types of social interventions, including those with intended beneficiaries beyond workers; however, future research should investigate the boundary conditions of these implications.

Findings from TableTech suggest caution in the use of win-win and business case framings. In some cases, it may be desirable to use other framings for social interventions, such as fairness or paradox frames (Hahn et al., 2014; Georgeac and Rattan, 2023). When managers

do choose to use a win-win framing, perhaps to bring skeptical stakeholders on board, my findings suggest that they should ensure that one goal does not dominate over the other (Ely and Meyerson, 2000) and that they should carefully set expectations. In particular, before implementation it is important to establish consensus on how to measure outcomes and to set clearly defined thresholds that will signal success or failure. My findings also suggest that it is important to allow ample transition time and to set realistic timelines for assessing change.

Moreover, my findings suggest limits to organizations' ability to capture unambiguous data and use it to drive decision-making. In the context of work redesign, scholars have written about the difficulty of "trying to persuade businesses of the validity" of the business case, noting that "the insistence on totally precise and rigorous real-time information of a type not typically demanded in other business contexts signals a deep level of resistance" (Williams, Berdahl, and Vandello, 2016: 531). My findings empirically demonstrate how resisters' demands for rigorous evidence of both social and financial performance can be difficult if not impossible to generate in a complex, dynamic organizational context. These findings suggest that demanding unambiguous data can be an effective resistance strategy. They also suggest that it may be wise to temper expectations for measurement because it can be difficult to make sense of ambiguous information, and because significant policy changes take a long time to implement, refine, and generate benefits.

These measurement-related difficulties point to the need for managerial conviction and courage when implementing well-being initiatives. Resonant with TableTech's CEO, Ton (2023) refers to the need for a "leap of faith" to successfully implement "good jobs" policies. This leap of faith does not require decision-making in the absence of evidence; rather, it involves making decisions based on evidence from rigorous research on the experience of other companies who

have completed their transition to new policies. Put differently, managers can take heart that research shows it is possible to generate business benefits from prioritizing workers but should not expect to measure these benefits in their own organizations in the short-term.

My findings also have implications for managing power dynamics in relation to social goals in organizations. TableTech's experience shows that support from the top executive is not sufficient to ensure the continuity of a social intervention and highlights the importance of hiring managers with the background, ideological inclination, and skills to support the integration of social goals (Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Besharov, 2014). In addition, my findings highlight the risk that when workers are not empowered to participate in decision-making, their experiences and interests are likely to be discounted, while those of decision-makers are amplified (Ferrerias, Battilana, and Méda, 2022). Last, my findings underscore the reality that even when there is a desire or potential for social and financial goals to be synergistic, social-financial tensions persist, and managers must be prepared to manage the political dynamics arising from these tensions.

CHAPTER 2

Changing the Workweek to Enhance Worker Well-being: Shorter or More Flexible?

Many workers today are struggling. Across classes, sectors, and occupations, they face long work hours and mounting demands from employers, with serious consequences like work-life conflict, stress, and poor physical and mental health (Schor, 1993; Schnall, Dobson, and Rosskam, 2009; Pfeffer, 2018; Kelly and Moen, 2020; Beckman and Mazmanian, 2020). These problems harm not only workers, but also employers, contributing to higher turnover rates, rising health care costs, and lower performance (Ton, 2014, 2023). Moreover, work-life conflict and threats to well-being have negative consequences for society, as they contribute to gender and class inequality (Blair-Loy, 2003; Cha, 2013; McCallum, 2020) and leave workers lacking adequate time to participate in social and political life (Rose, 2016; Herzog, 2024). In response to pressure from workers and the public to adopt employment practices that address these issues, organizations are implementing flexible work and scheduling changes that target worker well-being. Such interventions include flexible work policies and changes to how shifts are managed and scheduled (Fox et al., 2022), and more recently, shortening the workweek with no change in pay (Schor et al., 2022, 2023).

This paper compares how two different organizational interventions—namely, flexible work and a shorter workweek—shape workers’ work-life conflict and well-being in the context of white-collar knowledge work. Flexible work and shortening the workweek are two distinct approaches to managing the problem of work-life conflict, and they are undergirded by different premises. The flexible work approach is premised on the idea that giving workers control over when and where they work can help mitigate work-life conflict and enhance well-being

(Karasek, 1979; Moen et al., 2016; Kaduk et al., 2019). A growing body of research has emerged in the past several decades showing that this approach can indeed benefit workers (Kelly, Moen, and Tranby, 2011; Nijp et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2014; Moen et al., 2016), while also documenting its limitations (Chung, 2022). Reducing the length of the workweek is premised on the idea that workers need more time for non-work activities and therefore directly targets the amount of work hours expected of workers rather than control over those hours. Findings from research on pilots of a four-day (as opposed to a standard five-day) workweek indicate that this approach can also generate benefits for workers (Schor et al., 2022, 2023), though research on a shorter workweek has emerged only recently. As such, though organizations are actively implementing flexible work and shorter workweeks, research has yet to investigate how each approach may differently shape workers' experiences and behaviors.

To investigate this question, this study leverages data from a unique context in which workers experienced both a shorter workweek and a flexible work policy. Through a qualitative, inductive study of employees at a company I call TableTech, I investigate how these two policies—both of which aimed to reduce work-life conflict and improve worker well-being—differently shaped workers' experiences. TableTech initially implemented a four-day workweek (hereafter 4DWW), which redefined the company's workweek to be four instead of five days. After four months, the 4DWW was replaced with a "Flexible Fridays" policy that encouraged workers to flexibly use Fridays to manage personal and/or work tasks. Under both policies, workers' job expectations and pay remained unchanged. I compare workers' experiences under the two policies to derive insight into the factors that enable and constrain individuals' ability to manage or reduce their work time, and to explore the consequences of the two policies for workers' well-being.

Most workers at TableTech had a stated desire to spend more time on personal life and less time on work; however, they struggled to take time despite encouragement from the organization and their managers, describing both psychological and structural barriers to doing so. I found that the 4DWW enabled workers to reduce work time more than Flexible Fridays and was experienced by workers as more supportive of their work-life balance and well-being. I identify three ways in which the 4DWW helped workers overcome both psychological and structural barriers to taking time off: workers interpreted it as a strong signal that the organization wanted them to prioritize well-being, they believed that it was easier to interpret because it set Friday as a de facto “off” day, and it reduced interdependent work on Fridays. Because of these features, workers experienced the 4DWW as granting them a real choice over how to use their time on Fridays, whether for personal or work activities. By contrast, workers experienced Flexible Fridays as unclear and felt that it imposed greater pressure to be available and to work on Fridays. I found that the 4DWW better supported workers’ well-being and work-life balance because it enabled greater psychological detachment from work, improved the quality of their time off, and enabled them to engage in a wider range of activities—not only caregiving and domestic labor but also leisure—on Fridays.

By exploring how reduced work time and flexibility differently shape workers’ experiences and time use behaviors, this paper contributes to scholarship on work redesign, flexible work, and the future of work. I show how even when organizations implement policies using best practices identified by the literature—such as being universally available to employees and supported by managers—internalized pressure to work and accompanying feelings of guilt can still impede workers from using available work/life policies. I further show that reduced worktime policies may have both psychological and structural advantages over flexible work

policies: they enable workers to overcome psychological barriers (i.e., their guilt) so that they can use the policy available to them, and they enable coordination that helps prevent flexibility from paradoxically generating more work. Building on philosopher Julie Rose's (2016) concept of "free time," I theorize that shortening the workweek helps create free time, as distinguished from non-work time, which may have important implications for well-being, the equitable distribution of time, and workers' participation in society.

ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACHES TO THE WORK/LIFE PROBLEM AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR WORKERS

The Problem: Work/life Conflict and Overwork as Threats to Worker Well-being

Many workers are struggling with long work hours and work/life conflict. Despite large increases in productivity over time, work hours in the United States have increased rather than decreased (Schor, 1993), and the prevalence of overwork, which Cha and Weeden (2014) define as working 50 or more hours per week, has risen. In fact, research shows that "From 1975 to 2016, the hours of all wage and salary workers increased by 13 percent, equivalent to about five extra weeks of work per year" (McCallum, 2020: 7). In this context, time-related challenges afflict workers across occupations and across the income ladder, though they tend to manifest differently for those in low-income and high-income jobs. Those in low-income jobs often struggle to earn a living wage, and so may work multiple jobs, and they also often struggle with unstable schedules and employers demanding too many hours (e.g., forced overtime) or offering too few hours (Kalleberg, 2011; Schneider and Harknett, 2019; McCallum, 2020). Workers in professional and knowledge work jobs tend to struggle with employers' expectations that they prioritize work and be available around-the-clock, expectations that have escalated with the rise of mobile devices (Perlow, 2012; Mazmanian, Orlikowski, and Yates, 2013; Kelly and Moen,

2020; Beckman and Mazmanian, 2020). As a result of these conditions, many workers experience what scholars have termed “time strain” or “time poverty,” which has negative consequences for their well-being (Moen et al., 2013; Fan et al., 2018; Whillans, 2020; Giurge, Whillans, and West, 2020).

The discourse on work-life conflict has historically been framed around gender, characterizing the struggle of managing both one’s job and one’s home life as a women’s problem. Scholars have documented how as middle- and upper-class women entered the workforce and took on demanding jobs, families experienced mounting time strain and work-life conflict, with women and especially mothers disproportionately bearing this burden due to their domestic work and caregiving responsibilities (Hochschild and Machung, 1989; Blair-Loy, 2003; Jacobs and Gerson, 2005). Recently, however, research has increasingly acknowledged that all workers, including men, can experience work-life conflict, and has demonstrated that many men desire to spend more time with their families (Reid, 2015; Kelly and Moen, 2020; de Laat, 2023). Research has also suggested that linking work-life conflict and women may contribute to the persistence of high-intensity work cultures. For example, a study of a professional services firm showed that the gendering of the narrative of work-family conflict contributed to the persistence of both long hours and gender inequality (Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020). Thus, prior research highlights the need for research and practice to investigate how all workers can experience less work-life conflict and gain access to more time outside of work.

Solutions to the Problem of Work-Life Conflict: A Flexible Week, or a Shorter One?

In response to issues around work-life conflict, organizations are increasingly adopting interventions that aim to reduce work-life conflict and improve worker well-being (for a review, see Fox et al., 2022). These interventions take many different forms. Here, I focus on two of

them, both of which are gaining traction in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic: flexible work, which has been the dominant approach adopted and studied in professional and knowledge work settings, and a shorter workweek. I discuss the theoretical underpinnings of each approach and review findings from existing research on how each shapes workers' experiences and well-being.

Flexible work. Flexible work initiatives aim to reduce work-life conflict by giving workers more autonomy over when and where they work. The flexible work approach is “grounded in the job demands-control model, stress process theory, and job demands resources theory” (Kaduk et al., 2019: 415; Karasek, 1979; Schieman, Glavin, and Milkie, 2009; Moen et al., 2016; Fan et al., 2018). The theoretical underpinning of this approach is that if workers have more autonomy and control over their own work, they will be better able to manage the demands of both work and their personal lives. Research generally supports this proposition, showing that when workers have more schedule control, they experience improved work-life balance and job satisfaction (Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton, 2006; Kelly, Moen, and Tranby, 2011; Kelly et al., 2014; for a review see Nijp et al., 2012), and in some cases also experience enhanced well-being and engage in more health-related behaviors (Moen et al., 2011, 2016).

Though schedule control generally has been found to benefit workers, scholars have noted that it comes in different forms and is not uniformly beneficial for workers. Work can be flexible in terms of time (flexible schedules) and/or space (flexible locations), and flexible work may be voluntary or involuntary, depending on whether workers choose alternative work arrangements at their own discretion or are required to do so by their employer (Allen et al., 2013; G. M. Spreitzer, Cameron, and Garrett, 2017; Kaduk et al., 2019). Research has generally shown that flexibility is associated with better outcomes when it is voluntary and when it occurs within regular work hours rather than extending them (Glass and Noonan, 2016; Kaduk et al.,

2019; Yang et al., 2023). At the same time, even flexible schedules that workers understand to be voluntary and autonomy-enhancing have sometimes been associated with higher work-family conflict (Blair-Loy, 2009; Kaduk et al., 2019) and longer hours (Lott and Chung, 2016), which scholars have referred to as the “paradox of flexibility”: workers who have more freedom and autonomy in when and where they work can experience increased work intensity, more hours, and spillover of work into non-work hours, such that flexibility can become a form of organizational control (Putnam, Myers, and Gailliard, 2014; Chung, 2022). For example, Mazmanian, Orlikowski and Yates (2013) show how the use of mobile email devices enabled greater flexibility in when and where professionals worked, yet also escalated their engagement with work and reduced their ability to disconnect from it. Similarly, Kelliher and Anderson (2010) show how some workers using flexible work practices experience the intensification of their work, at times because the ability to work flexibly evokes a feeling of gratitude and raises their commitment to their workplace. Moreover, research shows that workers who use flexible work policies often face stigma and career penalties, and that these penalties can deter workers from using flexible work policies when they are available (Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl, 2013; Reid, 2015; Gonsalves, 2020). This research suggests that flexible work is not a panacea for workers’ struggles with overwork and work-life conflict and can in some cases become a mechanism for organizational control.

Research on what scholars have termed “dual-agenda work redesign” sheds light on how organizations implementing flexible work policies can mitigate some of these challenges (Perlow and Kelly, 2014). Research on carefully designed and implemented work redesign initiatives—specifically, the Results Only Work Environment at Best Buy (Kelly, Moen, and Tranby, 2011; Moen et al., 2011) and the STAR initiative at “TOMO” (Kelly and Moen, 2020), both of which

aimed to increase workers' autonomy over when and where they worked—shows that these initiatives can succeed, actually be used, and benefit workers when they are equally available to all workers by default, are framed as benefitting both work and life, legitimize personal life as important to consider when organizing work, and provide training to managers to enable them to support workers (Kelly and Moen, 2020). These features make dual-agenda work redesign different from accommodation models in which managers grant individual workers accommodations that are exceptions to the rule (Perlow and Kelly, 2014). Managerial cooperation and cooperation within teams are also important enabling factors (Kelly et al., 2010; Perlow, 2012).

A shorter workweek. To date, most of the research on how organizations can help mitigate workers' work-life conflict has focused on flexible work initiatives. Yet especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the American Psychological Association reporting that “Burnout and stress are at all-time highs across professions” (Abramson, 2022), interest in reducing work time is gaining traction. Trials of a 4DWW in countries around the globe (Schor et al., 2022, 2023) have received extensive press coverage since they began in 2022 (e.g., (Zomorodi, Geiran, and Meshkinpour, 2023), legislation introduced in the United States in 2021 and 2024 would amend the Fair Labor Standards Act to shorten the standard workweek from 40 to 32 hours (Liu, 2023; Sanders, 2023; V. Kim, 2024), and in 2023, striking autoworkers asked for a shorter week with no reduction in pay (Appelbaum, 2023). Though the idea of adopting shorter work hours is not new—for example, Kellogg famously adopted a six-hour day in the 1930s (Hunnicutt, 1996)—growing interest and organizational adoption in recent years has sparked a need for research on what happens when organizations shorten the workweek in the 21st Century.

The potential for a shorter workweek to benefit workers has a slightly different theoretical basis than flexible work. Whereas flexible work is grounded in the idea that greater autonomy can solve the problem of work-life conflict, a shorter workweek is grounded in the idea that workers need to work fewer hours so that they can have more time to rest and engage in non-work activities. For example, the website of the nonprofit Four Day Week Global, which is running ongoing trials of a 4DWW in collaboration with researchers, states, “Flexible schedules simply reorganize the same number of working hours, which does not solve for long-term burnout or exhaustion. Our goal is to reduce the overall amount of hours that we work, not just rearrange them” (4 Day Week Global, n.d.).

Scholarship on time suggests that a reduced work time approach may benefit workers and society, especially if workers gain access to longer, uninterrupted periods of non-work time. Psychological research has demonstrated that it is beneficial to psychologically disengage from one’s work (Sonnentag, 2012; Wendsche and Lohmann-Haislah, 2017) and shows that some workers experience more subjective time pressure when their work time is fragmented and they must frequently switch between work and non-work roles (Lu, 2024). Others have highlighted the importance of rest (Pang, 2016) and have argued that access to sufficient time outside of work is a human right and an issue of freedom and justice (Rose, 2016; McCallum, 2020).

Scholars of time use have largely conceptualized workers as individuals who choose to allocate their time between work time and leisure time; however, non-work time may be used for a variety of activities, including domestic labor, caregiving, engaging in hobbies, social activities, sleeping and resting, and engaging in voluntary and political activity (Schor, 1993; Rose, 2016). One potential advantage of a shorter workweek is that it may increase workers’ ability to engage in a broader range of activities. Philosopher and political scientist Julie Rose

argues that reducing work time has the potential to increase workers' access to what she defines as "free time": "the time not committed to meeting one's own, or one's dependents', basic needs" (Rose, 2016: 40). By this definition, free time is time that is spent on discretionary pursuits—for example, spending time with friends, going for a hike, or volunteering in one's community—as opposed to non-work-related necessities, such as sleeping, domestic tasks, and child care. Rose argues that citizens should be "entitled to a fair share of free time" (Rose, 2016: 5) and argues that ensuring equitable access to and distribution of free time is an important societal issue, because without it, workers lack the ability to engage in freedom of association and cannot effectively participate in social and political life.

Initial findings from recent trials (Schor et al., 2022, 2023) as well as previous trials of a shorter week in Iceland (Haraldsson and Kellam, 2021) indicate that shortening the week can benefit workers. Trials have shown that workers in organizations implementing a 4DWW experience better physical and mental health, life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and work-life balance and reduced burnout (Schor et al., 2022, 2023). Follow-up research has also indicated that it is possible for workers and organizations implementing a 4DWW to sustain these benefits over time (Schor, Fan, and Gu, 2023). To date, however, we do yet not know a lot about how workers experience these policies, nor about how they compare to the more common flexible work approach. This study aims to fill this gap.

METHOD

This study draws on data collected over the course of eleven months at a software start-up that implemented a 4DWW policy, then replaced it with a flexible work policy. I draw primarily on in-depth interviews with employees and supplement these data with observations

and surveys. My approach is inductive, as appropriate for building theory in a nascent area of research (Edmondson and McManus, 2007).

Research Setting

The setting for this study is TableTech, a software start-up that produces back-of-house software for the food services industry. TableTech was founded in 2017 and had recently secured a Series A round of venture capital funding at the time of the study. Headquartered in the Western United States, TableTech is an all-remote company, with employees physically located across the U.S. and Latin America.³ The company was in a period of rapid growth, approximately doubling the number of workers employed from fewer than 40 to nearly 80 during the study period. Workers are organized into three core teams at TableTech (Sales, Customer Success, and Engineering), with a few employees in other roles and a five-person executive team.

In 2022, the founder of TableTech initiated a trial of a 4DWW policy. He rooted his motivation for this change in the company's mission, which was to improve the lives of workers in the food industry, explaining at a company-wide meeting announcing the pilot: "I asked...What other actions can we take that...reinforce [our mission]? And, I realized that I want us to...tak[e] the same approach to our own employees, to you all. And so the idea is that, we want to demonstrate our desire for you all to have a fulfilling life, to be happy at work, to have longevity with us, to not get burnt out." In addition to improving well-being and work-life balance, the CEO stated the goal that productivity would remain the same or even increase: "the expected productivity is going to remain the same. Now I actually hope...that productivity

³ TableTech went all-remote during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and never returned to a physical office. At the start of the study period, employees had been working remotely for more than two years.

actually increases. Teams become way more efficient because people are better balanced, happier, more satisfied, more at ease, just have less angst and crisis in their life.”

The 4DWW changed the expected workweek from five days to four; employees were encouraged but not required to take Fridays off from work.⁴ Employees’ job expectations and pay did not change. In explaining this policy, the CEO emphasized that employees were not required or expected to work a particular number of hours; rather, they were expected to be present at work four days a week, and to work as much as needed to accomplish their work.

We are saying that instead of having five days to get the work done that each of you is being asked to do already, we are going to have four days that are official days to get work done....we still want you to get the same amount of work done, and all we are doing is saying that your commitment to the business is going to be four days a week... if... you still want to have five days to get work done, great. That’s totally fine. You can still work five days a week. Now you have a fifth day where you have no meetings, and you can just go heads down. If...you can be really efficient with your hours in four days and you can work four [six-hour days], and get all your work done, good for you. Great. Now you have a fifth day, and now you can use that fifth day for whatever fills you up.

The 4DWW trial was announced in June and implemented in August. By October, three months into the trial, 91 percent of employees were taking a partial or a full day off each week (further details on policy participation are reported in the Findings). The CEO, his co-founder, and the vast majority of employees believed that the 4DWW trial was a success and wanted to continue it. However, a few resisters—primarily the other three members of the executive team—believed that the 4DWW posed a threat to productivity and advocated for the end of the policy. In response to this resistance, at the end of the fourth month of the 4DWW trial, the CEO decided to end the 4DWW and replace it with a policy that encouraged employees to work “flexibly” on Fridays called the “Flexible Fifth Day” (employees often referred to this policy as “Flexible Fridays,” which is the language I use in this paper).

⁴ One employee was encouraged to instead take Monday off instead to ensure coverage for customers.

The Flexible Fridays policy highlighted flexibility as the key feature of the 4DWW that employees had enjoyed and aimed to “preserve” and promote flexible work on Fridays. The CEO expressed a hope that the new policy would be substantively similar to the 4DWW, calling it a “rebranding” and explaining that the policy aimed to clarify that employees were still expected to complete five days’ worth of work, as had also been the case with the 4DWW. Announcing this change, he said:

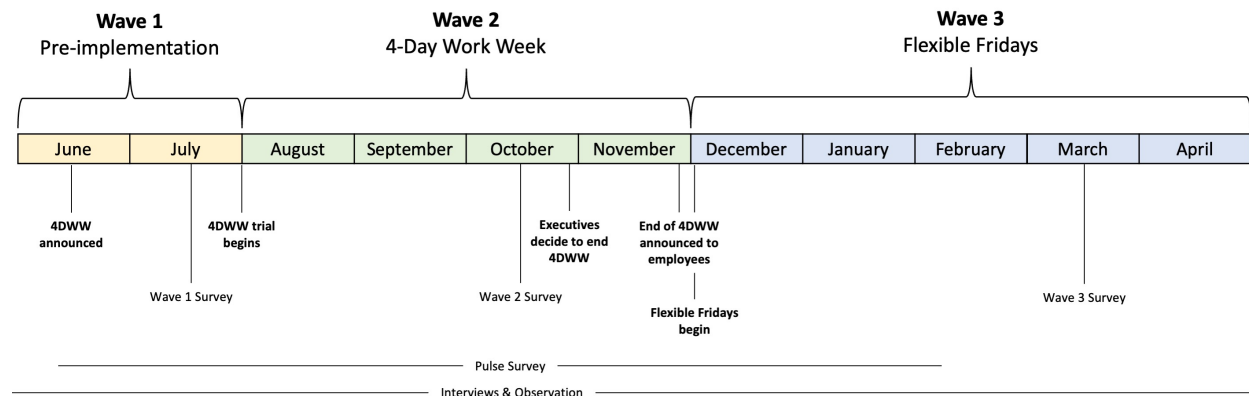
We are going to make a small change to the 4DWW. And the intent of this change is to preserve the flexibility. And this is going to be moving to what we call a Flexible Fifth Day...we believe having this term Flexible Fifth Day allows us to make it clear to everyone that there is a five-day workload that everyone is going to be responsible for. There are going to be four days when you are expected to work structured work...And then there is a fifth day, this bucket of time, that is going to be more flexible, more free... So hopefully for a lot of you, this change from the 4DWW to the Flexible Fifth Day is no more than just a rebranding. (CEO)

Despite the CEO’s statement that the policy change was “just a rebranding,” many, though not all, employees experienced it as a significant change. Most workers increased their work hours on Fridays (details are reported in the Findings). In addition, employees reported that their subjective experience of the two policies differed. I draw on employees’ different time use patterns and accounts of their experiences to analyze how the 4DWW and Flexible Fridays policies differently shaped these outcomes, with different consequences for workers’ well-being.

Data

I collected data for this study over the course of 11 months. The data are structured in three waves: before the 4DWW (Wave 1), during the 4DWW (Wave 2), and during Flexible Fridays (Wave 3), which enables me to follow workers’ experiences over time as they experienced different organizational policies. Over the course of the study, I gathered interview, observation, survey, and archival data. Figure 2.1 presents a timeline of key events and data collection.

Figure 2.1: Timeline of Key Events and Data Collection



I initially gained access to TableTech when its founders approached a research partner, who had been studying TableTech in the context of a larger study on purpose-driven start-ups, with the opportunity to study the company’s 4DWW trial. I collected all of the data for this paper, with my research partner participating in some interviews, primarily with executives, assisting in survey design, and attending key company meetings.

The core data source on which this paper draws is a set of 141 semi-structured interviews with 61 individuals, who represent 78 percent of the 78 full-time workers at TableTech during the study period. I interviewed individuals across waves, which enables me to trace their experiences over time (27 workers participated in three interviews, 14 in two interviews, and 20 in one interview). Interviews were semi-structured, recorded and professionally transcribed in all but a few cases in which I took near-verbatim notes, and typically lasted about 60 minutes in Waves 1 and 2, and about 30-45 minutes in Wave 3. Because TableTech is an all-remote firm, all interviews were conducted via Zoom. Interviews covered participants’ roles and the content of their work; their expectations for and experiences of the 4DWW and Flexible Fridays; descriptions of a typical and/or recent day/week; descriptions of how they used their time

throughout the week, and especially on Fridays; and their accounts of their own well-being and work-life balance. Appendix A presents my interview protocols.

In addition to interviews, I conducted over 140 hours of observations, which primarily consisted of weekly team meetings for Sales, Engineering, Customer Success, and the Executive Team. I also observed company-wide “All Hands” meetings, training sessions, customer and prospect calls, and software coding sessions. I had access to TableTech’s Slack workspace, which functioned as the company’s virtual “office.” I monitored the core team and company-wide channels and gathered key posts, slide decks, and policy documents as archival materials.

I supplement my qualitative data with survey data. I conducted two types of surveys. The first was a brief “pulse” survey, which I administered weekly during Waves 1 and 2, and approximately every other week during Wave 3. I administered this survey in 25 weeks, with an average response rate of 60 percent. It consisted of six to ten questions, including questions about job satisfaction, days worked, and satisfaction with personal time, each of which was measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Once per wave, I also administered a longer “Employee Experience Survey,” consisting of approximately 60 questions on a range of work and time related topics, measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The average response rate for this survey was 96 percent. For a summary of data collected, see Appendix B.

Study Participants

This paper focuses primarily on a subset of 53 employees who experienced both the 4DWW and Flexible Fridays to enable analysis of how their behavior and experience changed across the two policies. Employees not included in this subset either exited before I was able to collect data on their experience of both policies, or joined TableTech later in the study period and

so did not experience the 4DWW.⁵ I draw primarily from 123 in-depth interviews with these employees. Of the 53 employees analyzed, seven participated in four interviews, 23 participated in three interviews, eight participated in two interviews, and five participated in no interviews. Survey and observation data enable me to fill gaps in interview data and observe team- and company-level dynamics. These employees were distributed across TableTech's teams as follows: Sales (n=8), Customer Success (n=8), Engineering (n=29), Leadership (n=5), and other (n=3). Following quotes, I indicate the employee's team with "S" for sales, "C" for Customer Success, "E" for Engineering, "LT" for Leadership, and "other." Consistent with the U.S. software start-up industry, TableTech's workforce was mostly male (83 percent). In interviews or surveys, 36 percent reported that they were the caregiver for a child or an adult, with 15 men and four women reporting caregiving responsibilities. See Table 2.1 for a summary of participant characteristics.

⁵ I include employees who experienced both policies for at least one month each. I excluded four additional employees because I lacked sufficient data to document their time off behavior across both the 4DWW and Flexible Fridays to arrive at my final count of 53 participants.

Table 2.1. Summary of Participant Characteristics

	All Participants		Participants in both 4DWW and Flexible Fridays	
Team				
Sales	16	21%	8	15%
Customer Success	11	14%	8	15%
Engineering	42	54%	29	55%
Executive Team	5	6%	5	9%
Other	4	5%	3	6%
Gender				
Men	67	86%	44	83%
Women	11	14%	9	17%
Caregiving Status*				
Caregiver			19	36%
Non-caregiver			33	62%
TOTAL	78	100%	53	100%

* The caregiving status of one participant is unknown.

Analysis

My analytical process is inductive (Charmaz, 2014). My interest in how employees differently experience shorter workweek vs. flexible work policies was initially sparked by insights during data collection. I noticed that employees were near-unanimous in expressing strong positive sentiment towards the 4DWW and reported that it improved their well-being and work-life balance, though only some of them were actually taking a day off. I noticed that even those who only used the 4DWW policy minimally felt it increased flexibility and control over their time. By contrast, I noticed that many people experienced more constraint and reported reduced benefits for their personal lives under the Flexible Fridays policy, which sparked my interest in understanding these differences.

These initial insights prompted me to analyze my data at the individual level, focusing on individuals' reports of how they used their time—especially on Fridays—and their reports of their own well-being and work-life balance. I first focused on time use behavior, drawing on portions of interviews in which participants described a typical and/or recent day or week, described a typical and/or recent Friday, and discussed the kinds of activities they were doing on Fridays. I triangulated with data from survey questions that asked “In the last 4 weeks, how many times did you take Friday (or another day for the 4DWW) off?” (administered during the 4DWW), “In the last 4 weeks, how many times did you take Friday (or another flex day) off?”, and “In the last 4 weeks, how many times did you work a shorter day on Friday (or another flex day)?” (administered during Flexible Fridays). Through this analysis, I came to conceptualize employees' time off behavior on Fridays as falling into three categories: those who were taking Friday off all or most of the time (full users), those who were working a shorter day and/or taking Friday off occasionally (partial users), and those who were not taking Friday off at all (not users). This analysis also enabled me to document an important shift I had observed: that compared to their time use during the 4DWW, most but not all employees reduced the amount of time they were taking off after the Flexible Fridays policy was implemented. Considering prior research showing that women and caregivers are more likely to use flexible and alternative work arrangements (Wharton, Chivers, and Blair-Loy, 2008; Perlow and Kelly, 2014), I also analyzed these data by gender and caregiver status.

Next, I focused my analysis on understanding individuals' accounts of why their subjective experience and their behavior changed between the 4DWW and Flexible Fridays. This analysis surfaced several factors identified by prior research (Perlow, 2012; Kelly and Moen, 2020), such as the enabling nature of perceptions of manager support and the inhibiting nature of

lack of coordination or obligations to colleagues. I also noticed that many people talked about how they experienced guilt and pressure to work; many expressed the sense that this pressure was internal, and some even noted that their manager was actively encouraging them to take time off but found it difficult to do so because of these feelings of guilt. I noticed that many people talked about the 4DWW as alleviating this psychological pressure in a way that enabled them to take time off, whereas they did not experience Flexible Fridays in this way. After initially focusing on the 4DWW's benefits for alleviating psychological pressure, I noticed that participants also described fewer structural pressures to work on Friday during the 4DWW. This insight led me to analyze how the 4DWW reduced both psychological and structural barriers to time taking and how the features of the 4DWW that made it more enabling better supported worker well-being, and to consider ways in which psychological and structural pressures were intertwined.

FINDINGS

I found that workers at TableTech had a strong desire for more time for their lives outside of work. However, they faced both psychological and structural barriers to taking time away from work and hoped that TableTech's work/life policies would enable them to do so. I show that the 4DWW enabled workers to take more time off than Flexible Fridays. I then identify features of the 4DWW that made it more enabling in helping workers overcome both psychological and structural barriers to time taking. I end by discussing three ways in which workers experienced the 4DWW as more supportive of their well-being and work-life balance.

The Struggle for More Time for Life Outside of Work

Workers' desire for more time. Many workers described feeling tired, stressed, and overloaded, and they connected these feelings to high work demands. For example, a software

engineer said, “On Monday it’s okay, but when I start getting closer to Fridays, it’s like my energy has been totally drained... [at the end of the week] that’s when I say, ‘Oh my God, it’s Friday.’ I am happy...but at the same time, I’m so tired that I probably won’t enjoy my weekend because I’ll probably be sleeping all day to rest” (P02, E). Another located her exhaustion in the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic and remote work, saying, “I think everyone is exhausted from this pandemic stuff, remote work. Like, we are tired, you know?” (P04, E) Before the 4DWW trial began, workers expressed hope that it would help alleviate their stress and exhaustion by creating more time for personal activities and rest.

For some, the desire for more time for life outside of work was rooted not only in the need to cope with stress and exhaustion, but also in a desire to rethink how much space work should take up in one’s life. One employee, discussing his anticipation of the 4DWW, said,

I’m one of those humans that has learned throughout my career, [that] your worth is defined by your productivity and what you can do and what you can contribute. And I translate that to working really hard and working long hours. And so, changing that model is something I’m excited about. I think it’ll enable me to be happier, truly. This is getting kind of esoteric, but like the meaning of life, is [it] how many tasks I could complete, or how much money I can make? It’s not about that, it’s about, am I truly happy? ... So creating space to just be and lean into the relationship with myself more I think is the part [of the 4DWW trial] that I’m excited about. (P07, C)

Another employee described the time strain that he experienced while working and raising young children, saying, “Everyone is used to working a forty-hour week and you’re in this rut of five days on, two days off. You try to cram everything you do in those two days. It’s never enough for me at this point... You have three kids, life never stops. I haven’t had a recharge since my first child was born eleven years ago.” He stated that “From a normal American’s view, I’m a very satisfied and happy person, worker, employee,” and he expressed a strong connection to his work, saying, “I do feel a very strong sense of ownership with TableTech...I’m here to make it successful and that’s really my main goal.” Yet at the same time, he desired to scale back the role

of work in his life, saying, “[My view] of the utopian world is that no one should work five days a week. I just don’t believe that. I think you should be given the amount of work that you are able to do in a reasonable amount of time...If there’s work to be done, you do the work. If you can take time, you should take the time” (P38, C).

Even employees who prided themselves on being exceptionally devoted to their work hoped that they would be able to gain more space for their non-work lives. One salesperson said, in anticipation of the 4DWW, “I’m actually grateful that Friday could become a day where I take some calls...[and] I can [also] be with my wife to help prepare the house for Sabbath. It’s actually a really wonderful thing. And maybe it’s going to help me cope with being a workaholic a little better” (P26, S). Thus, the desire for TableTech to adopt policies that would help employees spend less time on work and more time on their personal lives was widely shared.

Psychological barriers to taking time. Though workers wanted to take more time away from work, many struggled to do so because they experienced pressure to work more and experienced guilt when they were not working. Many workers described this pressure as self-imposed. For example, a salesperson described struggling with “the feeling I should be working even though I have it off,” saying, “It’s kind of like that self-doubt, like you should be doing this, or you should be doing that, and you’re not working hard. That kind of inner reflection process of you’re not doing this right, because [taking another day off] is such a new thing, not just with our country, but across the world” (P43, S). An engineer described how he put pressure on himself to continue working, even when he was experiencing significant pain from a kidney stone: “It’s like I know I have to go to the medic...and I just leave it for tomorrow.... But even though I was in pain, I knew I wanted to help my [workgroup], and I didn’t stop...I don’t feel

comfortable doing anything else when I'm in my work time journey." Asked where this pressure came from, he said, "maybe [that pressure to work is] coming from me" (P02, E).

Some workers reported that they even struggled to take time off when explicitly encouraged to do so by their manager. One employee described such a conversation with her manager, who was actively encouraging her to take Fridays off, attributing her resistance to taking time away from work to "learned behavior" from a prior work environment:

I was like, "Sorry, I don't have a nanny tomorrow [on Friday], so I'm not going to be able to be online in the morning, but I'll have Slack on my phone." And [my manager said], "Why are you working tomorrow?" I was like, "I just mean, I don't know, I don't know." He's like, "You've got to stop. You've got to just take the time off. Do what you need to do." And I was like, "I know. I know. I just wanted you to be aware in case I didn't answer." He's like, "Okay, that's fair," but he's like, "stop putting so much pressure on yourself." But I think it's just, that was a learned behavior. I worked at a corporate company for the majority of my twenties, and if you said you were sick, they assumed you were hung over and you were reprimanded for it. (P14, S)

Another employee similarly described struggling with how work "never leaves me," saying, "as soon as I wake up in the morning, my brain goes to work...that's just me. I don't like that...I would love to [turn it off]." He reported experiencing intense guilt at the prospect of taking time off for his child's birthday, even though his manager was encouraging him to do so:

It's [my daughter's] birthday tomorrow, and she wants to go to the ballpark. And look, I've only got one daughter...she only turns eighteen once, so I have to be there for her tomorrow and not work. And that's just going to drive me. I will have my phone with me. I'm not going to have a laptop, but I'm going to be unfortunately working my head and on a phone for most of the day, which I don't want it to be, but it's just me. I can't change that...It doesn't come from TableTech. It comes from me... [my manager] says "Take the day off. Go and enjoy. Do what you've got to do." (P12, S)

He went on to discuss how having permission and support from his organization and his manager was a new experience for him, saying, "A very big part of my desire and appeal of joining TableTech is this, that they insist that family come first, and you'll take care of yourself. And that is foreign to me, because no other organization has ever put those guiding principles forward.

But I just have to, [despite] my own mental struggles, try and adopt that.” These examples illustrate that this psychological experience—what workers described as self-imposed pressure to work and feeling guilty about not working—was one of the key barriers to having more time for personal life that workers needed to overcome to use the reduced work time or flexible work policies available to them.

Structural barriers to taking time. Workers experienced not only psychological but also structural barriers to taking time away from work. Structural barriers arose when employees needed to engage in work that was interdependent with others. For instance, workers sometimes described feeling unable to take time away from work due to the need to be available to clients or colleagues. On Customer Success, being available for customer support was a common concern. As one employee described, “I think we all sort of understand that we have a very customer centric job. All of our customers aren't going to take four-day weeks, so we have to figure out how to have coverage during that time” (P38, C). Describing pressure to be available to support his colleagues, an executive said that the challenge to taking Fridays off would be “Probably not the volume [of work], but more just like, being around, because like, I just get emails or Slack messages from everybody—[names other executives]—all these people, all the time. So, it's more of like, just being around” (P25, LT).

Structural barriers to time taking were especially salient on the Engineering team, which had a highly interdependent work structure. This team worked in a method of team-based code production called mob programming, in which engineers worked in teams of three called “mobs” to collaboratively write software code in real time in a Zoom room or Slack huddle. The software engineer who experienced a kidney stone and attributed pressure to work to himself also described pressure from the way things worked at TableTech saying, “Maybe [it's] my inner

conscience, I think that I need to work that way because of how things work here” (P02, E). Another engineer similarly linked self-imposed pressure and the work structure at TableTech, saying, “Sometimes it’s a bit of self-imposed pressure because I feel like I’m not delivering as fast as I would expect. I spend the whole day here, and since I am in a mob, I know that there are other people expecting me to be here...It’s like you have a rope on your neck...It’s a set commitment because of how the system works here” (P23, E). These examples illustrate how, as prior research has shown, workers can internalize structural pressures and expectations in ways that contribute to the intensification of their work (e.g., Michel, 2011; Mazmanian, Orlikowski, and Yates, 2013).

The work requirements and incentive systems at TableTech were also structural barriers to reducing work time. Workers sometimes reported working on Fridays because they had to complete work that their manager or team required of them, or that they wanted to accomplish on a certain timeline. In addition, for the salespeople, the number of sales activities (i.e., calls, emails, and meetings) they were expected to complete, as well as sales quotas on which they were incentivized and financially rewarded, at times compelled them to work more hours.

I found that the 4DWW policy enabled workers to overcome both psychological and structural barriers to taking time off in ways that Flexible Fridays did not. Next, I report differences in workers’ time use patterns across the two policies, then show how the policies differently shaped workers’ experiences and behaviors.

Workers’ Time Use Patterns: 4DWW and Flexible Fridays

Workers reported that both the 4DWW and Flexible Fridays policies enabled them to take more time for their personal lives, as they desired. Workers took more time off under the 4DWW policy, and most, though not all, individuals changed their work patterns such that they took less

time off after the 4DWW transitioned to Flexible Fridays. In addition, most but not all workers reported that the subjective experience of the two policies was different, such that it felt like a substantial change, not merely a “rebranding” as the CEO hoped it would be.

Drawing on interview and survey data, I categorized workers’ time use on Friday as taking Fridays all or mostly off (reporting taking a full or close to a full day off most of the time in an interview, and/or reporting at least three out of the last four Fridays off on a survey), taking Fridays partially off (reporting taking approximately half of Fridays off or working shorter days on Fridays in an interview, and/or reporting one or two of the last four Fridays off or shorter Fridays in a survey), or not taking Fridays off (reporting that they worked full days on Fridays, and/or zero of the last four Fridays off or shorter in a survey). I found that during the 4DWW period, 57% (n=30) of workers took Friday all or mostly off, 34% (n=18) took Friday partially off, and only 9% (n=5) did not take Friday off at all. Time off on Fridays decreased during Flexible Fridays, with only 6% (n=3) of workers taking Friday all or mostly off, 51% (n=27) taking Friday partially off, and 43% (n=23) working a full day on Fridays. Over 70% of workers changed their time-taking behavior between the two policies, with all but one of these workers increasing rather than decreasing their work time.

Time use under the two policies varied by team. Customer Success and Engineering displayed similar patterns. Under the 4DWW on those teams, respectively, 63% and 66% of team members took Friday off, 38% and 34% took Friday partially off, and no workers took no time off. Sales team members were less likely to take a full day off and more likely to work a full day, with 25% reporting full days off, 63% partial, and 13% (one person) working the full day. Executives were least likely to take time off, with three executives working the full day across both policies. Time use across teams was more similar under the Flexible Friday policy, with

members of the Engineering team slightly more likely to take the full day off or to not take any time off on Fridays as compared to Sales and Customer Success. Table 2.2 reports Friday time use behaviors for all workers and by team.

Table 2.2. Friday Time Off, 4DWW and Flexible Fridays

ALL TableTech			Sales	
Fridays off?	<u>4DWW</u>	<u>FLEXIBLE</u>	<u>4DWW</u>	<u>FLEXIBLE</u>
All or mostly off	30 (57%)	3 (6%)	2 (25%)	0 (0%)
Partially off	18 (34%)	27 (51%)	5 (63%)	5 (63%)
Not off	5 (9%)	23 (43%)	1 (13%)	3 (38%)
Changed behavior?				
Yes	38 (72%)		3 (38%)	
No	15 (28%)		5 (63%)	

Customer Success			Engineering	
Fridays off?	<u>4DWW</u>	<u>FLEXIBLE</u>	<u>4DWW</u>	<u>FLEXIBLE</u>
All or mostly off	5 (63%)	0 (0%)	19 (66%)	2 (7%)
Partially off	3 (38%)	5 (63%)	10 (34%)	13 (45%)
Not off	0 (0%)	3 (38%)	0 (0%)	14 (48%)
Changed behavior?				
Yes	6 (75%)		25 (86%)	
No	2 (25%)		4 (14%)	

Leadership			Other	
Fridays off?	<u>4DWW</u>	<u>FLEXIBLE</u>	<u>4DWW</u>	<u>FLEXIBLE</u>
All or mostly off	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	2 (67%)	0 (0%)
Partially off	0 (0%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)	3 (100%)
Not off	3 (60%)	3 (60%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)
Changed behavior?				
Yes	1 (20%)		3 (100%)	
No	4 (80%)		0 (0%)	

Prior research documents women's and caregivers' propensity to use flexible and reduced hour policies at higher rates than men and non-caregivers (Wharton, Chivers, and Blair-Loy, 2008; Perlow and Kelly, 2014). I found that at TableTech, there were subtle differences in how men and women as well as caregivers and non-caregivers used the 4DWW and Flexible Fridays. Women were slightly more likely to take Friday fully off (67% vs. 55%), and men were more likely to not take Friday off at all (11% vs. 0%). All five of the workers who did not take Friday off at all were men, and three of them were on the executive team; given that executives were least likely to take time off, this finding may be driven by seniority and managerial responsibility in addition to gender.

I found that caregivers and non-caregivers used the 4DWW in similar ways (58% vs 55% were full users, and 32% vs 35% were partial users). However, under Flexible Fridays, caregivers took more time off than non-caregivers, driven by greater use of partial Fridays off by caregivers. Among both caregivers and non-caregivers, few took Friday fully off (5% vs 6%), but 75% of caregivers took part of Friday off, while only 36% of non-caregivers did. In addition, only 21% of caregivers did not take any time off on Fridays, compared to 58% of non-caregivers. One possible interpretation of these findings (supported by qualitative data, which I will discuss below) is that workers felt more uniformly able to take time away from work for a variety of personal life activities under the 4DWW policy, whereas under Flexible Fridays, caregiving remained a legitimate non-work activity while other non-work activities did not. Table 3 reports findings on gender and caregiving.

Table 2.3. Time Use on Fridays by Gender and Caregiver Status, 4DWW vs Flexible Fridays

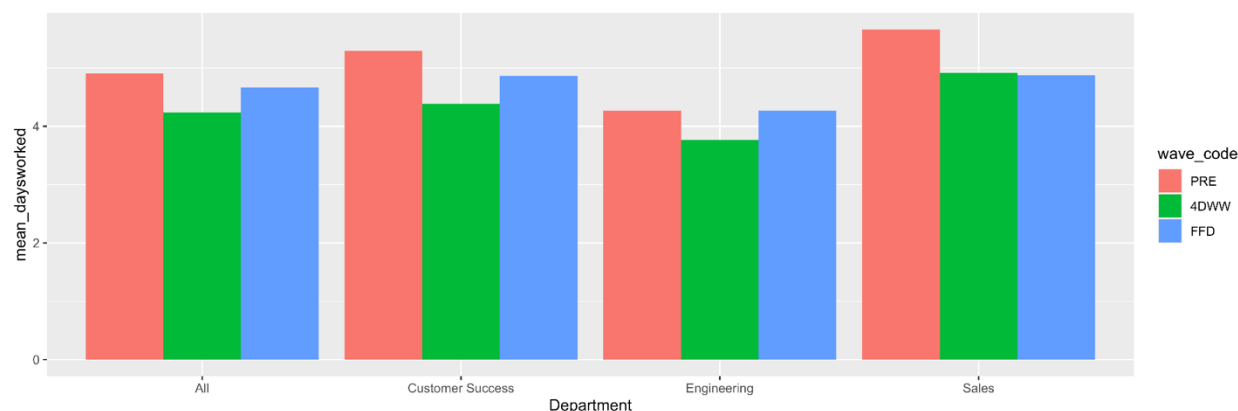
	Men		Women	
Fridays off?	<u>4DWW</u>	<u>FLEXIBLE</u>	<u>4DWW</u>	<u>FLEXIBLE</u>
All or mostly off	24 (55%)	2 (5%)	6 (67%)	1 (11%)
Partially off	15 (34%)	22 (50%)	3 (33%)	5 (56%)
Not off	5 (11%)	20 (45%)	0 (0%)	3 (33%)
Changed behavior?				
Yes	32 (73%)		6 (67%)	
No	12 (27%)		3 (33%)	

	Caregivers		Non-caregivers	
Fridays off?	<u>4DWW</u>	<u>FLEXIBLE</u>	<u>4DWW</u>	<u>FLEXIBLE</u>
All or mostly off	11 (58%)	1 (5%)	18 (55%)	2 (6%)
Partially off	6 (32%)	14 (74%)	12 (36%)	12 (36%)
Not off	2 (11%)	4 (21%)	3 (9%)	19 (58%)
Changed behavior?				
Yes	11 (58%)		26 (79%)	
No	8 (42%)		7 (21%)	

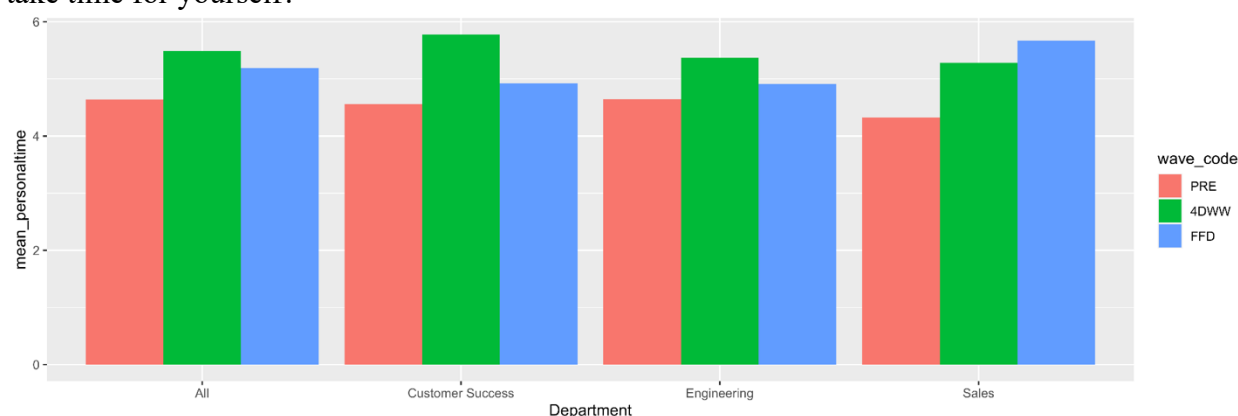
Data from a pulse survey administered weekly or bi-weekly across the first 10 months of the study period also show that workers worked the fewest days during the 4DWW period, compared to before the 4DWW and during Flexible Friday. These data document a rise in days worked during Flexible Fridays, though there is variation across teams. Survey data also show that workers experienced the greatest adequacy of time for their personal lives during the 4DWW, followed by during Flexible Fridays. Figure 2.2 reports these findings.

Figure 2.2: Days Worked and Adequacy of Personal Time Before 4DWW, During 4DWW and During Flexible Fridays

During the last 7 days (including today), how many days did you work 2 hours or more? *



In the last week, how adequate was the time you had to attend to your personal life, recharge, and take time for yourself? *



* For more information about Pulse Survey data, see Appendix B. Note that this analysis include all responses, including those from individuals who did not experience all three time periods.

These findings show that the 4DWW, more so than the Flexible Fridays policy, enabled workers to take time off and enhanced workers' satisfaction with the amount of time they had for their personal lives. Indeed, though the CEO expressed a hope that for many workers the shift to Flexible Fridays would be only a “rebranding,” most workers experienced it as a more substantial change. A minority of workers—a share of those who did not change their behavior between the two waves—felt the policies were the same, saying things like, “Yeah, it's the same thing. It's just like the way that I was envisioning [it] changed a little bit, but it feels the same.

The idea of it is the same, that I can have more time to myself or do things that I want to” (P04, E). But the majority felt that something had shifted, saying, for example, “I think there was just more of a structural change to how we're treating that that came with the name change, at least in our department” (P42, E). Some workers suggested that the nature of the Flexible Fridays policy, including the name of the policy itself, shaped their experience. As one worker described, “sometimes just a change of words changed people’s behavior” (P30, E). Next, I turn to an analysis of the features of the 4DWW and Flexible Fridays that enabled and constrained workers in their ability to take time for their personal lives on Fridays.

How the Four-Day Workweek Reduced Barriers to Time Taking

The 4DWW helped workers overcome both psychological and structural barriers to taking time off in several ways that Flexible Fridays did not. First, workers interpreted it as an especially strong signal of care and permission to prioritize well-being and work-life balance. Second, they experienced the policy as clearer and easier to interpret, describing how the 4DWW made Friday a de facto “off” day, whereas Flexible Fridays created more pressure to work. Third, by helping to coordinate and encourage taking time off, the 4DWW helped reduce interdependent work and pressure to work resulting from colleagues’ visible work time. These features of the 4DWW created a feeling of freedom, such that workers experienced the 4DWW as providing them with a real option of working or not working on Fridays.

4DWW as a strong signal of care and permission. Many employees reported that they interpreted the implementation of the 4DWW as a strong signal that TableTech leaders genuinely cared about their well-being and wanted them to improve their work-life balance. As one salesperson put it, “The idea of the 4DWW infused that mentality of ‘Take care of yourself.’ ... It was an inoculation of the culture. Our culture is, we want to take care of ourselves. Here it is”

(P09, S). Another employee, describing his reaction to the policy, said, “my first impression was that woah, that’s really good, because it makes me comfortable knowing that the company really thinks about its employees’ mental health state” (P02, E). The clear signal that caring for oneself was a company priority and part of the culture helped employees feel that they could truly use the 4DWW policy when it was made available to them.

4DWW as easier to interpret than flexibility: sets baseline to off. Many employees also reported that the 4DWW policy was easier to interpret than Flexible Fridays. Specifically, the 4DWW was interpreted as setting the baseline expectation for Fridays as not working, and this clarity enabled workers to feel more secure about taking time off. As one salesperson described, “it’s pretty self-explanatory. Four-day workweek. It’s kind of in the name” (P43, S). Another said, “I mean, this is pretty bold and clear statement—four-day workweek...I don’t feel pressure to log in on a Friday...the whole 4DWW experiment was just a very clear message that...this is not a butts-in-seats organization. It’s really about getting the work done and being efficient” (P32, other).

Workers described how the 4DWW set the default state of Fridays to “off” instead of “on.” During the Flexible Fridays period, one compared the experience of the two policies, saying, “It did feel more aggressive during the four-day work week, maybe culturally in the company as a whole, where it was like really avoid getting any meetings or setting anything hard on Fridays.... It felt like...you only work four days, so the fifth day is off-off” (P045, C). During the 4DWW period, he had previously described how this clarity in what was “expected” helped him “push through” the guilt he initially experienced taking Friday time off, thus describing how the clarity of the 4DWW helped him overcome psychological barriers to time taking:

P45: I did notice that in the first month, month and a half, the mindset shift—I don’t have to feel bad about taking the day off. It’s just expected, which wasn’t always the case.

Interviewer: ...was there something that changed the way you were thinking about it? How did that mental transition go for you?

P45: Just time. Just grind against it. Feel bad, but try to remind yourself. At the same time, not having my boss breathe down my neck when I'm off, was reinforcing for that sort of thing.

Interviewer: Do you feel guilty now on Fridays, taking time off?

P45: Not as much.

By contrast, employees described how Flexible Fridays did not grant the same clarity.

Contrasting the two policies, one said, "the expectation has gone from that we are not working on Friday to we may be working on Friday" (P052, C). This uncertainty made workers feel less secure in taking time off and less able to plan personal activities on Fridays.

Reducing interdependent work. Because workers interpreted the 4DWW as a clear signal that they did not need to work on Fridays, the 4DWW enabled a high proportion of workers to take time off. It thereby served as a coordinating function, reducing interdependencies that impacted workers' time taking behavior in two ways. First, when workers observed that others were not working, they felt more able to take time off. Workers described how when they saw that their colleagues were online, it increased their feeling that they should be working. As one described:

I think there is an unspoken pressure...when your colleagues are working on a Friday. Their little bubble on Slack is green and it's such a toxic thing to do, but you take inventory of who's working, and who's not. And I feel like, if your boss is online and they see that you're working, you're like, 'Nice.' But if you're not online, you're thinking, and I'll check Slack on my phone if I go on a hike early or whatever and see who's on, and I'm like, 'Ooh, I should be,' you know, and then it's kind of like an external pressure. (P08, S)

However, observing that one's colleagues were not working could have the opposite effect, enabling workers to take time off by instilling a sense of permission and normalizing taking time off. For example, an engineer described how witnessing his colleagues take Fridays off helped

him feel able to himself take the day off too. This engineer described how initially taking time off on Friday felt “really weird,” saying, “I’m in the supermarket and it’s full of elder people because it’s Friday morning. Everyone else is working or is at school or whatever, so it feels weird...it’s like hey, I’m just doing the wrong thing. I should be working right now.” He went on to describe how witnessing how his colleagues engaged differently with the 4DWW helped him overcome these feelings of guilt, saying, “[I saw] messages in the Slack saying, ‘Hey, tomorrow I’m going to the beach,’ or, ‘Tomorrow I’m going to this concert so I will be out or wherever.’ It’s like whoa, I’m not used to that...I mean it was really, it was a huge impact to see that message...it was like realizing that that person isn’t going to work on Friday” (P18, E). This engineer reported that the 4DWW helped him change his behavior to accord with a shift in his priorities, as he desired to learn that “work shouldn’t be your entire life.” Over time, as he observed colleagues taking time, he too began to take time off on Fridays despite his initial hesitance.

Second, by setting the default for Friday to “off,” the 4DWW helped reduce interdependent work, especially meetings, on Fridays. During the 4DWW, most workers reported that they had few meetings on Fridays; if they worked, they tended to do so independently. For instance, one Customer Success team member described how she sometimes worked on Fridays to ensure that the support queue was covered, but said, “I don’t think that people really schedule meetings or anything” (P06, C). When people did meet with colleagues on Friday, they described asking for permission to do so. For instance, describing a recent Friday during the 4DWW, one salesperson said, “I think we had an internal meeting—which we’re not supposed to be doing, I know—but I think we did because we had just gotten back from a conference and we needed to [do some follow-up work]...So, we all made sure it was okay with each other, we were like,

‘Hey, are you good on Friday? If you’re not, can’t do anything about it, you’re entitled to your Fridays’” (P08, S).

During Flexible Fridays, by contrast, workers described participating in more meetings on Fridays, though many still said Fridays had fewer meetings than other workdays. Describing the transition from 4DWW to Flexible Fridays, one Customer Success employee said, “I don’t think it’s really that flexible...It’s just like a workday. I feel tied to my desk. I have meetings. I am doing whatever. If other people on the team are in a meeting, I’m meeting. So I don’t really think of it as any different than a regular workday...[when the policy changed] it was like all of a sudden there was a time to meet in a week” (P44, C). Relatedly, some employees described feeling more able to request meetings with their colleagues. One salesperson said that Flexible Fridays felt different from the 4DWW because “it doesn’t feel like I’m really asking too much of someone to take [a meeting], you know if I need help on a call...it doesn’t feel like I’m doing something that is making somebody work on a day they shouldn’t be working. So it’s like it’s okay if I ask them for a meeting” (P28, S). Another salesperson, who worked full days during both policies, similarly reported that switching from the 4DWW to Flexible Fridays “entirely” alleviated his concerns about coworkers not being available on Fridays, saying, “I felt less guilty of putting people on the calendar” (P26, S). Once Flexible Fridays increased the feeling of permission to schedule meetings, interdependencies with colleague and clients thus quickly increased, constraining employees’ ability to take personal time on Fridays.

4DWW as the freedom to choose. These features of the 4DWW—its signal of care and permission, its clarity in defining Friday as an off day, and its reduction of interdependencies with colleagues—created feeling of freedom to use one’s time on Fridays however one wanted, whether for personal or professional tasks. Describing this experience, one employee said, “I’m

free to do what I want to do... I can listen to my music, and learn something, code something. I'm free. I don't need to answer. I don't need to talk with anyone." He went on to describe how he could "decide to come here to my office and do something [for work]" or "enjoy [life] outside [of work]. Everyone is free to do what they want to do" (P03, E). Another similarly expressed how he felt he could choose to work or not work: "I think what really, really is so beneficial about the 4DWW is that there is a choice to work on Friday. It's completely up to you, and you don't have to work at all on Friday. That's just up to you if you want to push a little harder" (P041, S). Thus, though the 4DWW set Friday to a default of "off," workers did not feel prohibited from working; indeed, many chose to work on Fridays and experienced this choice as flexibility. As one employee put it, the biggest benefit of the 4DWW was "just the flexibility... and the options to do different things, and to use my time as I see it valuable" (P44, C).

By contrast, workers experienced an expectation and obligation to work on Fridays under the Flexible Fridays policy, even though the intent of the policy was to give workers control over their time on Fridays. One employee described, "Fridays feel like more flexible day because we usually don't have meetings. But it's not the same thing [as the 4DWW]. It's something like if I'm not here in my computer working, I feel like I'm stealing from the company. Because I should be here working. And even if I work overtime during the week I still feel like I should be working on Friday" (P046, E). A member of the executive team similarly described how "my mentality has shifted" with the transition from 4DWW to Flexible Fridays, saying, "If I just have a notion of an obligation, I have to function in that way. If I have no notion of an obligation, I feel free. I get to be stress free, I get to be relaxed, I get to be my own person. Whereas if I have one little thing hit my calendar, I'm like, no, I've got to be in this mode... that sort of sense of freedom and autonomy, that has...been...the biggest loss" (P22, LT).

These examples illustrate how workers experienced the Flexible Fridays policy as amplifying the guilt they experienced taking time away from work, whereas the 4DWW reduced it. Describing the experience of Flexible Fridays, one said, “I think the Flex Friday is just more of another day of work without meetings... if you're taking time off, or at least I personally, you feel guilty that you're offline. Or at least if I'm taking the time off, I'm still checking Slack and seeing if there's anything that I need to jump on because I still feel I need to be available even though I'm not fully online” (P42, E). By contrast, an engineer described how the 4DWW helped break this mindset:

I was struggling with this in the beginning...you felt a little guilty...I'm being paid to work five days and I'm just working four so I'm cheating the company...we need to break this paradigm...[with] the 4DWW, we are not cheating anyone. We are not being the unfaithful husband. We are still working the five days, but the last day we are taking our time to refresh our head...this mindset that I need to work five days, that I need to work twelve hours a day...I see it sometimes [at TableTech], but I think that they are breaking this idea now. (P53, E).

Underscoring how the policy change altered how workers felt about their ability to take time, another employee said, “I guess it feels different. Even though it's technically the same, I think because it's changed to a flex—there's a difference, right? ... if I think of a four-day week, [I think], ‘Okay, cool, I have Friday off if I need it.’ Then now with it being flex, it's like, ‘I should go on’” (P56, C).

The Benefits of the Four-day Workweek for Well-being and Work-life Balance

The 4DWW and Flexible Fridays were both intended to enhance worker well-being and improve work-life balance, but I found that workers experienced the 4DWW as more supportive of these outcomes in three ways. First, the 4DWW enabled greater psychological disengagement from work. Second, having Friday off enabled workers to use their weekend time in new ways. Third, workers who took time off on Fridays under the 4DWW policy engaged in a wider range

of non-work activities than those who did so under Flexible Fridays. These differences have implications for workers' thriving outside of work and for equity at work and at home across workers with different personal preferences and obligations, especially for caregivers vs. non-caregivers.

Psychological disengagement. Workers reported that the 4DWW enabled them to mentally disengage from their work, and that this disengagement helped them feel they could achieve better work-life balance and feel more rested. For example, when asked whether his personal well-being had changed during the 4DWW, one employee said, "I would say mentally. I'm able to shut off....Fridays that I take off, I'm training myself to do that. I'm training myself to be there [in] the moment...I have more time to myself...I think that the majority of the benefit is [in] your mind, but only if you can shut it off" (P19, E). Another employee said during the 4DWW, "I don't feel like I'm ramming my life around work as much as I used to. I feel like the two are in balance. That's the first time in my professional career...being able to decompress, get right with my world. Get my chores done. Make sure my wife knows she's valued. All of those kinds of things and then have that refreshed energy to coming back [to work]." By contrast, in a later interview he described how during the Flexible Fridays, he did not have the ability to "turn off the work brain" in the same way:

It's the difference between being off and on-call, is kind of how I feel that transition has happened. That's how I would characterize that....Friday I think is in that gray zone now, of, 'Well, you need to be available, but you're also off,' which equates to on-call to me...I have to have my TableTech brain in low power mode, but it's still there. I can't put it on the shelf and go and do my stuff....I like to work and then be done. I like to turn off the work brain. (P052, C)

Thus, workers felt that the 4DWW enabled them to disengage from work to a greater extent, which helped them feel better rested and more energized.

Improving quality of time off. Workers also reported that having Friday as a day that was largely protected from work enhanced their overall ability to manage work-life balance in a way that contributed to a sense of freedom and well-being. Having Friday as a personal day improved the quality of their time away from work, as they felt able to use their time in ways that contributed to their sense of balance and rest, and also enabled them to pursue valued activities that they otherwise might have felt they did not have time to do. One employee described how with a longer weekend, she felt more balanced and felt she could say “yes” to more valued activities with family and friends:

I just have such an ease about my personal life because don't feel like work takes up the entirety of my week...when you put four to three versus five to two...It doesn't feel weighted so much in one area. It just feels like I have some breathing room in my personal life...take this past weekend, Sunday was [a family event]. [Normally] that would have taken up half my weekend. I would have been like oh, I only have Saturday to do what I want to do...I just feel like I can say 'yes' a lot more because I'm not constrained by work being my determining factor (P31, other).

Another employee described how having Friday off made space for “joy,” “relaxing” and “rest” in addition to chores and other personal life tasks, describing how as a result he was better rested and had the energy to do more than just recuperate from the workweek on the weekends:

I think that having Fridays off gives you the opportunity to, in my case, run all those errands, or say okay, I have this day to accomplish this stuff related to my personal life, and then have the weekend to enjoy the weekend as a weekend, as really days off instead of having to say okay yeah, I work from Mondays through Fridays, and then on Saturday, I have to ... Do all things that are related to my personal life, but are not related to joy or relaxing, or actually rest. It happened to me a lot of times. Okay, I work from Monday to Friday, and then on Saturday I had to do all the things. And then I realized that it's Saturday night and I'm really tired. And then on Sundays there is nothing I can do because I'm really tired, so I sleep until eleven AM or noon, whatever. And then I realize that my weekend was just six hours, Sunday afternoon, and that was the only time in the week when I was really [able to] rest... [to] know that on Saturday and Sunday I will be able to rest, really rest. That's amazing. (P18, E)

Transitioning from the 4DWW to Flexible Fridays reduced this benefit. Contrasting how the use of personal time felt during the 4DWW compared to Flexible Fridays, one employee

described how Flexible Fridays felt more like work days and less like time off, saying “[with Flexible Fridays] I think there is a slightly different feeling of, you don’t necessarily feel like you’re actually getting that more time, personal time necessarily, because it’s still—it feels like it’s a work day with an asterisk, right?” By contrast, the 4DWW had felt more “special,” protected from work, and made her feel better rested, thereby enabling her to “take advantage of the weekend”:

It did feel a little bit more intentional in your personal time [with the 4DWW]...It felt a little bit more like special or you’re trying to take advantage of it in some way... I do think that, for one, having a Friday off ... You can be more proactive about, like scheduling appointments, or taking care of personal tasks, because a lot of places will only be open during certain hours.... if you’re working Friday...I feel you’re a little bit more tired. You’re not as motivated to take advantage of the weekend. I feel like it gives you time to rest and do necessities so that you can actually take advantage of the weekend. (P01, C)

4DWW enables a wider range of activities. Workers also reported engaging in different personal life activities on Fridays during the 4DWW and Flexible Fridays. The non-work activities workers engaged in broadly fell into three categories: caregiving, other forms of domestic labor such as cleaning and chores, and leisure. Workers reported engaging in all of these activities on Fridays during the 4DWW, including a wide range of leisure activities, including spending time with friends and family, traveling, hiking, going to concerts, and hobbies ranging from art to auto shows to non-work-related computer programming. They also reported engaging in restful or unstructured activities, such as resting, sleeping, “hanging out,” watching television, and “taking time for myself.” By contrast, the activities they reported doing during Flexible Fridays were mostly restricted to caregiving and other forms of domestic labor, such as caring for children, doing laundry, grocery shopping, and attending appointments that had to be undertaken during a weekday. Workers seemed to engage in fewer restful or

unstructured activities and were more likely to multitask, which may help explain their decreased ability to mentally disengage from work.

For example, one mother of a young child described a change in how she used her time on Fridays. During the 4DWW, she took a full day off most Fridays took time to both take care of herself and do domestic labor. She said, “It’s so nice to have that Friday time that’s kind of just mine...I’ve gotten two massages in the last two months...I’ve also been doing exercise—like actual exercise...to do a serious workout is great and something a little different than [how I usually squeeze in walking and jogging to pick up my son from preschool]...I’ve done some swimming.” She also used Friday time for chores, saying, “it’s kind of nice to take a little bit of time listening to music in a more casual way to clean up the house and not have it be stuffed in between dinner and bedtime.” During Flexible Fridays, she reported taking part of the day instead of the full day off. She described how she still used time for chores but was no longer engaging in the same types of self-care activities, saying, “[During the 4DWW] I was treating it more as like a sacred day most of the time...Whereas now it’s more like, alright, maybe on Friday I will take an hour to clean the house and listen to a podcast that I really like. I call that self-care. It’s just a different level of the self-care that I’m treating myself to on Fridays...It doesn’t feel as much of like a, ‘This is your day to turn off and recover.’ It’s like I’m multitasking the recovery, right?” (P32, other)

Other workers who took full or part days off on Friday during the 4DWW described a shift from using Friday for leisure activities to working full days. For example, one employee who usually took Fridays off during the 4DWW described using that time for hiking, babysitting her friend’s children, and spending time with friends or her mother. She described how the 4DWW “just is flexibility...something that I value...is being able to dip my toes into a lot of

different things and be involved in a lot of different things. And that's what this time gives me is variety in my week and flexibility to have that kind of variety" (P44, C). This employee switched to working a full day on Fridays during Flexible Fridays. A software engineer who was a partial 4DWW user reported a mix of working, job-related learning, and travel during the 4DWW, but returned to working a full day during Flexible Fridays, saying, "I didn't like [the change]. I was enjoying the Friday free. I think we don't have [a truly flexible] Friday" (P03, E).

As reported above, caregivers were more likely than non-caregivers to continue to take time off on Fridays during Flexible Fridays; about 80 percent of caregivers took at least some time off on Fridays during Flexible Fridays, compared to only about 40 percent of non-caregivers. This finding is consistent with how workers continued to engage in caregiving and domestic activities more than leisure activities during Flexible Fridays, and it has two important implications. First, caregiving appears to be recognized as a legitimate reason to use a flexible work policy, which may contribute to caregivers using flexible work policies at higher rates than non-caregivers, and in turn may contribute to the continued stigmatization of the use of flexible work policies and the penalties associated with using them (Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl, 2013). Second, workers who are not caregivers may struggle more to gain access to more non-work time despite wanting to do so. Discussing the benefits of the 4DWW, one worker who did not have dependents said, "We are able to actually live, right?" He went on to describe how he was able to use the time he had gained in any way he wanted, even if just to sleep: "I'm able to spend time with my wife. Since I was in my last job for three years, I had a lot of time that I didn't spend with her. I think that's probably true for most of the people, especially the ones with zero kids. For me, that's quality of life, that's time...time is the most valuable thing that you can have. Even if it's just to sleep twelve hours, that's my choice, right?" (P46, E) The 4DWW

appears to have helped workers feel empowered to view time off on Fridays as truly their own and to not have to justify the activities they engaged in, whereas flexible work was used primarily for activities that were easily legible as needs or obligations rather than free time. This finding suggests that reduced worktime policies may have advantages over flexible work policies in enabling equal access to flexible work policies (for those with and without caregiving responsibilities) and in mitigating the penalties experienced by users of flexible work policies, who are disproportionately caregivers.

DISCUSSION

Contributions to Scholarship on Work-Life Conflict and Work Redesign

This paper makes several contributions to scholarship on work-life conflict, worker well-being and time use, and work redesign. First, to my knowledge, this paper presents one of the first in-depth, ethnographic studies of a 4DWW in the 21st Century and is the first such study to investigate workers' experience of a 4DWW in an all-remote context. Published reports on recent 4DWW trials rely primarily on survey data (Schor et al., 2022, 2023). This study helps to build a richer understanding of workers' subjective experiences with a shorter workweek. In addition, I directly compare how the same workers experience two different work redesign policies: a shorter workweek, which is a newer and less common intervention, and flexible work, which is currently more common and has been the subject of more prior research (Fox et al., 2022). Comparing the two policies is important given the rise of interest in a shorter workweek, as it can help inform organizational decisions about which policies to adopt and helps begin to identify how these policies differently shape outcomes of interest, here, workers' time-taking behavior, work-life conflict, and well-being.

This paper also contributes to research on how workers engage with the work-life policies available to them by highlighting the interrelated nature of psychological and structural barriers to taking time off. Prior research shows that workers can internalize organizational and cultural expectations that they be dedicated to work, work long hours, and be always available to their employers, such that they come to believe these goals are their own (Michel, 2011; Mazmanian, Orlikowski, and Yates, 2013). I show that even when an organization explicitly adopts better work-life balance as a goal and follows many of the best practices in the work redesign literature, such as making policies automatically universal and providing managerial support (Perlow and Kelly, 2014; Kelly and Moen, 2020), many still feel “weird” or guilty about taking time off and struggle to do so even though they desire to alter the balance between their work and personal lives. I further show that there is a feedback loop between psychological and structural barriers to time taking, because when individuals continue to work due to perceived social pressure or their own feelings of guilt, they inadvertently create the social conditions that prompt others to experience social pressure to work and create interdependent work that inhibits others’ time taking. My findings suggest that shortening the workweek may have advantages over flexible work in helping workers overcome barriers to time taking.

I also contribute to the literatures on work-life conflict and workers’ time use by drawing a distinction between different kinds of non-work time and activities. Scholarship on work-life conflict typically conceptualizes time as a binary between work and non-work time (often referred to as leisure time) (Schor, 1993; Rose, 2016). Drawing on detailed data documenting which activities workers engaged in during their time off under both a shorter workweek and a flexible work policy, I show how workers engage in three types of non-work activities: caregiving, other domestic labor, and leisure. I further show how while flexible work enables

caregiving and other domestic labor, a shorter workweek better enables workers (both caregivers and non-caregivers) to engage in leisure activities. Building on Rose’s definition of “free time” as “time not committed to meeting one’s own, or one’s dependents’, basic needs” (Rose, 2016: 40), I argue that free time—during which people may engage in leisure activities as well as rest, political activity, and more—is an under-considered need that merits more attention from organizational scholarship. My findings suggest that providing flexibility to workers is insufficient to increase their access to free time, which is a critical resource with important implications for equity, human thriving, and the social and political health of society.

My findings showed that many workers—even those who self-identify as “workaholics”—desire more time for their lives outside of work. Yet it remains the case that for many workers, work is a great source of meaning and fulfillment (Cech, 2021). Not all people desire to work less, and it is not always the case that reducing work enhances subjective well-being. Future research should probe how efforts to reduce work time intersect with some individuals’ desire to work a lot and even to work more and should investigate how these individuals’ preferences may intersect with the group-level dynamics at play in reducing work time. For instance, prior research shows that making reducing work time a shared goal helps enable successful policy implementation (Perlow, 2012), suggesting that at the group level there is value in universal or even mandatory adoption. How organizations can manage tensions between individual preferences and the need for coordination is an important topic for further exploration.

Limitations and Future Work

This study is subject to several limitations and boundary conditions. I draw on an in-depth qualitative study of a single organization, which enabled me to collect extensive data on

workers over time and to develop a deep understanding of the context in which they were embedded; however, the specific features of TableTech and relying on a single case suggest boundary conditions on the transferability of my findings. TableTech is a start-up, a small firm, and is a white-collar professional knowledge work setting with salaried workers. Further research is needed to understand how my findings might change in larger, more established organizational contexts and in lower-paying, hourly, and/or shift work settings. It is especially important to conduct additional research in such settings, as shorter workweek policies have been critiqued for their tendency to benefit only already privileged workers and be inaccessible to those who are struggling the most (Levitz, 2023). In addition, TableTech is an all-remote company. Research on all-remote contexts is needed as this mode of working becomes increasingly common in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic (Bloom, Han, and Liang, 2023), but further research comparing in-person, hybrid, and remote work settings is needed. Further, TableTech is a male-dominated context (the start-up software industry), and the small number of women in my study limits my ability to investigate gender differences. Future research in gender-balanced and female-dominated work settings is needed to better understand the gendered dynamics of shorter workweek policies.

Though TableTech's sequential implementation of a four-day workweek and a flexible work policy presents the unusual opportunity to compare how the same workers experienced two different policies, it is important to acknowledge the potential for the order in which workers experienced the policies to shape my findings. Workers' reported preference for the 4DWW over Flexible Fridays and their reports that it better supported their well-being may have been at least partly driven by disappointment or negative sentiment at the perceived loss of a policy that they enjoyed, consistent with psychological research on loss aversion (Kahneman, Knetsch, and

Thaler, 1991). I have attempted to mitigate this concern by focusing on workers' concrete accounts of their time use behaviors (when they took time, as well as how they used their time off), as well as focusing on their accounts of how they experienced each policy and why they experienced them differently. Nevertheless, future research in settings in which flexible work is followed by a shorter week, as well as research spanning multiple settings, should be conducted.

In the context of rising interest in a shorter workweek, this study provides insight into some of the potential benefits of adopting such policies as compared to flexible work policies. Shorter workweek policies may be easier for workers to understand and to actually use when they are available to them, and my findings showed that they can increase not only the amount but also the quality of workers' non-work time. This study points to the need for further investigation into the ways in which shortening the workweek may reduce inequality (e.g., between workers of different genders, or between caregivers and non-caregivers) or may exacerbate it (e.g., between salaried and hourly workers, or between high-income and low-income workers). It also highlights time as a critical resource that organizations play a central role in distributing, with consequences for workers and for communities and societies.

CHAPTER 3

Defining Who You Are by Whom You Serve?

Strategies for Prosocial–Professional Identity Integration with Clients

Lakshmi Ramarajan and Julie Yen

Many people seek to positively contribute to society through their professional work, a desire that is rising with the salience of urgent social issues like inequality and climate change (Margolis and Walsh, 2003; Briscoe and Gupta, 2016; Battilana, Obloj, et al., 2022; Heucher et al., 2024). One channel through which professionals aspiring to contribute to society may do so is their work with clients. Yet, these professionals can experience conflict when the types of clients they view as enabling societal impact differ from the types of clients that enable professional success. Imagine a management consultant who feels that working with wealthy corporate clients enables her to achieve professional recognition but leaves her doubting her impact on society. Or consider an architect who works with a mission-driven community client that can afford only a simple drawing, which the architect feels enables him to contribute to society but leaves him aspiring to do more complex, cutting-edge design. Such tensions can spark a deep identity conflict between individuals' sense of themselves as people who contribute to society, a form of prosocial identity (Grant, 2007; Grant et al., 2009; Grant and Berg, 2012), and their professional identity, the “constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role” (Ibarra 1999: 764–765; see also Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006).

Prior research suggests that clients are important relational partners in the construction of both professional (Lepisto, Crosina, and Pratt, 2015; Cardador and Pratt, 2018) and prosocial (Grant, 2007) identities. Recent research on professional identity construction shows that clients can affirm or threaten professional identity (DiBenigno, 2022). At the same time, research on prosocial behavior at work shows the importance of experiencing impact on and contact with intended beneficiaries, such as clients, customers, or patients, for one's prosocial motivation and identity (Grant, 2007, 2008, 2012). Each of these bodies of research points to the importance of clients but treats prosocial and professional identities as though they operate in isolation from each other. A multiple identities perspective problematizes this view: people experience their identities jointly, and identities may conflict (Ramarajan and Reid, 2013; Ramarajan, 2014; Caza, Moss, and Vough, 2018). Therefore, clients may simultaneously be counterparts for the construction of professional and prosocial identity, and the types of clients that affirm one may not affirm the other.

Drawing on this multiple identities perspective, we investigate how professionals negotiate prosocial–professional identity tensions in relation to clients. How professionals reconcile their prosocial and professional identities matters because identity work has consequences for how people engage in behaviors in their work roles (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley, 2008), such as how they approach and interact with others, including clients (Caza, Vough, and Puranik, 2018; Ramarajan and Reid, 2020; DiBenigno, 2022). Thus, we ask, how do professionals aspiring to contribute to society navigate potential conflicts between their prosocial and professional identities, and how do their identity strategies, in turn, shape how they relate to clients?

We investigated these questions through a qualitative, inductive study of 84 architects who expressed a desire to contribute to society through their professional work.⁶ We found that the professionals in our study viewed building their professional identity as dependent on creating cutting-edge designs that showcased their aesthetic and technical excellence, which meant working for high-status, wealthy clients who could pay for such work (such as corporate and upper-class clients). By contrast, they viewed working with low-status clients (such as clients from low-income communities and socially disadvantaged backgrounds) as a threat to professional identity because these clients could not afford such high-quality design. At the same time, however, working with high-status clients sparked an internal conflict for many of the professionals we studied, as doing so was inconsistent with how they wanted to contribute to society and therefore threatened their prosocial identity. We found that professionals used four prosocial–professional identity integration strategies to resolve this conflict, which we label defending, affirming, expanding, and reforming professional identity. These strategies consisted of different approaches to the types of clients that professionals worked with (high- versus low-status) and the types of knowledge and skills professionals used with those clients (design expertise versus other types of knowledge and skills). All four strategies enabled professionals to integrate their prosocial and professional identities. In addition, the strategies differently shaped how professionals related to their clients, specifically by shaping professionals’ approach to mutual or hierarchical power relations with clients.

We build on our findings to develop a conceptual model of how professionals navigate prosocial–professional identity conflicts in relation to their clients. Our model theorizes how

⁶ We purposefully sampled participants by approaching people in traditional firms with social responsibility or public interest programs and in social-sector design organizations, explaining our interest in talking to those interested in contributing to society through their work. We provide further details in our Method section.

client status and the knowledge and skills used in professional work are central foci of prosocial–professional identity integration strategies. We also theorize how these strategies shape power dynamics in professional–client relationships. Our model contributes to research on professional identity by bringing a multiple identities perspective (Ramarajan and Reid, 2013; Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015) to scholarship on the centrality of clients in professional identity construction (Vough et al., 2013; DiBenigno, 2022). We show that clients reflect and express not only one’s professional identity but also one’s personal prosocial identity. We also reveal that client status and the knowledge and skills that professionals use matter for identity integration. Last, we show how these strategies shape whether professionals maintain, enhance, or diminish their own power in relation to their clients.

Prosocial–Professional Identity Conflict in Relation to Clients

The literatures on professional identity and prosocial identity independently highlight the importance of clients. We discuss each, then draw on a multiple identities lens to integrate the two, and explore the potential for tension between prosocial and professional identity. In exploring this tension, we discuss relevant scholarship on client status, which emerged from our data as a key source of this identity tension.

Constructing Professional Identity: The Role of Clients and Professional Work

Professional identity is the set of meanings that people attach to themselves in their professional roles (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006). Individuals construct professional identity through identity work (Snow and Anderson, 1987), a process through which they “build, revise, maintain, repair, and otherwise craft their identities” (Lepisto, Crosina, and Pratt, 2015: 12). People conduct this identity work in relation to the profession’s expectations, norms, and values about what it means to be a “good” professional (Pratt, Rockmann, and

Kaufmann, 2006; Cech, 2015; Reid, 2015), as well as in relation to important others (Cooley, 1902; Gecas, 1982), such as role models (Ibarra, 1999), managers (Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006; Reid, 2015), and spouses (Petriglieri and Obodaru, 2019). Research highlights that clients and customers are important relational counterparts for professional identity construction (Vough et al., 2013; Lepisto, Crosina, and Pratt, 2015; Cardador and Pratt, 2018). For instance, DiBenigno (2022) showed how client interactions can affirm or threaten nurses' ability to craft a professional identity consistent with the nurses' idealized view of themselves as maternal caregivers of sick and helpless patients. Thus, clients play a key role in shaping professionals' understandings of themselves.

Professionals also “derive their identities directly from the professional work they do” (Kellogg, 2014: 915; see also Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006). Central to professional work is expertise, the body of abstract, specialized, technical knowledge and skills that professionals gain through formal training and use to diagnose and treat problems in the course of their work (Abbott, 1988; Sandefur, 2015). In addition to formal expertise, other types of knowledge and skills are central to the performance of one's professional role or the accomplishment of desired work outcomes. These types include contextual knowledge and skills (Barley, 1996); knowledge of how to navigate relationships and procedures (Sandefur, 2015), of clients' daily routines and challenges (Huisin, 2015), and of the communities in which one works (Oelberger, 2018: 983); emotion and intuition (Craciun, 2018); and the ability to handle non-professional issues, i.e., those typically outside one's specialized expertise, such as teachers' ability to handle students' complaints and lawyers' ability to handle clients' emotions (Liu, 2020).⁷ From a professional identity perspective, the entire range of knowledge and skills that

⁷ Scholars vary in how they define expertise, whether they include these other types of knowledge and skills in professional expertise, and how they label the various types of knowledge and skills that professionals use. To avoid

professionals use to do their professional work can serve as a foundation for constructing identity.

Indeed, recent research shows that in some contexts, professionals strongly identify with various types of knowledge and skills associated with their professional roles, and they experience challenges to the content of and control over this knowledge as a threat to their professional identity (Lifshitz-Assaf, 2018; Kang and Kim, 2021). Research further shows that as their work changes, professionals can adapt their self-definitions to incorporate mastery over different kinds of knowledge and skills needed to do their work. For instance, as technology disrupted the value of the specialized skills librarians traditionally used in their roles, they adapted their professional identity from “masters of search” to “connectors of people and information” (Nelson and Irwin, 2014: 903). Building on this research, we explore how professionals can construct different sets of knowledge and skills as central to their professional work and, therefore, to their professional identity.

Constructing Prosocial Identity: The Role of Clients and of Self- and Other-Interested Motives

A separate stream of research on prosociality at work suggests that many people want to have a positive impact on others, i.e., that they have prosocial motivation (Grant and Berg, 2012; Bolino and Grant, 2016). Prosocial identity, “the dimension of the self-concept focused on helping and benefitting others” (Grant et al., 2009: 321), is rooted in this motivation and guides prosocial behavior (Callero, 1985; Penner et al., 2005). Prosocial behavior at work encompasses a wide range of behaviors intended to help others, including helping one’s colleagues (Grant, Dutton, and Rosso, 2008), volunteering and pro bono work (Rhode, 2005; Rodell et al., 2016;

confusion, we use “expertise” to denote the specialized, abstract, formal knowledge of a profession. We do not use this term in reference to other types of knowledge and skills.

Gatignon, 2022), paid work in service occupations or nonprofits (Grant, 2008; Jiang, 2021; Fang and Tilcsik, 2022), and activism around social issues (Meyerson and Scully, 1995; Howard-Grenville, 2007; Briscoe and Gupta, 2016) (for a review see Penner et al., 2005).

Research suggests that the intended beneficiaries of prosocial work are important relational counterparts in the construction of prosocial identity. Grant (2007) theorized that impact on and contact with the beneficiaries of one's work shape the development of prosocial identity and behavior. Field experiments show that giving fundraisers and lifeguards more exposure to the impact of their work on others increases helping behavior (Grant, 2008). Other research shows that contact with intended beneficiaries and the perception of prosocial impact increase motivation (Grant et al., 2007), job satisfaction (Grant and Campbell, 2007; Steijn and van der Voet, 2019), and meaningfulness (Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski, 2010: 110).

Interrogating professionals' desire to benefit their clients, however, reveals a tension that can complicate the expression and construction of prosocial identity: prosocial behavior can arise from both other-focused and self-interested motives, and these motives can be independent of each other (Grant and Berg, 2012). Prosocial behavior can entail emotional, relational, and material costs to oneself, incurred in the name of helping others (England, Budig, and Folbre, 2002; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017; Fang and Tilcsik, 2022; Wilmers and Zhang, 2022). For instance, Oelberger (2019) showed that international aid workers' devotion to their work can generate conflict in their close personal relationships, and Bunderson and Thompson (2009) described how zookeepers' calling to protect wildlife leads them to accept low pay, long hours, and difficult working conditions. At the same time, prosocial behavior can entail self-benefits, such as relational and status gains (for a review, see Simpson and Willer, 2015). For instance, helping others can enhance one's reputation as helpful, moral, or good (Grant and Mayer, 2009;

Flynn and Yu, 2021), and it can yield career benefits, such as the opportunity for less experienced workers to learn skills (Burbano, Mamer, and Snyder, 2018).

The potential for self-interest complicates the expression of prosocial identity through client work, raising the question of who benefits (*cui bono?*) from prosocial behavior (Blau and Scott, 1962; Marquis, Toffel, and Zhou, 2016; Oelberger, 2018; Giridharadas, 2019; Kutlaca and Radke, 2023). While people often view costs or sacrifices as evidence of prosociality (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Fang and Tilcsik, 2022), self-benefits that accrue from prosocial behavior, whether intentionally or unintentionally, can raise doubts about one's own or others' prosociality (Simpson and Willer, 2015). Thus, clients' potential to help or harm one's pay, reputation, and career trajectory suggests that they may both threaten and support prosocial identity.

Tensions Between Professional and Prosocial Identity: A Multiple Identities Perspective and the Role of Client Status

Despite the central role of clients in the literatures on professional identity and prosocial identity, these conversations have largely evolved separately. Yet, scholars have long acknowledged that people have multiple identities (Burke and Stets, 2009; see Ramarajan, 2014 for a review) and that when the different roles and institutions to which they belong have diverging expectations, they often experience conflict between their personal and professional identities (Ramarajan and Reid, 2013; Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015). For example, many studies explore the tension individuals experience when identities based on personal life and family roles conflict with professional identity demands, such as being fully committed to work or embodying a particular professional ideal (Meyerson and Scully, 1995; Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep, 2009; Creed, DeJordy, and Lok, 2010; Reid, 2015; Cha and Roberts, 2019; Chreim et al., 2020).

Building on this work, we bring a multiple identities perspective to examine the joint construction of prosocial and professional identity in relation to one's clients. Professionals may view clients as an expression and reflection (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934) of both their personal prosocial identity and their professional identity because clients are the intended beneficiaries of their work and the key recipients of their professional services, respectively. A multiple identities perspective suggests that if the clients that affirm prosocial identity differ from those that affirm professional identity, individuals may experience identity conflict. We therefore set out to investigate how professionals who aspire to contribute to society navigate potential prosocial–professional identity tensions related to their clients.

One important source of tension that emerged from our data was client status, i.e., clients' prestige and social worth based on their wealth and social class standing (Berger, Cohen, and Zelditch, 1972). We found that the prosocial–professional identity tension that professionals experienced in architecture was driven by professional norms that valued working with high-status clients and devalued working with low-status clients; working with high-status clients best supported professionals' design expertise and thereby affirmed their professional identity, while working with low-status clients who could not afford high-end designs threatened this expertise and identity.⁸ To make sense of this finding, we turned to scholarship on client status in professional work.

Scholars suggest that professions face different social, commercial, bureaucratic, and technological pressures, which shape variation in norms and experiences within and between professions (Leicht and Fennell, 2001; Gorman and Vallas, 2020). In some commercialized

⁸ We use the terms “high-status” and “low-status” to denote the top and bottom of the client hierarchy. Though middle-status clients exist, we focus on the clear challenge to professional norms that value working with high-status clients represented by serving clients from low-status groups, particularly those from low-status class backgrounds and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups.

contexts, professionals may view working with high-status clients as more valued and rewarded than working with low-status clients because such clients can help one garner professional success (Leicht and Fennell, 2001: 93–94).⁹ In elite, commercialized professional contexts such as corporate law, accounting, and management consulting, clients with financial resources are likely to be valued because they are thought to provide complex, challenging work that requires technical expertise, earns high fees, and can burnish professionals' own reputations (Anderson-Gough, Grey, and Robson, 2000; Liu, 2020). Architecture, the focus of our study, is another such context in which elite clients may be highly valued partly because they can pay for complex, cutting-edge designs and can bring attention and visibility to one's design expertise (Blau, 1984; Cuff, 1991). Conversely, low-status clients and those without financial resources may be devalued and avoided in some professional contexts. For instance, in corporate law some professionals avoid low-status clients because they may threaten the interests of high-status clients (Phillips, Turco, and Zuckerman, 2013). Some professionals may also devalue low-status clients because they are associated with tasks that do not draw on professional expertise or because they present more challenges to expertise than high-status clients do (Becker, 1952; Roth, 1972; Heimer and Staffen, 1995; Liu, 2020). In sum, one perspective on this work is that it provides examples of contexts in which professionals may view high-status clients as valuable, partly because they may enable professional expertise. As such, in some contexts, high-status clients may affirm and low-status clients may threaten professional identity.

⁹ We acknowledge different perspectives in the literature about this relationship. There is also variation in contexts within and across professions. For example, in some social work contexts, working with low-status clients may be more valued than working with wealthy clients, because wealthy clients may be seen as less in need of social workers' expertise. In other contexts, clients with complex cases or obedient clients may be more valued than wealthy ones. In still others, wealthy or elite clients may be seen as those who devalue professional expertise and subject professionals to their demands. Thus, we do not theorize that working with high-status clients will be seen as supporting expertise in general.

Building on these streams of work, we explore the role that clients in general and client status in particular may play in professionals' prosocial-professional identity conflict and the strategies professionals use to resolve it. Further, professional identity construction has important consequences for how people engage with and relate to others (Petriglieri and Obodaru, 2019; Ramarajan and Reid, 2020; DiBenigno, 2022). We therefore also explore the consequences of professionals' identity work for how they relate to their clients.

METHOD

We draw on interviews with 84 architects and designers. Our approach is inductive, as recommended for theory building (Edmondson and McManus, 2007; Charmaz, 2014). We began with a broad research question, seeking to understand how professionals pursued behavior they viewed as contributing to society in their work. Iterating among data collection, analysis, and theorizing, we refined our research question to focus on how professionals navigate prosocial-professional identity conflicts in relation to clients.

Research Setting

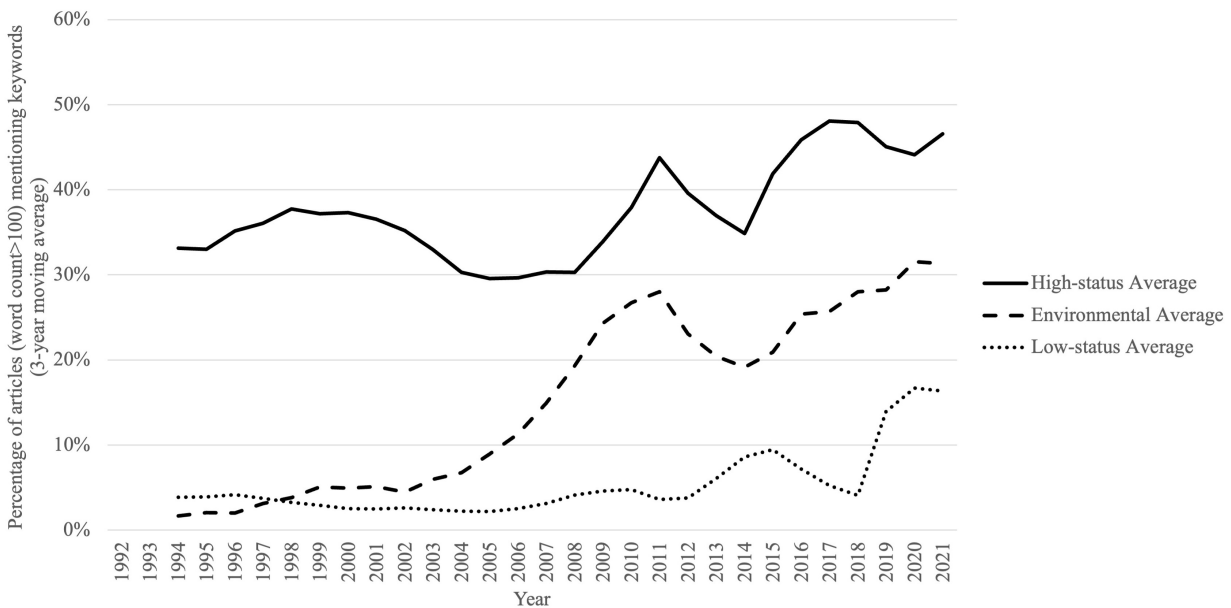
The architecture profession is characterized by a collective professional identity rooted in design expertise, which is developed and valorized via intense socialization and training practices (Blau, 1984; Cuff, 1991; Deamer, 2015). An influential ethnography of architectural work explains, "Architects are trained to assume responsibility for design; their professional identity depends on it," and "The architect's primary expertise" is "design-as-art" (Cuff, 1991: 21, 31). Recent ethnographies also describe how the "ideal" architect, emphasized in training and through professional competitions and awards, is a creative genius for whom design is central to their identity (Ahuja, Nikolova, and Clegg, 2017). Becoming a licensed architect in the United

States involves graduate training at a professional school, work requirements, and a rigorous exam (NCARB, 2019). The onerous nature of this certification process prompts many people in the profession to work as unlicensed designers.¹⁰ Architects and designers work in an array of contexts, including large corporate firms and small, medium-sized, and solo practices (Miller, 2019). Like many professions, architecture remains predominantly White and male (NCARB, 2019). In 2014, licensed and associate members of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) were 21.7 percent women and 1.89 percent African American (AIA, 2015).

Working with high-status clients is often viewed as desirable in architecture; wealthy clients who seek distinction offer opportunities to build a professional reputation as a successful designer (Cuff, 1991; Brown, et al., 2010; Rahman and Barley, 2017). By contrast, working with low-status clients is not well institutionalized, though public interest and social impact work exist and garner some attention (Feldman et al., 2011). To further explore the relationship between design and client status, we conducted an exploratory analysis of articles in *Architectural Record*, a premier industry publication focused on design. This analysis indicates that articles containing words associated with high-status client work (e.g., luxury, corporate) are far more prevalent than those associated with low-status client work (e.g., affordable housing); see Figure 1 and Appendix D for details. Thus, architecture is a suitable context for our study; in a client-facing profession that values working with elites, conflict over who benefits from their work is likely salient for individuals who want to make a societal contribution.

¹⁰ These non-licensed professionals, who often use the title “designer,” typically identify as architects but cannot legally call themselves registered architects or market their services as such. There were approximately 115,000 licensed architects in the United States in 2018 (NCARB, 2019); numerous non-licensed practitioners engage in similar work, including design, documentation, and construction management. Only registered architects are legally allowed to stamp drawings and to sign off on technical documentation.

Figure 3.1: Percentages of Articles in *Architectural Record* with Keywords Associated with Low- vs. High-Status Clients Over Time, 1992–2021*



* Using the LexisNexis archives of *Architectural Record*, we compared the frequency of words associated with serving low-status clients (e.g., pro bono, social impact) to that of words associated with serving high-status clients (e.g., elite, luxury) over nearly 30 years. Though most keywords related to serving low-status clients exhibited an upward trend, they featured in a small percentage of articles published each year (0–20%). Keywords related to serving high-status clients featured in 20–50% of published articles; environmental articles occupied the middle ground. This pattern suggests that architecture’s dominant focus over this time period continued to associate expertise with serving high-status clients. Appendix D lists the keywords we searched and provides examples of articles from each category.

Data Collection

Sample design. Our data consist primarily of semi-structured interviews with 84 architects and designers. Three participants were key informants who provided orientation to the profession and facilitated access to practitioners. Sampling evolved over three rounds of data collection. Our initial research question led us to purposefully sample professionals who expressed interest in doing work they viewed as contributing to society, which we referred to in recruitment materials and initial conversations broadly as pro bono, public interest, public service, social responsibility, or social impact work. Considering the literature, we

conceptualized these activities as a type of prosocial behavior that could be influenced by prosocial identity (Penner et al., 2005; Grant, 2007; Grant and Berg, 2012).

During the first round (2012), we interviewed 22 employees at two large, prominent, national firms. These firms primarily work with paying clients, which include businesses, residences, hospitals, universities, and schools. They also have formal programs to work with pro bono clients.¹¹ At both firms, pro bono work was explicitly distinguished from conventional work for paying clients and was performed under the auspices of “social responsibility” or “social impact” initiatives. Recruiting participants broadly interested in contributing to society yielded individuals who did and did not participate in the formal pro bono programs; we interviewed them all, as we initially wanted to understand the full range and context of prosocial work in traditional firms. Through our analysis, this initial sampling choice enabled us to understand that while all our participants viewed themselves as people aiming to contribute to society through their work, the types of clients they associated with this self-view varied. For instance, some participants associated their contribution to society with working with low-status, pro bono clients, but others associated this contribution with working with high-status, paying clients.

We conducted a second round of 36 interviews (2015–2019) after learning from our key informants about professionals who did public interest or social impact work outside of traditional firms. Through conferences, lists of public interest designers, and snowball sampling,

¹¹ Various institutional pressures and instrumental motivations prompt firms to pursue pro bono and corporate social responsibility work (e.g., recruitment, reputation, attracting clients). Accordingly, we do not assume that these programs existed for altruistic reasons or necessarily created social value. These firms were nonetheless appropriate settings for examining how professionals engaged with prosocial work in traditional firms. They were distinctive in the profession in that not all firms have pro bono programs. Individual prosocial behavior such as participating in pro bono work within firms can come with costs (e.g., loss of pay) as well as benefits (e.g., career and reputational benefits; see, e.g., Bode, Rogan, and Singh, 2021), so we do not assume that all participants in these programs are motivated only by the desire to contribute to society. However, the existence of these programs made it likely that professionals who self-identified as motivated to contribute to society would have opportunities to do so.

we purposefully sampled professionals working in small, socially focused design firms, nonprofit and community-based organizations, and local governments. We used similar language, describing our interest in talking to professionals who were engaged in public interest, social impact, or public service work.

Iterating between analysis and theorizing yielded the insight that participants associated their prosocial identities with their clients, especially low-status clients, prompting us to embark on a third round of data collection (2021). We again sampled architects who expressed interest in contributing to society, this time intentionally focusing on those working with low-status clients from both traditional firms and non-traditional contexts. We added 23 participants. In this round, we revised our questions to focus on client status and power in client relationships. We also re-interviewed four participants from the prior rounds to learn about their experiences over time. Thus, our strategy enabled us to maintain a consistent approach to recruiting professionals who viewed themselves as contributing to society and, as our research questions and findings evolved, enabled us to analyze variation in our sample in the professionals' work contexts and in the types of clients with whom they worked.

Supplementary activities familiarized us with the field. We visited two large firms and a leading architecture-oriented nonprofit multiple times, which provided context for participants' accounts of prevailing professional expectations (e.g., intense focus on design). We attended 15 days of workshops and conferences on socially oriented design, where we observed and conversed informally with practitioners and clients. We also read books, articles, and reports and gathered publicly available data on firms and practitioners in the field, which we used to create a narrative timeline of key events in the field. These activities provided a broad overview of the

field-level discourse and work-related activities through which professionals aimed to contribute to society.

Interview-based approach and procedures. Interviews are commonly used to conduct identity research in organizational behavior (e.g., Ibarra, 1999; Petriglieri, Ashford, and Wrzesniewski, 2019) because they are particularly well suited to understanding how people make sense of themselves in their social contexts. Interview data were required for accessing the internal meaning-making and self-concepts pertinent to our research question (Lamont and Swidler, 2014); these data gave us access to participants’ “interior experiences,” how they interpreted their perceptions, and “the meanings to them of their relationships . . . their work, and their selves” (Weiss, 1994: 1). We followed recommended practices for interview methods. For example, we familiarized ourselves with the field to enhance our ability to build trust and elicit disclosure (Charmaz, 2014); we conducted interviews as conversations, tailoring our questioning to better understand the meaning of each person’s experience (Weiss, 1994; Lamont and Swidler, 2014); and we probed for specific, concrete examples and stories to move beyond generalized accounts and explore nuances in meaning (Elsbach and Bechky, 2018; Small and Calarco, 2022). These practices help researchers manage challenges that can arise with interview data, such as self-justification, social desirability bias, and recall errors (Charmaz, 2014).

Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol, beginning with a description of the participant’s current role and career history. Our questions addressed projects and practices across various work contexts and types of clients, as well as goals, motives, and challenges associated with pursuing prosocial work. The protocol, which evolved over the course of the study (Charmaz, 2014), served as a consistent guide (see Appendix E for the final protocol). In the first round of data collection, we conducted interviews onsite at the offices responsible for

firms' pro bono programs, located in two large U.S. cities. For the second and third rounds, we interviewed geographically dispersed professionals by telephone or video. Interviews lasted 30 to 100 minutes, averaging about an hour. All interviews except one were recorded and transcribed; one participant declined our request to record.

Participants' characteristics and work contexts. All participants had at least one formal degree in architecture or design at the bachelor's level or higher. Participants worked in a range of organizational contexts, including traditional architecture firms, i.e., large, commercially focused practices (n=37); socially oriented design organizations, such as smaller firms serving under-resourced clients or organizations that linked design professionals with nonprofit clients (n=33); and community-oriented organizations, such as a housing advocacy organization (n=14). Roles and tasks varied with contexts, but in all cases, professionals viewed themselves as architects or designers.¹² At traditional firms, participants held conventional titles, such as project architect, design associate, and principal. In the other contexts, their titles ranged from traditional (e.g., design associate) to unconventional for architects (e.g., community development director). In all three contexts, participants performed both high- and low-complexity work for low-status clients, ranging from large affordable housing complexes to temporary installations in public spaces. Table 3.1 reports counts of participants' demographics, work experience, and work contexts.

¹² Our initial sample included an additional ten people; we did not include them in our final analysis because they were not formally trained as architects/designers. Accordingly, our sample includes 84 participants, but participant ID numbers range from P1 to P94.

Table 3.1: Counts of Participant Demographics*

Race	White	52		
	Black	12		
	Asian	8		
	Hispanic	7		
	Multiracial	4		
	Other	1		
Race and gender		White	Minority*	Total
	Men	25	17	42
	Women	27	15	42
	Total	52	32	
Years in field	Early career (<10 years)	26		
	Mid-career (10–20 years)	33		
	Late career (>20 years)	25		
	Average years in field	16		
Work context	Traditional professional firm	37		
	Socially oriented design organization	33		
	Community-oriented organization	14		
Total interviewees		84		

* Racial groups included in the minority category include Black, Asian, Hispanic, multiracial, and “other.”

Data Analysis

Recent scholarship has advocated making the inductive process more transparent by sharing the decision points, “aha” moments, and analytical moves unique to each study (Grodal, Anteby, and Holm, 2020; Pratt, Sonenshein, and Feldman, 2022). Accordingly, we describe key turning points in our process. Initial analysis occurred during our first round of data collection. We engaged in open coding, allowing themes to emerge inductively (Charmaz, 2014). Our key insight during this analysis was that participants struggled with pro bono work because they perceived it to conflict with professional norms of design excellence. Curiosity about whether this conflict extended to non-traditional contexts prompted our second round of data collection, after which our second stage of analysis focused on similarities and differences between participants in traditional firms and those in other settings. Participants in both contexts spoke of “struggle” and “unease” with professional norms that emphasized “theory and form.” However, we were struck by a key difference: participants at traditional firms tended to talk about

contributing “buildings” and “design skills,” while those in non-traditional contexts invoked “working beyond buildings” and “interdisciplinary skills.” Consulting the literature led us to associate this pattern with participants’ understanding of the types of knowledge and skills they viewed as central to their prosocial work.

Our third round of analysis was sparked by feedback that helped us conceptualize the status of the client as critical to participants’ struggles. We observed that professionals who viewed working with elite clients as contradicting their desires to contribute to society struggled when they encountered professional norms associating design expertise with work for elite, high-status clients. We also saw that many participants aimed to work with low-status clients because they were more easily associated with prosociality, but this created tensions regarding their professional identity. This insight generated further data collection and re-analysis to focus more on status and power. We coded for all mentions of power, class, elites, and status to analyze how professionals viewed high- versus low-status clients, looking for heterogeneity across participants employed in traditional and non-traditional contexts. We found that this variability existed at the individual—rather than context—level, which led us to shift the focus of our theorizing from contexts to approaches. We recoded all data at the individual level and asked, what type of client is this professional working with, and how do they view the client’s status? Recoding our data revealed that participants related the status of clients to their own prosocial identities (e.g., viewing working for any client as prosocial versus wanting to serve “needy” people), as well as further variation in how participants talked about the types of knowledge and skills that were relevant. We then assessed how participants combined these two elements. This assessment enabled us to identify four approaches based on the type of clients (high-status versus low-status) the participant worked with and the types of knowledge and skills (design expertise

versus other types) the participant viewed as relevant. We call these four approaches prosocial–professional identity integration strategies because each constitutes a distinct way of enacting a prosocial identity and reconciling it with one’s professional identity.

In our fourth stage of analysis, we focused on understanding the relational consequences of these identity work strategies. We looked for differences both within and between individuals in their approaches to working with high- versus low-status clients. We noticed that a subset of participants working with low-status clients often spoke about “collaboration” and “sharing power” with clients. This finding led us to focus on participants’ approaches to power with their clients. We coded for approach to power each time participants described working with high- and low-status clients and found that these descriptions signaled (1) mutuality; (2) a hierarchy in which the professional was superior to the client; or (3) a hierarchy in which the professional was subordinate to the client. Further analysis revealed that embracing design expertise as central to professional identity elevated architects’ sense of their own power with clients; with high-status clients this resulted in mutuality, and with low-status clients this resulted in professionals’ superiority over clients. At this stage, iterating between our findings and the literature on the self-benefits of prosocial behavior helped us to ask, who benefits from these strategies? (*cui bono*) (Blau and Scott, 1962). We came to interpret our findings as showing that strategies were differentially advantageous to professionals, specifically by maintaining, enhancing, or diminishing their power in relation to clients.

Last, we analyzed the data for factors that influenced which strategy a professional adopted. Following recommended practices (Vough et al., 2013; Cardador and Pratt, 2018), we analyzed for narrative causality (Polkinghorne, 1988), examining how participants narrated processes and moves. Analyzing participants’ accounts of how they made choices about which

clients to serve helped us to see how themes that had emerged in earlier analyses—such as “shared experiences” with low-status clients and “pushback from clients”—shaped the strategies they used. These findings led us to incorporate into our theory professionals’ own demographic identities and client invalidation as key factors shaping their use of identity integration strategies.

FINDINGS

We propose a conceptual model describing professionals’ strategies for integrating prosocial and professional identities and how these strategies shape professionals’ approach to power in relation to clients. First, we describe the professional norms our participants encountered and the conflict they experienced between prosocial and professional identity, which stemmed from their clients’ status. Second, we report the four prosocial–professional identity integration strategies through which professionals managed these conflicts. Third, we show that these strategies shaped professionals’ approach to power in relation to clients. Last, we describe two relational factors that shape professionals’ use of strategies and movement between them.

Conflicts Between Prosocial and Professional Identity

We found that both design and contributing to society were central to architects’ identities. The architects in our sample described their profession as valuing high-status clients because they enabled design expertise. They further discussed how this professional norm threatened their personal prosocial aspirations, sparking prosocial–professional identity conflict.

Centrality of prosocial and professional identity. Making a positive contribution to society was a central part of self-definition for the professionals in our study. Participants often rooted their intention to benefit others in how they were raised and expressed a desire to integrate prosociality into their professional work. One participant described a “feeling of wanting to be of

service to others,” saying, “I credit my parents for that, how I grew up.” She stated that “figuring out how to integrate that into my professional and personal [lives]” was important to her (P81). Another architect similarly emphasized having long known “that ultimately whatever I did would have a larger social impact,” saying, “I was raised in community. My grandmother was a civil rights activist. . . . All I understood was, how do you take care of others? What profession do you take on that therefore allows you to impact the masses?” (P19).

Similarly, participants described design as central to their identity. One architect described design as more than a job, saying, “for me, design is 24/7 . . . everything I see or do, whether it’s like a spoon or a building or an outdoor space I’m walking through . . . I just pick up on cues and color, texture, all those things. So, it’s kind of always all-encompassing” (P58). Another described design “as an innate interest,” saying, “from very early on . . . my interest was always on the creative side, designing how things go together” (P15). Thus, for the architects in our study, both prosociality and design were central and enduring facets of who they were.

Working with high-status clients supports professional identity. Participants’ accounts indicated that aesthetic and technical design excellence was the core professional ideal that architects were expected to prioritize. Architects characterized the valorization of design as “design for design’s sake” (P68) and described a culture of elevating design: “the ethos [was] strong, design was important,” and “architectural culture” required being “really passionate about design” (P72). Design was central to achieving the pinnacle of professional success: becoming a “signature architect,” “black-cape architect,” or “starchitect,” famous for design. As one participant asserted, “To this day, our profession is largely defined by success equals being the starchitect . . . your name is associated with a building” (P9).

Architects further described how the pursuit of design excellence was linked to working with clients who had sufficient capital to pay for expensive design services, i.e., high-status clients. As one architect described, high-status clients' association with design excellence made them the most desirable clients and those traditionally served by the profession:

Our profession values beauty, aesthetics, the economics of buildings. Obviously, the more you can spend, the more you can do, and the more beautiful they are. We really have marketed ourselves as purveyors of something hard to attain. To do that, we have to elevate the profession into . . . not even 1 percent, it's like the 0.01 percent that can really afford the services of architects at the level that a lot of architects want to work. (P16)

Another participant asserted that the highest-quality design tends to be done for wealthy corporate clients: "I think the zoomiest projects for us, the ones that get the most design recognition, they would probably be in our corporate commercial sector" (P77). Still another described how high-status clients enable the professional's self-interest as a designer, saying "some of it's ego-driven. . . . We're always aspiring to that top, top, top client so . . . that we can fulfill our own vision" (P16). These accounts express a common belief that architects can best enact their design expertise and the ideal of the architect as "visionary" when working for clients with substantial financial resources.

Working with high-status clients conflicts with prosocial identity. We found that the link between elite clients and design expertise put architects' professional identities in conflict with their prosocial identities. For many architects, serving an elite few who could pay for visionary design did not align with their desire to help society at large. One architect described struggling with the profession's focus on design expertise and high-status clients in light of her own political goals:

When I went into grad school, then I was faced with the pedagogy of form and ornamentation. It was very aesthetic-driven, which I think was very alarming for me. I'm . . . drawn to those aspects, but I had this more ideal notion of an architect—building cities with people, and the social implications of that . . . I felt like the overarching

pedagogy was in conflict with some of my own political goals that I wanted to achieve. . . . The last thing I wanted to do was build homes and museums for wealthy people. (P54)

Another participant described being troubled by how “star architect[s]” made “transformative buildings” and “glamorous institutions” but did not better the lives of less privileged groups, saying, “The reach that those specific institutions have, it’s not necessarily the audience that I am personally most interested in serving . . . I do feel that we are dealing with an economic gap in the population” (P88). Thus, exclusively benefiting a wealthy few aligned with the ideal of the star architect but conflicted with participants’ prosocial identity.

Working with low-status clients supports prosocial identity and conflicts with professional identity. Just as working with elite clients sparked an identity conflict for professionals, so did working with low-status clients. While participants viewed high-status clients as enabling design expertise but conflicting with prosocial identity, they viewed low-status clients as enabling prosocial identity but conflicting with design expertise. This conflict was driven by the perception that work for low-status clients was unlikely to provide opportunities for high-level design. One participant noted that projects for low-status clients would never be featured in design magazines, which was a mark of professional achievement as a designer: “Most of our [pro bono] projects [for clients with few resources] are very feasible and have great community impact but have very little high design . . . they aren’t projects that will go into *Architectural Record* or up on [the website] ArchDaily” (P92). Another architect contrasted the low design quality of a reduced-fee project with its prosocial nature: “The design was not an award-winning design. It was really about a minimalist amount of money. . . . But . . . this warmed your heart in a big way” (P29). Some architects expressed a sense of loss after stepping away from high-status clients (including ones that could be seen to have a public benefit) and the high-quality design they enabled: “there certainly is a difference in doing a project for a

nonprofit agency doing your housing development . . . versus designing a new museum of natural history for a client that has huge financial backing . . . I certainly miss getting to do a higher design project. . . . It's that inner struggle for sure" (P11). Table 3.2 presents additional data illustrating these identity conflicts, and Appendix F includes a more detailed version of the table.

Table 3.2: Conflicts Between Prosocial and Professional Identity: Illustrative Evidence

Centrality of Prosocial and Professional Identity
Importance of making a contribution to society "I think I have always, since really childhood, had a deep interest in issues of social justice and the environment and always wanted a connection and wasn't sure how." (P59) Centrality of design to identity "[Good design is] what it's all about—I mean, to me. And I think it's also why architects as a profession are so grossly underpaid, because they love it . . . a good number of people out there . . . would do this for free." (P22)
Working with High-Status Clients Supports Design Expertise
Design expertise as core professional ideal "We're very focused on obviously the As, Bs and Cs of architecture, just generally learning history, generally learning place, space, just the formal constructs of architecture, but not any of this kind of social impact." (P86) Pursuit of design is linked to serving elite clients "[In] the field of architecture . . . unless you take a proactive position on situating your practice within a different context, you're gonna work for people that have, in theory, some capital to deploy, and oftentimes a lot. And beyond just capital, it oftentimes means control, whether in the form of land or more substantial capital resources, to get a big thing built." (P63)
Working with High-Status Clients Conflicts with Prosocial Identity
"There was always something missing . . . in what I had expected architecture to be about. . . . The vast majority of projects were for a very specific and wealthy segment of society. [That] didn't sit too well with me." (P12)
Working with Low-Status Clients Conflicts with Professional Identity
"I do sometimes worry about my design knowledge and IQ being lost, since I'm not possibly going to be in that space as often. Knowing about certain materials, building methodologies. That lingers in the back of my mind, like, will I be as sharp of a designer as I once was, because I'm not going to be in a design space as much . . . there's nothing like creating, it's just a beautiful thing, and beautiful experience and process. On the community development side, sometimes you get lost in spreadsheets, and just the paperwork of things. It's not so much design that goes on. When we did have architects that come through to design our projects, I get to look at their stuff and kind of review it and all that. It was bittersweet when I had to give it back to them like, oh yeah, you get to go design this now, and I don't. Yeah, I do miss it sometimes." (P82)

Prosocial–Professional Identity Integration Strategies

Professionals used four strategies to manage prosocial–professional identity conflict: defending, affirming, expanding, and reforming professional identity. Each strategy responded to threats to prosocial identity and to design expertise, and each consisted of a prosocial aim linked to approaches to different types of clients and different types of knowledge and skills. Table 3.3 summarizes the strategies, Table 3.4 provides additional illustrative quotes (see Appendix F for a more detailed version), and Table 3.5 provides counts of participants by strategy and work context.

Defending professional identity. Professionals using the defending strategy framed high-status clients and design expertise as prosocial. They defined their prosocial aims as helping the public through design. We label this strategy “defending” because it maintained architecture as it was typically practiced: working for high-status clients and using design expertise, which supported the traditional professional identity.

Professionals using this strategy responded in two ways to the threat that working with high-status clients posed to prosocial identity. First, they redefined the high-status clients they worked with as prosocial, invoking the mission and social contributions of clients like hospitals, schools, and research laboratories as evidence of the prosocial value of their design work. One architect attributed social benefit to designing for scientists as follows: “I think that we all get up in the morning, especially in the science-and-tech practice, and we go to work because we’re trying to use our design talent and our abilities to help science progress, by giving it really good places to be. . . . I see that as a calling of sorts, and a contribution that we make to science” (P17). Another described working with a public-school client as “noble” work benefitting others: “At a certain level, you’re still doing God’s work, right? We’re trying to keep the schools from

Table 3.3: Summary of Prosocial–Professional Integration Strategies

Prosocial aim	Defending	Affirming	Expanding	Reforming
	Contribute to the general public	Work with under-resourced clients	Work with under-resourced clients	Work with under-resourced clients
			Address broader social inequalities	Address broader social inequalities
				Share power with clients
Response to threat to prosocial identity	Defend	Engage	Engage	Engage
Approach to client status	Focus on high-status clients' social contributions	Add work with low-status clients (in addition to work with high-status clients)	Focus on working with low-status clients	Focus on working with low-status clients
	Frame clients' social contributions as part of one's own contribution			
Example clients	Pharmaceutical company University	Nonprofit providing housing to survivors of domestic violence Local zoo	Affordable housing developer Low-income individuals	Community-development organization Public agency
Response to threat to expertise	Defend	Defend	Defend and engage	Engage
Approach to knowledge and skills	Embrace design expertise	Embrace design expertise	Embrace design expertise	Doubt sufficiency of design expertise to accomplish prosocial aims
	Frame design expertise as useful for all (minimize view that expertise is only for elites)	Reframe low-status clients as clients that enable good design	Reframe low-status clients as clients that enable good design	Minimize design expertise
			Doubt sufficiency of design expertise to accomplish prosocial aims	Add other types of knowledge and skills
			Add other types of knowledge and skills	Frame other types of knowledge and skills as central
			Frame other types of knowledge and skills as central	Recognize low-status clients as having valuable knowledge
Knowledge and skills viewed as central to professional work	Design expertise	Design expertise	Design expertise	Relational skills
			Relational skills	Knowledge from other professions
			Knowledge from other professions	Clients' knowledge

Table 3.4: Prosocial–Professional Identity Integration Strategies: Illustrative Evidence*

Defending Strategy
Defend high-status clients as prosocial “Our work . . . in so many ways is helpful, because it’s really critical stuff. We’re doing great health-care facilities that allow researchers and others to cure cancer and find that thing. So that’s an amazing thing.” (P29)
Defend design expertise as prosocial “I personally, you know, really like doing architecture of any . . . kind, and I think we help any client in any project that we do. So, you know, every building needs a roof.” (P24)
Affirming Strategy
Working with economically under-resourced clients is prosocial “[Our firm] sets aside 1% of our billable hours for pro bono work. . . . We have a certain expertise in design and planning, and we want to use those as responsibly as possible to make an impact. . . . It’s directly for local nonprofits who wouldn’t have been able to afford our services otherwise.” (P89)
Reframing low-status clients as design clients “This is very much a design problem . . . it’s a great opportunity to do something that is sort of this creation of this pavilion-like element. And whether they have a concert for Indonesia or whether it’s a conversation about single mothers . . . there’s this pavilion which is just a beautiful design piece. I think it’s going to be an extraordinary installation. . . . And people go, ‘Wow. Did you see that thing over there? That’s really great.’ . . . it is serving a very strong social purpose, but I think for us [the stronger pull] . . . is that it actually is a design piece.” (P29)
Expanding Strategy
Addressing societal inequalities “I think the largest impact we’re trying to make here is . . . around this idea of equity and providing similar opportunities for housing, for transportation, for access to work to everybody in the community regardless of what their demographic background is. . . . On the larger scale we’re working to just increase housing change.” (P11)
Doubting the sufficiency of traditional design expertise “Some days I [think we’re moving the needle on structural inequality], and some days I don’t . . . at the end of the day, though, a lot of it falls in the policy [domain]. . . . As designers, as architects, you are service providers. I think that we are limited in our capacity to actually effect large-scale global change. . . . In my wish list, to moving that needle more, I want the people deciding where the money goes, and the people writing the policy to have had the experiences of working with neighborhoods. Understanding all these things, and being able to come to the table with that in their back pocket. I would like us to not be architects, and do everything else.” (P57)
Incorporating other types of knowledge and skills “Our teams are really multidisciplinary, so we bring a lot of different perspectives to a problem. . . . We have an expertise that creates solutions that really fit the needs and the contexts. [We have] this flexible and multimedia approach. . . . That mindset has led the culture to always be questioning, what are the best ways we should be doing something? What new disciplines or backgrounds should we be integrating to do better work?” (P56)

Table 3.4 (continued)

Reforming Strategy	
Aiming to share power with clients	“[My] goal [is] around empowerment and social justice . . . looking critically at what that means. . . . Public interest design projects that don’t move the dial, they’re feel-good projects, but they’re not moving the dial because the community isn’t actually empowered through them. . . . [I aim to] be really . . . self-critical . . . [and] critical of the profession and how we think about empowerment and equity.” (P44)
Recognizing clients’ knowledge	“Your job is to get everyone to the table, and it’s to quiet your own voice . . . and to really learn to listen to . . . that local knowledge, that local expertise, that local voice. That’s where I think you need to drop the ego.” (P44)
Prosocial–Professional Identity Integration	
	“My work really has been about integrating all those pieces of myself . . . not just have my work and then have my interests. How do you bring those things together? . . . I feel like I’ve gotten a fluidity where my professional life is an extension of my personal life. . . . the work I do professionally goes hand in hand with my personal beliefs as to the kind of world I want to live in and I want to create.” (P14)
* To avoid repetition, we do not provide quotes that illustrate concepts that are the same across some strategies (e.g., view of low-status clients as prosocial, doubting the value of traditional expertise); instead, we provide quotes that illustrate the distinctive aspects of each strategy.	

Table 3.5: Counts of Participants by Identity Integration Strategy Used and Work Context

	Defending	Affirming	Expanding	Reforming
Professional firm	15	16	6	–
Socially oriented design organization	–	–	26	7
Community-oriented organization	–	–	5	9
Total	15	16	37	16

falling apart . . . so there is a nobility to it” (P22). Participants also described clients, and by extension themselves, as prosocial by contrasting industries in which they worked, such as education and health care, with those they did not serve, such as high-end residential or retail (P30, P17), and with clients they considered morally questionable, such as totalitarian governments, prisons, and tobacco companies (P72, P85, P86).

Second, these professionals framed aesthetic and design expertise as itself prosocial, making the case for their own prosociality regardless of clients' status. One professional said, "I don't think anyone does socially irresponsible work. Architecture is fundamentally a social art. And that's what we try to do, is promote environments for people to have positive experiences" (P18). Another defended traditional design expertise as prosocial while also highlighting the prosocial mission of his high-status clients, saying, "architecture is a social art in profession, doing museums and places of worship and schools and residences . . . the very nature of what we do already has a social impact" (P83). In this view, beauty, aesthetics, and thoughtfully designed buildings were the core contributions of designers, and they were inherently helpful to a generic public, no matter who the client was.

Affirming professional identity. In the affirming strategy, professionals framed work with low-status clients as fulfilling prosocial aims while maintaining design expertise as central to professional identity. We label this strategy "affirming" because it entailed affirming a professional identity rooted in design expertise even as it involved remapping that expertise onto working with a different set of clients, i.e., low-status clients.

Professionals using this strategy viewed working with under-resourced clients who could not afford the market rate for design services as prosocial. One professional described this work as her unique contribution to society: "With this skill set, I'm making a difference to someone's life in my way. Like, I'm not a doctor, and I cannot treat someone, but I'm an architect and I can improve someone's way of living, and I can improve someone's way of working. . . . That's my contribution to that person who is needy" (P21). Another asserted that all architects should donate their design services, saying, "It is our duty to give back to other organizations that are

unable to . . . pay” (P35). These professionals thus upheld their prosocial identities by casting their clients as “needy” and themselves as benefactors.

While working with low-status clients alleviated the threat to prosocial identity, it evoked a threat to professional identity because low-status clients were not associated with high-quality design. In response, professionals using the affirming strategy reframed low-status clients as “design” clients, enabling them to reaffirm a professional identity rooted in design expertise. They often explicitly pushed back on the idea that working with low-status clients was only about feeling good or helping others, asserting that it was about design. One said, “I think it’s got to be more than the satisfaction of helping somebody. I think it denigrates the craft of what we do if all you’re doing is offering help and not actually . . . using it as part of your own development as an architect or as a designer” (P30). Another architect underscored this emphasis on design: “A lot of times [a pro bono project] is a feel-good thing and I want it to be about design excellence. . . . If someone wants to volunteer in a soup kitchen, that’s not a design challenge. . . . There’s plenty of people that could use our help, but they want design expertise. That’s what we bring” (P18). The affirming strategy turned the potential threat of working with low-status clients into an opportunity to exhibit one’s design excellence.

Expanding professional identity. The expanding strategy focused on low-status clients and retained the focus on design expertise while also incorporating other types of knowledge and skills as a core part of professional work. This strategy expands what is considered core to professional identity to include design expertise alongside a broader set of knowledge and skills, including relational skills and knowledge from other professions.

This strategy framed working with low-status clients as a way to help those who lacked resources, but unlike the affirming strategy it also aimed to address broader societal inequalities.

An architect working in neighborhood redevelopment included pursuing “equity” and addressing “structural inequality” in describing her work:

We really represent the grassroots, the regular Joe who is interested in improving his front stoop or his street, his neighborhood . . . [serving] community-based organizations that typically wouldn’t have design funding available to them, [and] we contribute to strengthening the fabric of neighborhoods . . . it’s not just about affordable housing or just about neighborhood change . . . it’s about working within all the systems to make people’s lives better. . . . That structural inequality, to me, is important. (P45)

Another architect contrasted the “more glamorous” side of architecture with a desire to work on social issues for low-status clients; he had an “interest and focus” on “communities and societies around the world . . . facing extreme challenges that come of very basic human needs” (P88).

Professionals using the expanding strategy drew on design expertise in their work with low-status clients, yet they doubted the sufficiency of this expertise for addressing social problems. One architect working in low-income areas voiced dissatisfaction with architects’ typical lack of involvement in questions that were important for clients—discussions “that the traditional architectural practice doesn’t enable you to participate in”:

When an architect gets a project, 90 percent of it is done. The land is secure. There’s a real-estate developer and a client or a city . . . and you’re just implementing what they want. That was always [much] less satisfying to me than the other 90 percent of the work, of “Well, what is the project? Who is benefiting from that? Who is not going to benefit from that? Why is it happening this way and not that way?” (P7)

Architects responded to this doubt by expanding their understanding of which knowledge and skills were necessary for working with low-status clients. One described “expanding the definition of practice” beyond “traditional” architecture to include community members’ participation in the design process, saying, “traditional practice [in] architecture is considered to be the design of buildings . . . I’m increasingly a proponent of expanding the definition of practice there” (P9). Another architect characterized the traditional role of the architect as only about design expertise: “If you go into most meetings with the American Institute of Architects,

there is the set idea that the place of the architect is this world of design and construction. . . .

That's probably how 95 percent of architects practice." Then he described his own approach to

"mission-driven work" as encompassing both design expertise and a set of relational skills:

As an architect, I think of design as problem solving. . . . It requires an understanding of architecture in the traditional sense, but then also architecture as deep project management and architecture as deep relationship management—and just this idea of herding cats, and using the greater world of building and the built environment to solve problems, rather than trying to think of a building as a stand-alone thing. . . . My number-one goal is just to hear people's stories. And I feel like that's what I do at my job: I just listen to people's stories. And I say, "Okay, I'll build a building. Why not?" (P80)

The expanding strategy could also involve incorporating the expertise of other professions, such as public health, urban planning, or environmental engineering. One participant described an interdisciplinary approach centered on design:

Definitely the center circle would be the design industry. From there on, it would be then the social sector; then, if you zoom out of that, it would then be the world—but I think the center of it is always design, because it's very design-led. The work that we do, I think it would be maybe some kind of lovely crisscross . . . the boundaries between design and the social sector, it's a nice weave, that kind of weaving the fabric of impact. (P33)

Similarly, the architect quoted above who wanted to work on the "90 percent" of a project typically outside of the architect's scope explained that he double-majored in college because he felt that additional training in other fields was necessary to his work with low-status clients:

It really started pushing more than just architecture bricks and mortar kind of questions. . . . I also was left a little unsatisfied with what just the standard school of architecture curriculum was offering around that, and I added a public policy major to my work. . . . It was taking grant writing classes and environmental policy class or interning with housing organizations . . . in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the country. Kind of being able to dance between those two fields and areas of work was really fundamental for me to move into what I call community design. (P7)

Professionals using this strategy believed that expanding the types of knowledge and skills they associated with their professional identity beyond design expertise enabled them to more effectively work with low-status clients and to address social inequalities.

Reforming professional identity. The fourth strategy also focused on working with low-status clients but went further than the expanding strategy. Professionals using this strategy included “empowering clients” as part of their prosocial aim. In addition, they considered low-status clients’ lived experiences and knowledge of their local contexts to be relevant to their professional work. We label this strategy “reforming” because it represents a greater divergence from a professional identity rooted solely in design expertise.

Architects using this strategy expressed the idea that sharing power with low-status clients was part of their prosocial aim. One architect described this aim by asking who played the “hero” role in a project, asking rhetorically how architects could “build stages” to support and showcase low-status clients:

It’s a little bit of taking away from the hero architect. I would prefer hero resident. . . . It’s really different from the typical. Most design workshops, you’ll have the architect being like, “This is my vision. This is what I’ve done.” That’s not a comfortable place for me. That’s not the place that I’m striving for. How do we build stages instead of stand on them? (P54)

Others described their work as “community-driven,” suggesting a desire for the client, not the architect, to have control over the direction of the work (P34). Thus, professionals using the reforming strategy desired to express their prosocial identity by sharing power with low-status clients.

Like those using the expanding strategy, these architects doubted the sufficiency of design expertise for addressing their prosocial aims. In response to this doubt, these architects minimized their use of design expertise and framed low-status clients as having knowledge that was essential to their work as professionals, knowledge that architects lacked. One described working on a school in a low-income community and “feeling like architecture might not always be the answer”:

It became clear . . . that they needed as much help with the curriculum design and a lot of other stuff that wasn't directly related to the building. I started to feel like I didn't really have any skillsets outside of architecture. . . . I start[ed] having feelings like, I don't know if I really wanted to do architecture, and I don't know if I always feel like architecture is the best way to tackle a lot of these issues. (P28)

Another described the importance of “citizen expertise,” viewing his own role as a designer as receiving and interpreting others’ knowledge:

The citizen-expert aspect of it is that . . . people know themselves, people know their own neighborhoods, they know their own homes, they know their own streets. I can't pretend that I know those things, and I can't pretend like I can tell you what that is. So, my job here is to listen, to understand, to interpret. (P75)

Another architect explained that in order to share power with clients, it was important to respect their knowledge: “You have to genuinely believe that the people you're working with know as much as you do, have as much to contribute as you do” (P34). Thus, the reforming strategy entailed minimizing design expertise, viewing other types of knowledge and skills as central to one's own professional work, and recognizing clients' knowledge as critical to this work.

Identity integration. All four identity strategies offered professionals a positive and integrated sense of their prosocial and professional identities (Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar, 2010). One architect who used the defending strategy described feeling “enchantment with being able to practice with a larger body of people who had similar values” (P17). Another, who adopted the affirming strategy, recalled her joy at learning that her firm was inaugurating a social impact initiative that would involve working with low-status clients: “[The firm announced] this call to action . . . and that really made me happy. It made my heart sing. . . . It was a validation [that] this is the right thing to do . . . that really made me even more elevated” (P35). Describing a deep synergy between her prosocial and professional identities, an architect who used the expanding strategy remarked, “I don't even think of it as work or career goals. I just kind of see it all as one—like I'm doing what I find meaningful, and that I love, and makes me happy”

(P57). An architect who used the reforming strategy commented that “this work . . . feels really spiritually aligned, personally aligned, with my own vision” (P62). Thus, all strategies enabled prosocial–professional identity integration; however, they had different implications for the power dynamics in professional–client relationships.

How Identity Integration Strategies Shape Approach to Power with Clients

We found that identity integration strategies shaped how professionals approached their power in relation to their clients. We conceptualized approach to power as professionals’ view of their relationship with clients based on their own and clients’ control over access to valued resources (Emerson, 1962; Magee and Galinsky, 2008), which in this context meant knowledge, skills, and financial resources. We observed that design expertise elevated professionals’ power relative to that of clients. However, viewing a broader set of knowledge and skills as central to one’s professional identity shifted the power dynamic. Below we describe how these dynamics played out differently with high- and low-status clients.

Defending: Embracing design expertise enables mutuality with high-status clients.

Professionals using the defending strategy typically perceived mutual power in their client relationships. Architects described a collaborative dynamic in which they interpreted clients’ desires while also encouraging clients toward what they viewed as good design:

Over the years I think we have been pretty good as far as pushing our clients to not necessarily think in the same way they’ve always been thinking, and to be able to understand education [the client’s industry] a little bit. . . . Sometimes if you just sit down and start drawing and . . . show the client the variations without any predetermined [notion of] what it should be, they can then say, “Oh, you know, this is how I teach or this is how I would like to teach.” And all of a sudden, now you use the design process to feed back down into, “Okay. What should I build?” (P24)

Architects also described how they defended their expert contributions against high-status clients’ financial power. One said, “You are hired for an expertise, and the expertise is to fulfill

on this definition of design. . . . You've got to like the space that I design for you, but let me be the professional that listens to you, understands you, and translates" (P76). Professionals using the defending strategy thus largely viewed themselves to be in mutual, symmetrical relationships with high-status clients in which clients' financial resources enabled good design, and architects used their design expertise to create the best possible building for the client.¹³

Affirming: Embracing design expertise enables hierarchy over low-status clients.

Architects using the affirming strategy typically perceived a sense of superiority and power over their clients. They saw low-status clients as clients they could help but whom they de-prioritized in terms of time and level of service because these clients lacked the resources to make the same demands that high-status clients did on architects' time and attention. One architect noted that pro bono work must not jeopardize relationships with high-status clients: "When push comes to shove, and you have a deadline for a paying client," she explained, the paying client took precedence (P89). Another reported that when work for low-status clients consumed more time than expected, "there can be discord around it in conversations on the business side of things." In these cases, the architect said, the solution was to scale back the work: "I'll just call the [pro bono] client and I'll say, 'Well, we're kind of getting a little further into this than we had bargained for. . . . We said we'd do three community meetings; we're at six. . . . Now that you want us to do the seventh, it's getting painful'" (P83).

These architects' sense of having power over low-status clients was driven by architects' perception that such clients lacked knowledge and therefore depended on architects' expertise. One professional, describing his pro bono clients' knowledge as deficient, said,

They initially were looking for permit-level drawings. But in reality, they had no capital, so . . . there's a lot of client education that goes into doing projects like this, because they

¹³ Below, we discuss the potential for architects working with high-status clients to view themselves as subordinate to those clients; see the section "Invalidation by high-status clients."

aren't your typical architectural-project client. They don't know what an architect can do. They also don't really know what they need, necessarily. (P50)

Expressing a view held by several participants, the architect who described scaling back work for low-status clients asserted that these clients "need someone to protect them from themselves," adding, "they need to be educated in the design and building professions" (P83). Architects who used the affirming strategy perceived low-status clients as dependent recipients of their largesse, lacking resources and knowledge, while casting themselves as possessors and givers of expertise.

At the same time, however, architects using the affirming strategy benefited from low-status clients' dependence on them, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Some architects reported seeking opportunities to exercise their design excellence in work with low-status clients that they could not get with high-status clients, whom they sometimes perceived as dictating the possibilities and constraints for design. One architect contrasted the creative freedom he experienced working with corporate versus pro bono clients as follows: "There's this mentality with [corporate] clients: when they are paying [for] something, they usually want you to do it a certain way . . . but with [pro bono clients] it's just open for interpretation. You come in and you can be a lot more creative" (P39). Another architect recalled that his pro bono client, a nonprofit providing services to victims of domestic violence, "gave us some more design freedom than [usual]" (P52). Thus, some architects turned to low-status clients to bolster both their prosocial and professional identities, and as a result, they gained power to exercise their design expertise.

Expanding: Maintaining design expertise enables hierarchy, and adding other knowledge and skills enables mutuality with low-status clients. Professionals using the expanding strategy exhibited the most heterogeneity in how they approached clients. Our analysis revealed that this heterogeneity was driven by variation in attachment to design expertise. Those rooted more strongly in design expertise tended to approach low-status clients

more hierarchically, whereas those who viewed their knowledge and skills more broadly approached clients more mutually.

Professionals who strongly embraced design expertise and only weakly embraced other types of knowledge and skills had an approach similar to those using the affirming strategy. For example, one architect who used the expanding strategy owned a socially oriented design firm focused on working with low-status clients and addressing social inequalities. He described himself as “the Bernie Sanders of architecture,” with the prosocial aim of helping “the folks at the bottom and the folks that have been left out,” as well as “not-for-profits who are mission driven” (P13). He maintained a strong grounding in design expertise with minimal expansion to other types of knowledge and skills. He described his role as “designer-in-chief” and talked about how he had won design awards and was reviewed in prominent outlets such as *Architectural Record* and *The New York Times Magazine*. He spoke about the technical and design elements of his work, describing his “very, very good instincts when it comes to trying to provide the highest-quality architecture.” Like those using the affirming strategy, he perceived that working with low-status clients enabled autonomy to exercise design expertise freely, saying, “the lack of budget liberates me in a fantastic way. It almost gives me more freedom, because as long as I keep that budget in mind, I can pretty much do whatever I want” (P13). This example further illustrates how strong reliance on design expertise as one’s social contribution could reinforce architects’ perceptions of power over low-status clients.

Others using the expanding strategy had a weaker attachment to design expertise and greater reliance on other types of knowledge and skills. These professionals perceived more mutual relationships with low-status clients. One architect described how he embraced his relational skills to create more mutuality with clients, saying,

What we're really trying to do now is the human-centered process overall, which is not just about design, which is about building a cultural understanding between groups, the sense of respect, and using that to create very open and honest and candid feedback and discussion and debate. (P12)

Another architect who worked at a neighborhood redevelopment organization described her approach to community engagement as “all about collaboration” and “starting a conversation” and contrasted it with a more heroic and paternalistic approach of “dive-bombing into neighborhoods” that she called “Mighty Mouse architecture.” She said,

You're not there to save the day. You're there to work with communities. They have the ideas. Your job is to help them put 'em on paper—not to tell them what's right and what's wrong. . . . I feel like [my organization] is in a position to train the next generation of architects to be a bit more humble, and work with community, and receive information, and to make a better product. . . . If you can't collaborate, you shouldn't be working in neighborhood redevelopment. (P45)

Thus, the use of a broader set of knowledge and skills, especially relational skills, led to a less hierarchical approach to relationships with low-status clients.

Reforming: Recognizing clients' knowledge enables mutuality with low-status clients. Architects using the reforming strategy were the most mutual in their approach to low-status clients. They described an explicit intention to alter the power balance by recognizing clients' lived experience and knowledge as relevant to their work and saw client knowledge as a basis for sharing power more equally with clients. One architect described how, since she viewed community members as the best-informed project participants, she pursued a “resident-driven” design process:

If we want to know about an issue, we should ask them to join the meetings. . . . I feel [an] inherent commitment to the resident to make sure that what they're saying gets elevated and amplified . . . always taking a step back and letting residents talk about what they need to talk about. . . . Residents are hired from the community to be engagement coordinators. . . . Power is this two-way street, and it's not always top-down. (P81)

This architect included community members because she “want[ed] to know about an issue” and linked this inclusiveness to her understanding that “power is this two-way street.” This link illustrates how architects using the reforming strategy perceived clients’ knowledge as a resource that they depended on, which enabled more mutual relationships. Another architect said, “I . . . create a process . . . that really puts decision-making power and respect and mutual appreciation into the hands of the people that we work with.” She expressed trying to make it “clear that there is gonna be a reciprocal relationship, and that governed everything from how a site is built to how we debate ideas to who gets to ultimately decide what happens.” Describing the mutuality of her client relationships, she said, “There are lots of disagreements. There’s yelling and demands. Things that very much signal a 50/50 relationship or an even playing field” (P34). These examples illustrate how professionals using the reforming strategy articulated their intention to share power with their low-status clients and believed they were putting this intention into practice.

Our analysis demonstrates that professionals’ perceptions of power dynamics were shaped by the combination of their client’s status and their view of the knowledge and skills that were relevant to their professional work with those clients. Table 3.6 presents a summary of power and status dynamics, and Table 3.7 provides further illustrative data (see Appendix F for a more detailed version of this table).

Factors Shaping the Use of Identity Integration Strategies

Though all professionals in our sample were able to achieve prosocial–professional identity integration, this integration was not necessarily stable; further experiences of identity conflict sometimes led them to alter their use of identity integration strategies in search of greater identity fulfillment. Such shifts occurred when clients invalidated a professional’s prosocial or

professional identity and when professionals found it difficult to identify with the archetypal architect (high-status, White, male) or the archetypal client (high-status, wealthy) because of their own demographic identities, which we conceptualized as demographic misfit.

Table 3.6: Summary of Power Dynamics by Identity Integration Strategy

Strategy	Client Status	Knowledge and Skills	How Strategy Shapes Approach to Power in Relation to Clients
Defending	High status	Design expertise	Mutual*: Strategy maintains professional power • Expertise viewed as valuable and residing with the professional • Clients are viewed as having financial resources
Affirming	Low status	Design expertise	Hierarchical*: Strategy enhances professional power • Expertise viewed as valuable and residing with the professional • Clients are viewed as lacking knowledge and financial resources
Expanding	Low status	Design expertise Relational skills Knowledge and skills from other professions	Mixed: Strategy partly enhances professional power • Expertise viewed as valuable and residing with the professional • Clients are viewed as lacking financial resources Strategy partly diminishes professional power • Doubting sufficiency of expertise
Reforming	Low status	Relational skills Knowledge and skills from other professions Clients' knowledge	Mutual: Strategy diminishes professional power and elevates clients' power • Doubting sufficiency of expertise • Valuable knowledge is viewed as residing with the client

* Professionals working with high-status clients may also experience hierarchical relationships in which the professional is viewed as subordinate to the client when clients invalidate their expertise.

Table 3.7: How Identity Integration Strategies Shape Approach to Power in Client Relationships: Illustrative Evidence

Defending: Embracing Design Expertise Enables Mutuality with High-Status Clients “A typical project follows a certain course . . . for a client with a specific need and it goes through a series of iterations . . . and collaborations to find the solution to that client’s problem . . . once there is a team together and once there is a collaboration going on I do like to kind of insert myself into the conversation and start to understand what the big idea is and how to support getting it done.” (P41)
Affirming: Embracing Design Expertise Enables Hierarchy over Low-Status Clients Low-status clients are deprioritized relative to high-status clients “The hardest part is . . . I think we’re supposed to have real office time for [pro bono], but it always ends up kind of taking a back seat to the real, bigger projects. . . . I want to really commit time to it and treat it like a normal project, but it ends up kind of last in line, I’d say, in terms of priorities and allocating time to it.” (P10) Low-status clients are dependent on professionals’ expertise and lack resources “You’re not dealing with someone that’s going to throw their hands up in the air and go to another architect. You can actually push for what you believe in because there’s no, there’s no money on the table.” (P20)
Expanding: Maintaining Design Expertise Enables Hierarchy, and Adding Other Knowledge and Skills Enables Mutuality with Low-Status Clients Embracing design expertise is associated with perceptions of power over clients “The economic dynamic that comes out of us having the dollars and the skills, no matter how much we try to be inclusive, there is that fear. You can see it sometimes with people saying yes even though they might not agree. . . . I don’t think that it’s entirely possible to negate the power dynamic that just exists in imbalanced economics. . . . ’Cause in this instance, rather than me being on the receiving end of it, I’m on the giving end of it, right?” (P16) Doubting sufficiency of design expertise is associated with perceptions of mutuality and collaboration “I always knew I wanted to do something more than just architecture . . . [this] shapes my [approach to my] profession to this day, blending architecture and focusing more on urban design and urban planning as it relates to architecture. . . . I do a lot of work in neighborhood redevelopment, affordable and mixed income housing. That’s one of our spiritual mainstays in terms of what we do here in our practice. I love working with nonprofit organizations. And I really love working with the community and engaging the community. Often the best ideas come from the community.” (P84)
Reforming: Recognizing Clients’ Knowledge Enables Mutuality with Low-Status Clients “That was some of the work that we’d been doing that was really important, where we were working with communities to help them have that voice . . . that we as designers are making decisions about where we put the power, that power of that design and whether we put it in the hands of people who matter. . . . We can actually activate the [power] in communities that don’t normally have that power.” (P64)

Invalidation by high-status clients. Professionals sometimes perceived themselves as being excessively dependent on and subordinate to high-status clients in ways that compromised their prosocial and professional identities. One architect perceived a high-status client to have

violated his prosociality when the client took extreme action against a local community affected by the project without involving him. This experience “was a turning point” that prompted him to work with low-status clients:

I was project lead, in a role to make decisions. . . . [The land for the project] was taken over by informal settlers. . . . One day we get back to site . . . and we find that all those people . . . have been bused out overnight. . . . The developer had worked with [the] local municipality, got the Army involved, bused everybody out. . . . To think that I had a role in leading the design, but here I [had] no involvement whatsoever in the fate of those people. . . . So that really was a turning point for me in terms of, how can we as designers and architects, not just work for the people who are paying for us, but consider other people who are stakeholders in what we do? (P73)

At other times, high-status clients invalidated architects’ professional identities. This invalidation occurred when architects felt pressured to compromise design quality to accommodate clients’ preferences and felt that clients did not respect their expertise. One architect described feeling devalued in such relationships: “I feel like I’m no different than the potato chip supplier. . . . You’re just in the commodity business. . . . They don’t care about design.” These clients inhibited designers from expressing their professional identities, as they were not able to pursue “really interesting design with [their] expertise” (P29). Some architects who experienced identity invalidation by (and subordination to) high-status clients turned to the affirming strategy; they compensated for these experiences by turning to low-status clients to express their prosocial identity and by seeking opportunities to exercise design excellence in work with such clients to express their professional identity, thereby inverting the power dynamic.

Invalidation by low-status clients. Professionals also described how interactions with low-status clients could invalidate their prosocial identity. In these cases, low-status clients challenged professionals’ prosocial intent, which could trigger a shift to using broader skills and knowledge. For example, one architect who had founded a socially focused design firm

described how she altered her prosocial aim and expanded her sense of her knowledge and skills in response to clients challenging her to include them in the decision-making process:

The young people we were working with . . . felt that we didn't hear them. . . . That was a really startling moment for me. . . . It flipped me in a way, and it really made me really hear people differently. It changed my way of being. . . . How do I . . . change the way in which you're feeling empowered? A lot of it came down to changing process. Now it's the young-adult advisory council that makes all the decisions. . . . I realized [the clients] want to speak more. You want to run these things more. You want to be in a position of decision-making, right? Okay. Then I can make that happen. (P14)

This example illustrates how professionals, when they encountered resistance from low-status clients, experienced a threat to their prosocial identity, which prompted them to alter their identity integration strategy to one that aimed to share power with clients.

Experiences of misfit/fit: Low-status demographic identities. Participants reported that both design expertise and high-status clients were typically associated with the archetype of the high-status, White, male architect. We found that how architects viewed their demographic identities in relation to this archetype shaped the identity integration strategies they used.

Female and racial minority architects described a lack of demographic fit with the archetype of the White, male architect as design expert. One woman said, "I switched a lot of firms at the beginning because I love to do design, and I'd get really frustrated that as a female I wasn't being given those opportunities, and automatically it was like, 'Oh, you're an interior designer.' I'm like, 'No, I'm an architect'" (P6). Another related how challenging it was to be one of few Black professionals in architecture:

I'm a Black woman. . . . At the time that I was hired there was one other Black [architect, a] male. . . . I [am] . . . constantly having to remind myself that I belong here, that I'm capable here, that I am impactful here, that there is opportunity for me to grow here. . . . Resisting tokenism has been one of the hugest battles of my entire career as an architect. (P19)

Many other architects from lower-status demographic backgrounds described similar experiences of marginalization in the profession. This demographic misfit made it more challenging and less compelling to embrace design expertise as one's sole professional contribution.

Individuals with low-status demographic identities also experienced misfit with the elite clients that architects traditionally served. For example, one Black architect described feeling alienated from elite clients: "Why are these my clients? . . . Why do I have to serve this rich client who doesn't really care about the community, and the project's impact, or me?" He elaborated on the dissonance he felt using his design skills to build apartments he could not afford to live in for a highly profit-oriented client:

These people aren't for me. They were developing . . . these really expensive apartments. . . . How crazy is that? I'm the designer, and I won't be able to experience living here. I can't even afford this. Those moments we were thinking about access, or lack of access, and equality. You're just like, this isn't it, this isn't worth it, to serve these groups of individuals with my time and my skill set, and to produce something I won't ever have full access to. That makes no sense to me. (P82)

This example illustrates how professionals with low-status identities perceived high-status clients as lacking concern for communities with whom they shared experiences of marginalization. This perception led them to feel that working with high-status clients and design expertise did not fulfill their prosocial identity, pushing them to question their approach.

Conversely, professionals with low-status identities reported a sense of fit with low-status clients, which made it easier and more attractive to work with them. The architect who described alienation from high-status clients above described how his prosocial and marginalized demographic identities propelled him to work with low-status clients: "I want to choose my clients; I want people who more or less look like me, have the same issues that I have, and I want work that I do to be able to benefit them. I don't want it to just be an elitist thing" (P82). He recounted an internal thought process that captured the process of expanding from design

expertise to include other types of knowledge and skills, “evolving” and “building” from “design-specific skills” to “policy”:

It evolves . . . like, “Man, there’s so many hurdles to prevent us from building affordable housing or building community-based projects. . . . What do I need to do to not allow those hurdles to block us from doing this work?” . . . Policy is really the first step in design. These laws and these codes really dictate what we can do and how we can do it. (P82)

A White architect similarly reported that experiencing economic marginalization led him to identify with low-income clients: “My family was very low-income growing up. . . . This kind of identity of growing up without much, but trying to be self-reliant and resilient, certainly helped me resonate with the people that we serve every day.” This identification enabled him to view his clients as “not just recipients [but] also givers” and to aim for a more egalitarian relationship:

It’s not just a top-down approach. It’s also an opportunity to be served by them. We have a client that we’ve helped a few times, an older individual who is an artist. . . . In a way for him to show his gratitude to us he recently gave us several beautiful paintings that he’d done, that we put in our office. Even though we’re helping people that are often economically struggling, they still have value and the ability to also serve us and serve others in their neighborhood and community. . . . That kind of portion of my identity is very much shaped by my upbringing and being on the other side at some point. (P11)

Experiences of fit/misfit: High-status demographic identities. Professionals with high-status identities—i.e., White and male participants—typically reported maintaining a strong grounding in design expertise and less expansion to a broader set of knowledge and skills, suggesting demographic fit with the professional archetype and elite clients (i.e., being White, male, and/or upper-class). While most of these participants did not discuss their high-status demographic identities explicitly, there were a few exceptions. One, who described himself as “architecture focused,” noted how as “a White male, I am kind of part of . . . the old guard [of the profession]” (P11). Another White, male professional described a sense of distance from some issues facing low-status clients because they were not part of his own “narrative.” He noted that

“gender and racial issues . . . are just not really my thing,” explaining, “I mean, I realize there’s tremendous imbalance, but it’s not—I don’t really spend much time on it. . . . And, yeah, look, I support all of it. It’s just not part of my narrative” (P13). In this sense, high-status professionals’ experience of fit with the professional archetype and with high-status clients may have enabled strategies that helped maintain their own status.

However, a few high-status professionals were aware of their misfit with low-status clients, which prompted them to move toward expanding and reforming strategies. Several White professionals described how clients who were members of ethnic/racial minority communities challenged their presence due to their race. As one architect explained,

I’m the White guy in the room. . . . It’s about knowing that when you work with a community that has been . . . made to distrust you because of the body you’re in, then you have to be aware of that and you have to be okay with being dragged through the mud as part of the initiation process of building trust.

This architect discussed how awareness of his higher-status characteristics fueled greater use of relational practices. He described “an eight-month process of working with community members and partnering them with designers to do small-scale place-making projects. . . . Small stuff, but really impactful for the people who get leadership opportunities and a voice and someone to listen to them.” He also said that in response to being one of the few White people at a community meeting, “I was staying in the back of the room . . . kind of just figuring how to show up in the space in a loving and compassionate way.” This professional saw navigating his own high-status demographic identity in relation to low-status clients as a necessary part of his work, explaining, “We have to dive so deep into the generational impacts of marginalization. . . . Unless you go that deep . . . it’s not going to be systems changing. In order to change something so deeply entrenched, you have to be so deeply aware of yourself” (P38). This view of one’s own

high-status demographic identities prompted some architects to adopt the reforming strategy, approaching low-status clients with the intention of sharing power.

Table 3.8 provides further data illustrating factors shaping the use of identity integration strategies (see Appendix F for a more detailed version of the table). Figure 3.2 presents participant counts by race and gender, categorized by the strategy used. Most of the participants using the defending and affirming strategies were White, while racial minority participants tended to use the expanding and reforming strategies. We also found that the few participants using the expanding strategy in traditional firms identified with marginalized groups. These data provide further support for the idea that lack of fit with demographic archetypes related to professional identity and high-status clients can influence professionals from low-status groups to use the expanding and reforming strategies, while fit with design expertise and elite clients influences those from high-status groups to use the defending and affirming strategies.

Table 3.8: Factors Shaping the Use of Identity Integration Strategies: Illustrative Evidence

Invalidation by Clients

Invalidation of prosocial identity by high-status clients

“[The client relationship] was very hierarchical [in] the very hardcore service industry way, where the client is always right and even though we as professionals may feel what they’re doing is wrong, we’re going to kind of continue to try and serve them as much as possible without necessarily advocating for what would be the right thing to do for the sake of the community. And so that was a little troubling to me. And even, we had a project in . . . this historically African American neighborhood . . . quite disadvantaged . . . that in theory would be a project where you could get involved in these issues. But we were doing market rate housing and weren’t really doing much of a community engagement . . . there’s only so much you can do in that position. And so that felt a little stifling.” (P69)

Invalidation of professional identity by high-status clients

“I see . . . almost like a lack of respect for the profession, and I’ve seen it just sort of getting worse and worse . . . [earlier in my career] our clients would come in and they would ask us for advice. ‘What should we do? What kind of ideas do you have?’ [Now] we have clients coming in here that tell us, ‘well that needs to be this, and we want this.’ It’s just like, wait a minute here. . . . [on a hotel project, the client] is like telling us what this thing, exactly what it’s going to look like and what’s going to be. . . . And you try to push back and say, ‘well, we think,’ and then you don’t want to argue with them because you’re afraid of losing that job. And I’ve seen that get progressively worse.” (P20)

Compensating for invalidation of professional identity by working with low-status clients

“[I am interested in] the artistic elements of [pro bono work] or just how it ties into my interest in architecture . . . it involves design, it involves construction, maybe using different materials, having to work within a limited budget, working with community members, using interesting materials, or sustainable issues, recycled materials.” (P6)

Invalidation of prosocial identity by low-status clients

“We were shocked at the amount of pushback. . . . one of the women on the client side who’s leading this who’s African American . . . She framed it very well. She says you have to understand when you’ve been living so long of being told and promised things, and not being delivered. . . . The distrust runs so deep, you can say anything you want and they’re not going to believe you. You’ve got to earn the trust and it’s going to take some time. . . . We made many modifications. The project’s a better project for it . . . we’ve garnered more and more support . . . yes, we get resistance. . . . If you want to do a project well in the community, it just takes effort.” (P83)

Experiences of Fit/Misfit: Professionals with Low-Status Demographic Identities

Experiencing discrimination in the profession (lack of fit with demographic archetype)

“I feel like I have been discriminated by being a woman, a woman in a field where the expectation is that the male does it better. . . . [I had an] interview for a job . . . at 2:00 PM. I arrived, I sat outside the office, and it was 2:15, 2:30, I’m like, this guy, I’m right here. He keeps talking on the phone. And when I finally knocked on the door and I said, ‘Sorry, I don’t want to interrupt you, I see you are engaged in conversation, but I think we had a two o’clock appointment.’ And he said to me, ‘Oh, two o’clock appointment. What’s your name?’ I said, ‘I’m P5.’ ‘Oh, I was expecting a guy because the portfolio was too good.’” (P5)

Table 3.8 (continued)

Distance from elite clients (demographic misfit)

“George Floyd, I mean, that summer changed my whole entire perspective because I was like, ‘Well, if I’m not doing anything to change this, what am I really doing?’ I mean, I think I was just generally very successful thus far in my career, but what [does] success really mean? I’ve had fellowships, I’ve had all that, but what does that really mean if I’m not doing the work that is impacting communities that I cared about? . . . It was like, well, I could keep going back to private practice. I can do the Googles. Sure. I mean, and if that’s what I want to do with my time, but I don’t want to do that. I feel I’d be able to make a much larger contribution in these spaces.” (P72)

Shared experiences of marginalization with low-status clients (demographic fit)

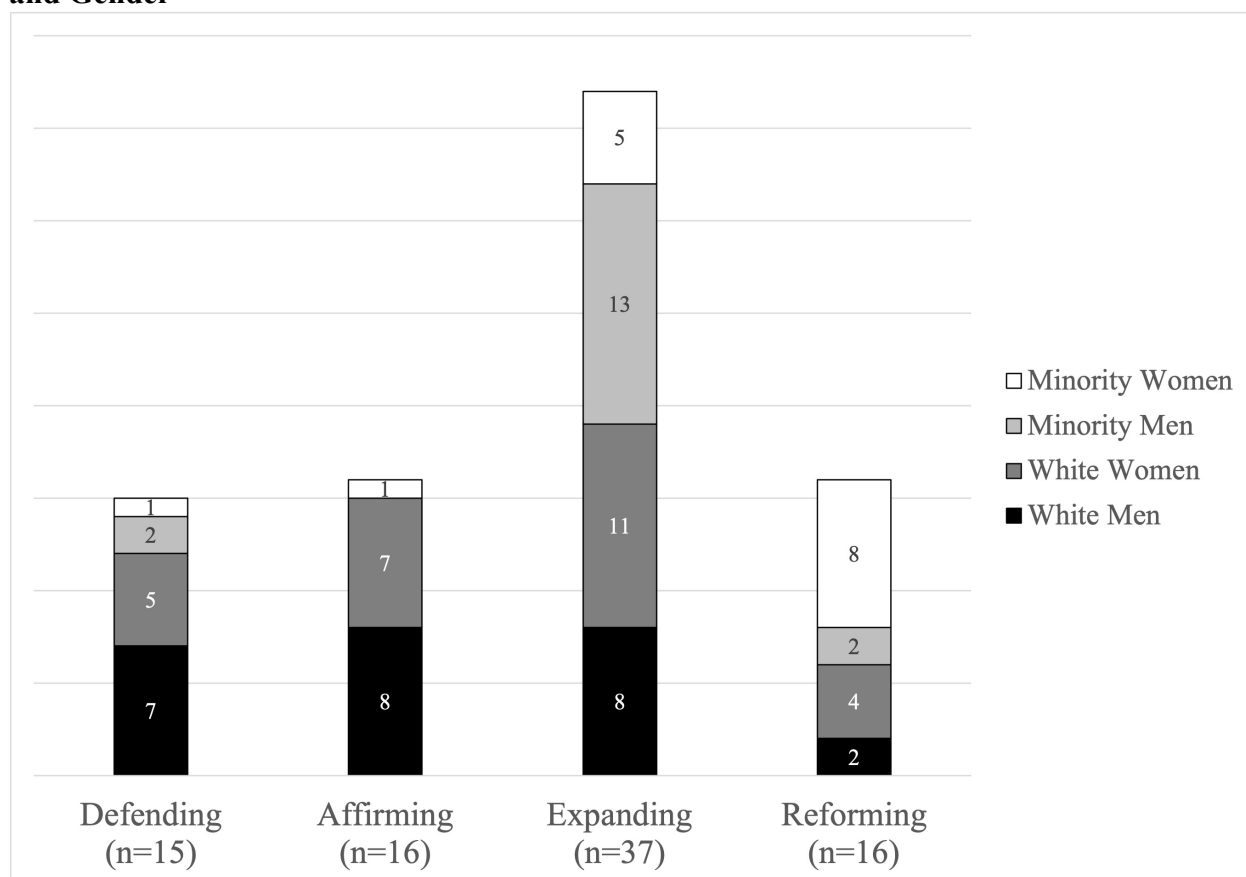
“I identify with the LGBT community, so that is helpful in some ways, but it’s nowhere near like being an African American in some of these communities. It’s hard to compare minority or underrepresented population cards, and I don’t think it’s ever helpful to really do that. . . . I think, when there’s a group of people from—whether they’re representatives of communities or the communities themselves that are traditionally from underrepresented, underinvested populations—when they understand . . . or can assume you’ve had similar experiences of being looked over or being passed over because of who you are. There’s a different air to the room, and there’s a different kind of conversation [that] can happen that, when it’s a room with—if there’s one or more older White men in the room that are trying to lead the conversation, and they’re straight, and they’re from otherwise traditional backgrounds, like, that’s a different conversation. . . . It’s an opportunity to have a conversation with someone about not necessarily shared experiences, but shared dynamics of, like, I can identify with being discriminated.” (P7)

Experiences of Fit/Misfit: Professionals with High-Status Demographic Identities

Awareness of demographic misfit with low-status clients prompts expanding expertise

“I talked about working in [an area] which is predominantly African-American. I may be a person of color, but I’m not Black, and I know nothing about what it means to be Black. Although I try really hard, I will never know. That was one of the beautiful examples of the realizations that you do when you focus on trying to understand other communities. So, working with the community . . . was an insane amount of research. For every community meeting, I had to do so much historical research, just personal reading that I had to come prepared just to be able to earn a little bit of respect from the community, just by them knowing that I had an interest and that I was trying to get to know where they were coming from. So that, coupled with their shared experiences, was extremely helpful. So yeah, there’s been barriers, but I like to focus on the positives that we can take.” (P88)

Figure 3.2: Prosocial–Professional Identity Integration Strategies by Participants’ Race and Gender*



* Racial groups included in the minority category include Black, Asian, Hispanic, multiracial, and “other.” See Table 3.1 for counts.

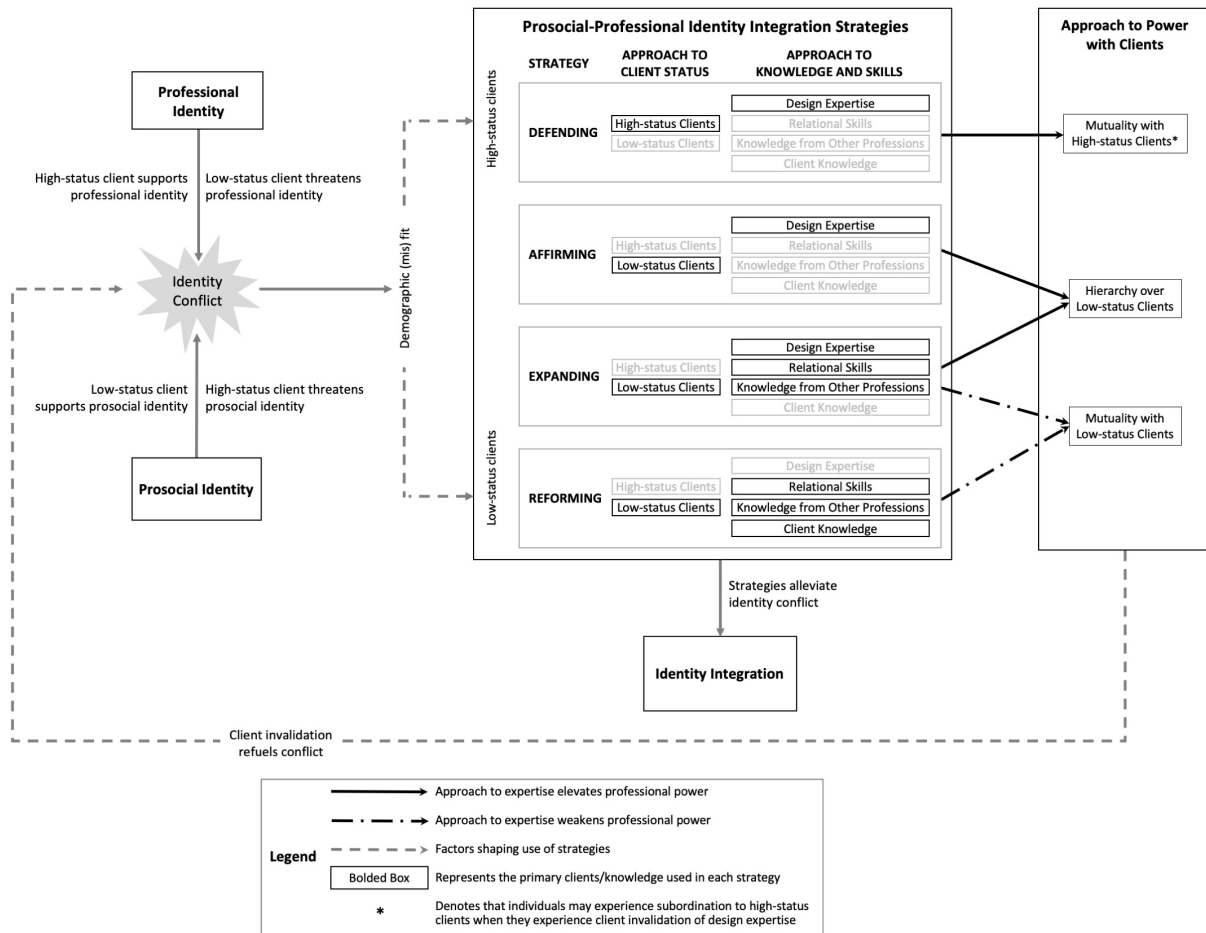
DISCUSSION

Toward a Theoretical Model of Prosocial–Professional Identity Integration

Professionals look to clients to answer fundamental identity questions: do the clients I work with define who I am as a person who aspires to benefit others and as a professional? Our model, depicted in Figure 3.3, presents pathways through which people can fulfill their desire to integrate prosocial and professional aspects of the self. Professionals’ identity integration strategies consist of linking their clients and the knowledge and skills they use with prosocial and professional meanings. These strategies, in turn, shape how professionals relate to their clients.

Specifically, we uncover how strategies shape professionals' symmetrical or asymmetrical approach to power in relation to their clients.

Figure 3.3: A Model of Prosocial–Professional Identity Integration



Our model centers on the role of the client in identity construction. People have multiple identities, and clients may therefore activate not only people's professional identities but also other facets of who they are, requiring professionals to negotiate their multiple identities in relation to clients. We theorize that for professionals for whom prosocial identity is important, clients are an expression and reflection not just of their professional identity as an expert but also of their personal prosocial identity as a person who benefits others.

We situate this conflict within the context of professional norms about the types of clients that are valuable to work with and may thus best support professional identity. Professional norms regarding clients vary across and within professions, such that the types of clients that validate and threaten different identities are likely context specific. We suggest that in elite professional contexts that value well-resourced clients (such as architecture), the status of one's clients can be a source of prosocial–professional identity conflict. As depicted on the left side of Figure 3.3, working with high-status clients can validate one's professional identity by enabling the development of the specialized expertise that traditionally undergirds it. Yet, working with high-status clients can threaten prosocial identity because doing so may be associated with benefiting only a narrow group of elites and with benefiting oneself through prestige and pay rather than benefiting others. Conversely, working with low-status clients can threaten professional identity because they are not associated with enabling expertise, though they can validate prosocial identity.

Our model next depicts how professionals respond to this conflict by using an array of prosocial–professional identity integration strategies. We identify four such strategies, which we conceptualize as defending, affirming, expanding, and reforming professional identity through the integration of prosocial identity. As depicted in the middle box of Figure 3.3, each strategy we identified consists of approaches to the type of client with whom the professional works and to the types of knowledge and skills they view as central to their work with those clients. When the client is high-status, the threat to prosocial identity is salient, so professionals' identity work revolves primarily around ascribing prosocial meaning to the client. When the client is low-status, the threat to professional identity is salient, so identity work revolves primarily around crafting understanding of the knowledge and skills that support both prosocial and professional

identity. Specifically, professionals using the defending strategy respond to identity conflict by framing the high-status clients they work with, who already support professional identity, as prosocial. Those using the affirming, expanding, and reforming strategies respond to identity conflict by working with at least some low-status clients, and they respond in different ways to the threat that working with low-status clients may sully their professional identity claims to specialized expertise. Some protect their professional identity by reasserting their specialized expertise as the sole or primary source of knowledge and skills central to their professional work, while others expand their professional identity to encompass a broader range of knowledge and skills. As depicted in the box below the strategies, each strategy represents a different path to the same outcome: experiencing the integration of one's prosocial and professional identities.

We depict the relational consequences of prosocial–professional identity integration strategies in the right-hand box of Figure 3.3. Although all strategies help professionals achieve integration, they have different implications for professionals' approach to power with their clients. We theorize that the set of knowledge and skills professionals view as central to their work shapes how they perceive power dynamics with their clients. When using strategies relying on expertise (defending, affirming, and expanding), professionals approached their clients as though they possessed a resource on which clients depended. However, using strategies (expanding and reforming) that additionally relied on other types of knowledge and skills, including relational skills and knowledge from other professions, shifted the power dynamic such that professionals approached clients in more mutual ways. Moreover, we theorize that when professionals recognize low-status clients as having knowledge necessary to professionals' work (reforming), power may be distributed beyond the professional, further enabling a mutual approach.

Last, we theorize two relational factors that shape which strategies professionals use (depicted with gray dotted lines in Figure 3.3). First, client invalidation—which occurs when professionals perceive that clients do not support either their prosocial or professional identities—may refuel conflict and prompt professionals to shift strategies. Second, experiences of demographic misfit or fit with professional archetypes and clients influence professionals’ propensity to work with high- or low-status clients and the types of knowledge and skills they view as central to their work. Overall, our model shows how prosocially oriented professionals’ search for identity integration is intertwined with status and power dynamics.

Contributions to Scholarship on Professional Identity

Our study makes several contributions to the rich body of research on professional identity. First, we show that clients shape the joint construction of both professional and personal identity. Prior research shows that clients and customers are key relational partners in professional identity construction (Vough et al., 2013; Cardador and Pratt, 2018; DiBenigno, 2022). We advance this emerging stream of work by showing that clients shape not only professional but also personal identities, and by integrating this stream with research on the challenge of negotiating multiple valued identities (Meyerson and Scully, 1995; Creed, DeJordy, and Lok, 2010; Ramarajan and Reid, 2013; Caza, Moss, and Vough, 2018; Chreim et al., 2020). Prior research also shows that relational counterparts in the personal domain (such as spouses) shape professional identity (Reid, 2018; Petriglieri and Obodaru, 2019). Conversely, we show how counterparts in the professional domain (such as clients) can shape personal identity.

Second, we highlight an underexplored dimension of personal identity in this literature—prosocial identity (Grant, 2007; Grant and Berg, 2012)—and demonstrate that professionals’ clients express and reflect (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934) not only their identities as professionals

but also their identities as good people who benefit others. Our central contribution here is to identify prosocial identity as an understudied factor in professional identity construction, suggesting a novel and important source of the variation we see in how professionals live out their work and relate to their clients. By focusing on prosocial identity, we also respond to professional identity scholars' calls for research on how conceptions of the public good, morality, virtue, and "the importance of seeing value in one's work beyond its implications for self-interest" can spark professional identity work (Lepisto, Crosina, and Pratt, 2015: 27). Abstracting from our focus on prosocial identity as a key personal identity, we show how clients may be a critical source of identity conflicts at work when they validate some important identities but not others. Our findings show that the identity work people engage in to resolve such conflicts can involve reframing or changing the types of clients they work with to support their multiple identities.

Third, we highlight the key role of client status in professional identity construction. Prior research has shown that clients can affirm or threaten professional identity (DiBenigno, 2022) but has not explored whether and how such threats depend on clients' status. Our focus on status arose from our data. We integrate this finding with insights from prior scholarship suggesting that in some contexts, working with high-status, well-resourced clients may be considered valuable because it supports professional status and reputation (e.g., Leicht and Fennell, 2001: 93–94), to argue that in some elite, commercialized contexts, high-status clients may more easily enable and low-status clients more easily threaten one's professional identity. A perspective that considered only people's desires to affirm their professional identity might suggest that they would simply align with professional norms, embracing high-status clients and avoiding lower-status ones. Our multiple identities perspective complicates this picture. We show how people

may diverge from professional norms and alter the types of clients they work with and the meanings they associate with those clients because high-status clients who affirm professional identity can threaten prosocial identity, and low-status clients who threaten professional identity can affirm prosocial identity.

We further show how professionals respond to each of these identity threats by defending themselves from or engaging with them (Petriglieri, 2011). For example, we see how some professionals, to defend against the threat that high-status clients pose to their prosocial identity, focus on clients' missions, while others engage with this threat by expanding the set of clients they work with. We see how professionals defend against the threat to their expertise by affirming its value for low-status clients and/or engage with this threat by expanding their approach to professional knowledge and skills. Thus, we document how clients can spark an ongoing tug-of-war in professionals' search for identity integration.

Fourth, our work deepens our understanding of how professionals' expertise in their domain—as well as a broader set of knowledge and skills they view as central to their work—can be a focus of professional identity construction. Recent research at the collective level suggests that though it is difficult for professionals to let go of defining themselves based on valued knowledge and skills, they can adapt their identities such that new types of knowledge and skills become a basis for professional identity (Nelson and Irwin, 2014; Lifshitz-Assaf, 2018). Our findings show how clients can trigger these adaptations at the individual level: seeing oneself as a prosocial professional may require modifying one's understanding of one's own professional knowledge and skills in order to effectively work with different types of clients and achieve prosocial aims. Moreover, our findings show how professionals' identity work enables them to adapt the same types of knowledge and skills to different types of clients (e.g., design

expertise for both high- and low-status clients) and to adapt different types of knowledge and skills to clients of similar status. We further show that this identity work sometimes involves changing *whose* knowledge and skills (their own and/or their clients') professionals consider necessary for their work. Thus, we demonstrate the challenge of constructing professional identity when one's expertise is threatened (Kang and Kim, 2021), but we also showcase professionals' flexibility in doing so. Crucially, we show that professionals' prosocial aims and identities, as well as their demographic identities, shape this flexibility.

Last, part of our research question asked in broad terms how prosocial–professional identity strategies might shape professionals' relations with clients. Emergent research on relational approaches to and outcomes of professional identity construction shows that these strategies shape how educators approach socializing students (Ramarajan and Reid, 2020), how nurses interact with clients (DiBenigno, 2022), and how domestic partners shape each other's professional identities (Petriglieri and Obodaru, 2019). We advance this stream of work by uncovering how professionals' identity integration can shape their approach to power in relation to their clients. Building on a common definition of power as control over access to valued resources (Emerson, 1962; Magee and Galinsky, 2008), we conceptualize our findings as revealing professionals' approaches to and perceptions of their own and their clients' control over valued resources in the professional–client relationship. Our data suggest that professionals' knowledge and skills, on the one hand, and clients' financial resources and knowledge, on the other, are key resources that can shape power relations and that identity work can shape the configuration of these resources.

Because professional identity research has not focused on power in relation to clients, we draw on insights from research on power dynamics in professional–client relationships to ground

our findings. One key insight centers on the power dynamic when professionals are subordinate or, at most, mutual to the client. This work highlights that professionals' control over their expertise and their dependence on clients' resources can contribute to power asymmetries and that elite clients can typically exert more power over professionals than low-status clients can (Freidson, 1986: 173–174, 218; Gunz and Gunz, 2008). But defending expertise is only one strategy for maintaining power in relation to clients; in some cases, professionals may also engage in non-expert tasks, which may be viewed as “scut work,” to gain authority (Huisin, 2015: 263).

We build on these insights to elucidate how and why professionals' identity work related to their expertise and to client status is critical to shaping their approach to power. As we might expect from an identity perspective, many professionals responded to the threat to expertise by defending (Petriglieri, 2011), thereby embracing expertise as the foundation for professional identity. Thus, our study illuminates how defending against identity threat can be at the root of maintaining power with elite clients and of enhancing power over low-status clients. However, from an identity perspective, we also observed professionals engaging (Petriglieri, 2011) with the threat to expertise: some professionals doubted the value of their expertise and shifted their approach, viewing their expertise as one resource among a larger set of knowledge and skills needed for their professional work. This shift altered their approach to power with low-status clients. The relational skills and recognition of clients' knowledge that these professionals embraced are consistent with relational practices such as “fluid expertise,” or “the willingness to show and acknowledge interdependence or need for input” (Fletcher, 2004: 653). Thus, our study also shows how engaging with identity threat may be at the root of a more mutual “power-with” (Follett, 1973: 72) approach to low-status clients.

Contributions to Scholarship on Prosocial Identity

Our study advances research on prosocial identity by showing how such identity work is intertwined with client status and power. Prior research on prosocial work has shown how contact with clients enables people to feel that they are making a prosocial contribution by helping others whom they view as beneficiaries (Grant, 2007, 2008). Scholars have also noted that self- and other-oriented motivations for prosocial behavior can co-occur (Grant and Berg, 2012; Simpson and Willer, 2015). Similarly, research highlights that prosocial and meaningful work can entail costs and sacrifices (e.g., Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017; Oelberger, 2019) but can also yield self-benefits (Grant and Mayer, 2009; Burbano, Mamer, and Snyder, 2018; Flynn and Yu, 2021). Our study adds to this picture by showing that the status of one's clients can call into question whom one is benefiting through one's work (Blau and Scott, 1962; Oelberger, 2018), thereby threatening one's prosocial identity.

We illuminate an important potential self-benefit arising from the pursuit of prosocial-professional integration: intentionally or unintentionally, some professionals may maintain or gain status and power through prosocial identity work. Those using the defending strategy minimize the role of client status and focus on prosocial mission, thereby gaining the benefits of working with elite clients and of claiming a prosocial identity while avoiding the potential professional costs of working with low-status clients (such as loss of challenging work, reputation, and fees). Those using the affirming and sometimes the expanding strategies, who work with low-status clients to enact their prosocial identity, can gain a sense of greater professional autonomy and power in client relationships. Even those using the reforming strategy, who, in search of their own identity fulfillment, state that they aim to approach low-status clients equitably and collaboratively, could be critiqued for encroaching into spaces in

which they would not traditionally be considered experts. These findings are resonant with critiques of people and organizations, especially elites, who purport to change the world but whose ostensibly prosocial activities often maintain the status quo and their elite positions (Marquis, Toffel, and Zhou, 2016; Oelberger, 2018; Giridharadas, 2019; Kutlaca and Radke, 2023).

Our findings also contribute to research on the role of status and demographic identities in prosocial work. First, we show how demographic identities can complicate the integration of one's prosocial and professional identities. Research on status in the professional identity literature has tended to focus on the identity work involved in managing the lower-status demographic identities of the professional (e.g., Creed, DeJordy, and Lok, 2010) or managing the lower status of the work itself (e.g., Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). We bring in client status and show its connection to the status of professionals' own demographic identities. Our findings show how professionals' demographic fit with a professional archetype and with their clients can reinforce, on the one hand, associations between high-status demographic categories (e.g., male, White) and professional expertise and success and, on the other hand, associations between low-status demographic categories (e.g., female, lower-class) and prosocial work (Joshi, 2014; Cech, 2015; Dimitriadis et al., 2017; Bode, Rogan, and Singh, 2021; Fang and Tilcsik, 2022).

We further show how demographic considerations matter differently for professionals with low-status and high-status identities. For professionals with low-status identities, the experience of demographic similarity with low-status clients can shape prosocial identity work by making professionals more likely to work with low-status clients, adopt a broader understanding of professional knowledge and skills, and even aim to share power with clients. The role of demographic fit helps to explain our somewhat counterintuitive finding that some

professionals proactively seek to reduce their own power relative to clients, building on research showing that a sense of solidarity with others can induce people, even when they occupy positions of structural power, to prioritize others' interests (Tost and Johnson, 2019).

Our findings also show that professionals from high-status groups may struggle with identity conflict when they pursue prosocial identity, yet compared to low-status professionals, they may have more potential to manage the trade-offs of prosocial–professional integration in ways that may maintain social and professional hierarchies. Furthermore, unlike members of low-status groups, members of high-status groups rarely viewed their high-status identities as relevant to their work, even when they were working with low-status clients. While this is consistent with research on avoiding one's high-status identities, for instance, in cross-class interactions (Gray and Kish-Gephardt, 2013), we also observed that some professionals were aware of the privilege associated with their identities. Future studies could focus on such within-group differences, as recent research suggests that identity work in relation to privilege plays a role in high-status group members' aims to address inequalities (Scully et al., 2018). In sum, our work contributes to deeper understanding of the role of power in professional and prosocial identity construction, by showing how power dynamics in the broader social context—professionals' and clients' different levels of power and status based on their demographic characteristics—shape identity work and professionals' interpersonal approaches to power in relation to their clients.

Last, our findings problematize the breadth and ambiguity of the concept of prosociality in prior research (Penner et al., 2005; Bolino and Grant, 2016). Our research underscores how the vagueness of what it means to contribute to society makes it possible to claim a very broad range of behaviors (e.g., serving high- and low-status clients) under a prosocial mantle, including

behaviors that may primarily benefit oneself and/or reinforce existing power hierarchies. Our findings highlight the importance of analyzing how people deploy and defend claims to prosociality and the potential self-benefits they may accrue from doing so, indicating the need for scholars to consider the extent to which work and activities that maintain professionals' own status and power should be considered prosocial and the potential value of narrower definitions of prosociality. Pressure to make a positive social contribution is rising for both individuals and corporations, and claiming prosociality can garner valuable benefits and rewards (Burbano, 2016; Nardi, 2022). In this context, it is increasingly important to attend to how people and organizations can rhetorically claim prosociality as a strategic resource that may be decoupled from accountability for specific social outcomes. Moreover, future research should focus on the social and professional contexts in which prosocial claims are made. In the architecture context, working with low-status clients affirmed prosocial identity, while working with high-status clients threatened it. Our findings open up new questions about whether and how high-status professionals may be using low-status clients to gain prosocial credibility and how broader social and professional contexts may reinforce beliefs about the types of clients seen as affirming prosociality.

Limitations and Future Work

Our study draws on professionals' narratives about their identities from interview data, which have important limitations: they are retrospective, may reflect participants' biases and impression management concerns, and may not accurately represent people's motives and behavior (Charmaz, 2014; Lamont and Swidler, 2014). In our study, for example, participants who explained working with low-status clients as an agentic choice shaped by their prosocial motives may have been compensating for lack of demand for their work from high-status clients,

or they may have downplayed self-benefiting motives such as gaining reputation and skills. However, our data were well suited to our research questions on identity. Interview data are unique in their ability to provide access to individuals' internal meaning-making and how they negotiate internal conflicts (Weiss, 1994; Lamont and Swidler, 2014). Our theorizing is based on the patterned ways in which professionals make identity claims in relation to the clients they work with and the work they do. To mitigate some of the challenges of working with interview data, we gained familiarity with the context, built trust, and elicited concrete, vivid stories (Charmaz, 2014; Small and Calarco, 2022). Our interviews captured details that could be seen as negative or risky, such as poor evaluations from clients and managers and issues in participants' personal lives, suggesting that we were able to build trust with our participants. Further, in our analysis, we did not take interviewees' accounts at face value but, rather, systematically analyzed our data for contradictions and critical interpretations (Pugh, 2013). This approach enabled us to identify obscured and self-presentational tensions in professionals' pursuit of prosociality, such as the potential for self-benefits (e.g., maintaining or gaining power).

Our data do not include clients' perspectives or observational data on professional–client interactions. Accordingly, we can analyze people's claims to being prosocial and to making a positive contribution to society, but we cannot assess the accuracy of professionals' accounts of how they approached clients, nor can we assess the impact or effectiveness of their efforts to engage in work that contributes to society. We limit our analysis to professionals' accounts of their identities and of their approach and intentions toward their clients when enacting those identities. Future research incorporating clients' perspectives and observational data could help connect identity accounts to how professionals treat clients in practice and to how clients perceive these interactions. Interrogating the power dynamics of prosociality from clients'

perspectives, as well as investigating when and how professionals' identity fulfillment leads to positive and negative consequences for clients, is a critical task for future research.

Future studies could also take a longitudinal approach. Our study is largely based on interviews at a single point in time. This approach enabled us to cover a wider array of experiences but not the real-time evolution of participants' approaches. We analyzed the data for how people described moves and shifts over time (Polkinghorne, 1988), but longitudinal data could alter the sequence we theorize and could extend our approach by exploring how the pursuit of prosocial–professional identity integration could trigger career shifts over time.

Our study has important boundary conditions. First, we purposefully sampled professionally trained architects interested in contributing to society through their work. This approach enabled us to investigate our research question, which concerns individuals who have both a prosocial and professional identity. We do not assume, however, that all professionals have a prosocial identity; though research suggests that prosocial identity matters for many people (Grant, 2007; Grant, Dutton, and Rosso, 2008), it may well be unimportant or absent for many others.

Second, architecture is an elite professional context; the profession is known to associate high-end design with clients who have socioeconomic resources (Cuff, 1991; Ahuja, Nikolova, and Clegg, 2017). Studying prosociality in elite contexts is important (Khan, 2012) because professionals in these contexts face significant pressure to be more socially oriented and yet may be doing so in ways that reproduce status and power hierarchies. Future research should investigate the extent to which the prosocial–professional identity tensions we studied may be salient in other contexts. We suspect that our findings may be relevant to other contexts in which working with elite, commercial clients is seen as enabling professional accomplishment and

expertise (e.g., corporate law, finance, consulting, media and advertising). Our findings may also be relevant in organizations facing increasing employee social activism (Briscoe and Gupta, 2016; Heucher et al., 2024). For instance, recent reports that some Google engineers expressed concern about working on cutting-edge AI projects for defense contractors suggest that there may be different bases for the types of clients that professionals see as supporting prosocial versus professional identity in different settings. Future research should interrogate this possibility as well as how pressures and prosocial–professional identity tensions may differ in other organizational and professional contexts. Whereas our research investigates a setting in which professionals’ clients are external to the organization, future research could also investigate settings in which professionals and clients work within the same organizations (e.g., Huising, 2015); for instance, internal company auditors who give professional advice to managers may experience different tensions and power dynamics than those revealed in this study. In addition, though we found that all the participants in our study were able to achieve a sense of identity integration (though integration was unstable and conflict could recur), identity conflict may remain unresolved in some contexts, e.g., if one cannot work with different types of clients due to monetary constraints or lack of opportunity. Future research should investigate conditions under which identity conflict may be unresolvable and how individuals respond to such situations.

Last, our findings are at the individual level but may have implications for collective-level change, suggesting directions for future research. As the rise of social issues heightens many people’s desires to bring their personal prosocial identity into the workplace and as many professions’ memberships become more diverse, future research should examine how individual-level prosocial–professional identity work may aggregate to shape change at the collective level.

Identity work can enable individuals to fulfill their personal prosocial aims within their work contexts, but it may also shape employees' individual and collective efforts to influence their workplaces to address important social issues (Meyerson and Scully, 1995; Briscoe and Gupta, 2016; Heucher et al., 2024), with potential implications for whether low-status clients have access to professional services. In addition, future research should probe how identity work that alters some professional members' understanding of their knowledge and skills may also shape understandings of expertise and professional identity at the collective level (Nelson and Irwin, 2014). Individual identity work may fuel contestation within a profession over which knowledge and skills count as expertise, who can hold it, and who benefits from it: professionals themselves, specific types of clients, or the broader society. Future studies should investigate how these dialogues reshape a profession and its relationship to society.

Practical Implications

Many people, especially young professionals, are struggling with what it means to contribute to society through their work. At the same time, organizations and professions are being challenged to pursue social goals. Our study has implications for individuals, organizations, and professions grappling with these challenges.

Our findings show that many types of clients—ranging from elite, well-resourced corporations to low-status, under-resourced communities—can fulfill professionals' prosocial and professional identities. For the individual, this flexibility is beneficial; being prosocial can mean different things to different people, and individuals may find various ways to fulfill their prosocial identities without feeling like they must trade off against important aspects of their professional identities. However, some professional and organizational contexts, especially elite, commercial ones, may heighten the trade-off between clients who validate one's prosocial

identity and those who validate one's professional identity. In such contexts, professionals who wish to work with low-status clients must be prepared to diverge from the status quo.

Furthermore, our study encourages professionals to consider the self-benefits that may arise, intentionally or unintentionally, from pursuing prosocial work and claiming a prosocial identity at work. Our findings suggest that mitigating the hierarchical power dynamics that may arise when working with low-status clients may require professionals to expand and reform how they view themselves as experts.

At the collective level, our findings have implications for how to expand a commercialized, elite profession's clientele to include low-status clients. Organizations should take care that initiatives intended to fulfill employees' prosocial identities through work with low-status clients substantively benefit those clients. Doing so may require a different understanding of which knowledge and skills are central to professional work, suggesting that professional organizations (e.g., schools, firms, and industry associations) may wish to consider altering how they set and reinforce professional norms and values. In the case of commercialized professions such as architecture, such a shift could involve preparing professionals to work with a more diverse clientele by altering socialization practices that privilege working with elite clients and by broadening the body of knowledge and skills required of new entrants.

Last, our findings have implications for how organizations attend to the demographic identities of both professionals and clients. Our findings are consistent with research showing that under certain conditions, women and racial/ethnic minority clients are better served by professionals who share their demographic characteristics (Fairlie, Hoffman, and Oreopoulos, 2014; Greenwood, Carnahan, and Huang, 2018; Greenwood et al., 2020). Yet, the risk of matching professionals and clients who share low-status identities is that in elite professions,

professionals from low-status demographic groups may face disproportionate demands to work with low-status clients and may therefore still find themselves at the margins of the profession if such work is devalued relative to work with elite clients. Organizations should attend to the risk that these dynamics may impede efforts to pursue diversity and equity.

As societal issues become increasingly salient, heightening discourses of equality, access, and justice for all, our study shows that professionals can experience a deep struggle to do work with clients that validates both their prosocial and professional identities. This struggle is fraught with choices about status and power. While some find identity integration in ways that maintain or enhance their professional status and power, others find it through redefining whom they serve and how they serve them.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation is motivated by a desire to better understand the role of organizations in working towards a better society—one that is more just and more sustainable than the one we inhabit today. The three papers presented focus on intersections between workers and organizations in the pursuit of the social good. Through the case of TableTech, in Chapter 1, I investigated what happens when an organization pursues the social goal of improving workers’ lives via the adoption of a shorter workweek. I show that adopting a “win-win” approach to doing so is fraught with challenges that can constrain an organization’s ability to sustain social initiatives. In Chapter 2, I explored how workers differently experienced a shorter workweek and flexible work. My findings suggest that a shorter workweek that enables workers to access free time—as distinct from non-work time—may generate greater benefits for workers themselves and perhaps also for society. In Chapter 3, drawing on evidence from the architecture profession, I showed how individuals can craft a range of different approaches to the pursuit of social goals, with varied implications for power relations between professionals and their clients.

An important theme that arose both explicitly and implicitly across these three chapters is power—the power of organizations to shape the lives of workers, the power or lack of power that workers have to shape organizational decisions, and the power that professionals have in shaping how they carry out their work and its impact on others. Power, classically defined by Emerson as control over access to valued resources (Emerson, 1962; Magee and Galinsky, 2008; Battilana and Casciaro, 2021), is a foundational concept in organization studies. Yet recent events, especially the Covid-19 pandemic, have drawn increased attention to the reality that most workers lack the power to meaningfully influence decision-making in their workplaces (Ferrerias, Battilana, and Méda, 2022). As philosophers have described, most workplaces today are akin to

authoritarian dictatorships, such that organizations wield disproportionate power over workers' lives, controlling the content of their work, workers' time, and their access to consequential resources such as pay and health care (Anderson, 2017; Ferreras, 2017). In this context, workers also often lack a substantial say over the strategic goals—including social ones—that organizations do or do not adopt.

Workers' lack of power to meaningfully shape critical decisions and aspects of organizational life is salient in Chapter 1, which shows how workers' clear preference for maintaining the 4DWW, informed by their belief that the 4DWW was successful, was overridden by a minority of executive decision-makers. One way to view this outcome is to see TableTech as a case in which workers were granted the right to voice their opinions—for example, by responding to surveys about their experience with the 4DWW, and in conversations with their managers—but did not have a structural right to participate in the decision-making process that decided the future of the initiative, in which only five executives participated. This outcome highlights the need for organizations and researchers to pay more attention to the importance of structurally empowering workers to participate in organizational decision-making, which is the topic of some of my published and ongoing work with collaborators (Yen, Battilana, and Aguirre, 2022; Battilana, Yen, et al., 2022; Battilana, Yen, and Krol, 2024).

Power is also at play, perhaps more implicitly, in Chapter 2, which situates time as a valued resource over which workers and organizations struggle for control. Scholars of work and time have noted that though worktime was a major focus area for unions in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, the struggle over time largely faded from view as individuals and policymakers came to view time use as a matter of individual choice (Schor, 1993; Rose, 2016; McCallum, 2020). In this view, individual workers can choose how to allocate the 24 hours they have in each day

between work time and non-work time based on their personal needs and preferences. Yet these choices are necessarily informed and constrained by the social and political systems in which workers are embedded—systems that push workers to work more and more in the pursuit of material needs, employment security, and even personal meaning and satisfaction, while leaving scarce free time for personal and social pursuits (Rose, 2016; McCallum, 2020; Cech, 2021; Herzog, 2024). Though the trajectory of the reemerging movement advocating for reduced worktime—exemplified by unions’ desire for a shorter week, and 32-hour workweek legislation introduced this year (V. Kim, 2024)—remains unclear, it is my hope that this research on TableTech will contribute to a growing body of work investigating the processes through which organizations shape workers’ access to and control over time, and with what consequences for workers, organizations, and society (e.g., Schor et al., 2022, 2023; Kelly and Moen, 2020).

Last, Chapter 3 explicitly theorizes the implications of individuals’ strategies for prosocial–professional identity integration for power relations between professionals and clients. This work highlights the importance of attending to the power dynamics that exist between the many people and entities implicated pursuing the social good. Individual professionals are constrained by the power systems of their professions, but also wield great power via their control over their expertise. Individuals have the power to pursue their own strategies for engaging in socially oriented work, yet these choices are shaped by the power dynamics associated with their own personal and demographic identities. The intended recipients of prosocial action have varying degrees of power in society, depending on their class status and other demographic features. All these complexities point to the need for further research to consider how the pursuit of social aims can shape power in society, for better or for worse.

Though sustained progress is elusive, organizations and the people who inhabit them have the power to effect change. In documenting and analyzing the complexity of pursuing social goals, this research aims to contribute to our understanding of how we can rise to the challenge of transforming work and organizations for the better.

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Appendix A: TableTech Interview Protocols

Interview Guide, Wave 1 (before 4DWW implementation)

Introduction

- Where are you geographically located?
- What is your role at TableTech?
- How long have you been at TableTech? Where did you work before? [career trajectory]

Expectations for the 4-Day Work Week

- What was your initial reaction when you heard that TableTech is going to trial a 4-day work week?
- Why do you think the company is doing this pilot?
- What do you think will be the biggest benefits / what are you most looking forward to?
- What do you think will be the biggest challenges / what are you most worried about?
- How is your team deciding how to implement the 4-day work week?
 - Have you been involved in the decision-making process?
 - Is this collaborative or top-down?
- Have you run into any conflicts or challenges in the planning process so far? [Probe for specific stories]
- What do you think will need to change about the way you work to make a 4-day work week successful at TableTech?

Time Use

- What does a typical workday look like for you? (What kind of tasks and activities?)
- We want to understand when and how much you work under a standard 5-day work week. This might feel like a strange exercise, but we'd like you to walk us through your day yesterday in detail. So, thinking about yesterday, can you walk us through your day from start to finish, starting with when you woke up? It might be helpful to pull up your calendar for this.
 - Would you say that this is a typical work day for you?
 - [probe to understand when they typically start/stop work]
- Do you typically work in the evenings? How often? What is this for?
- What does a typical weekend look like for you?
 - Do you work on the weekend? How much?
 - Did you work last weekend?
- Approximately how many hours would you say you work on a typical day? In a typical week?
- Generally speaking, how do you feel about how much you work?
- How would you describe the culture at TableTech in terms of time worked?
- To what extent do you feel like you have control over when and how much you work?
- When you need more time, are you able to ask for flexibility or an extension?
- Where does pressure come from: is it internal or external?
- Are you familiar with TableTech's unlimited PTO policy? How do you feel about this? How do you use PTO?

Well-being and work/life balance

- Overall, how satisfied are you with your work/life balance?
- Do you have a partner? Tell us a little bit about them.
 - Do you live together?
 - Do they have a job/jobs, full time/part time?

- Do you have kids?
 - How many, what ages
 - Do you have other dependents/people you consider yourself a caregiver for?
- How would you say you and your partner share tasks and responsibilities between the two of you? (division of domestic labor)
- What are the things you do to “fill your own cup” or take time for yourself? Do you find adequate time for these in a typical week? What would you like to do more of?
- What would you like to improve about your personal well-being, your life outside of work, or your work/life balance?
- How do you feel about unlimited PTO? Compared to 4DWW?
 - How have you used PTO in the past?
- What kind of company culture would you say the leaders at TableTech have created around time off, availability?

Work patterns and relationships

- What is it like to be working at an all remote company?
 - How has this changed your work (if there previously)?
 - What are biggest benefits?
 - What are biggest challenges?
- For engineers: tell us about mobbing—what is it like?
 - Do you like it?
 - What are biggest pros?
 - What are biggest cons?
 - How do you think mobbing will work with 4DWW?
- For those outside of US: what is it like to work for a US based company living in X location?

Mission and purpose

- Would you say that TableTech has a purpose or mission as a company? What is it/how would you describe it?
- How (if at all) do you feel you are able to contribute to the mission in your own role?
- Do you see the 4-day work week as being related in any way to TableTech’s purpose/mission? [probe: how does it make you feel as an employee?]
- Do you think the 4-day work week will affect TableTech’s ability to deliver on its purpose/mission? [probe for examples]

Wrap-up

- What are you hoping to get out of the 4DWW? Biggest hope? Biggest fear?
- Is there anything else you want us to know or something we should have asked you, but didn’t?

Interview Guide, Wave 2 (during 4DWW trial)

4DWW implementation

- Tell us about how your team approached the 4DWW
 - What was the planning process like?
 - When did your team start the 4DWW?
 - Were there any conflicts/challenges in implementing/transitioning?

Time Use

- Are you personally trying to work a 4-day week or a reduced week?

- Why or why not?
 - When did you personally start implementing the 4DWW (or try to)?
- Has the 4-day work week changed what a typical workday looks like for you?
 - How, if at all, has how you use your time at work changed?
 - Are you working longer hours on Monday-Thursday?
- Are you working less now? Do you typically work on a fifth day?
 - If yes, what was it for? How did you feel about working a fifth day? [probe for specific stories/examples]
 - If you foresee that your work is going to spill into a fifth day, do you talk about it with your manager or teammates? What did this look like? [probe for specific stories or examples]
- How do you decide whether to work on Friday/the 5th day? [probe for examples] [for engineers, probe for how they make this decision in their mob, stories, examples, conflict/disagreement]
- We want to understand when and how much you work under a 4-day work week. Thinking about yesterday, can you walk us through what the contours of what your day looked like? [suggest pull up your calendar/share screen]
 - Is this a typical day for you since the 4DWW trial started?
 - Since the 4DWW started, have you been working on the evenings/ weekend? How often/much?
- Has the work culture at TableTech changed since the start of the trial?
 - Do you feel less pressure or more pressure to be “on” or available?
 - Do you feel you have more or less flexibility/control?

Team Questions, Work Patterns, & Relationships

- Have the dynamics on your team changed at all since implementing the 4DWW?
- From your perspective, how is 4DWW affecting...
 - Team productivity
 - Your relationships with coworkers? / Team coordination/collaboration?
 - How meetings are scheduled or run at TableTech?
 - The frequency or methods of communication you use?
 - Your ability to be creative at work?
 - Your ability to focus or enter a flow state at work?
 - Your relationships with clients?
- Have you run into any conflicts or challenges so far? For example, have there been times when you had to choose between sticking to a 4-day work week and meeting a deadline? [Probe for specific stories]
- What adjustments do you think you and your team could make to improve efficiency and well-being moving forward?
- What’s your sense of how 4DWW is going on other teams? Has 4DWW affected your ability to collaborate across teams / internally within TableTech?
- How have you experienced leadership from your manager/team leader around the transition to a 4DWW?

Well-being / life outside of work

- If you've been working 4 days, what are you doing on your "extra" day off? [probe for specific examples]
- How, if at all, has how you use your time outside of work changed?
- Has your personal well-being changed since the start of the 4-day work week?
- Has anything changed in your personal life/life outside of work?
- Has anything changed for your family, partner, friends, important people in your life?
- How are you feeling about your work/life balance since you started the 4DWW? Would you say you are able to live a more balanced life working a 4-day week?

Reflections on 4DWW

- How is the pilot going for you personally so far?
 - What have been the biggest benefits, if any, of the 4-day work week for you?
 - What have been the biggest downsides or biggest challenges of the 4-day work week for you?
 - How has your approach changed over time / what are you experimenting with?
 - Do you think the 4-day work week has affected your productivity? How?
 - Would you say that anything else has changed for you because of the 4-day work week?
- Stepping back from the 4DWW, how do you think about the role of work in your life more broadly? How does work/your job relate to your personal identity?
- [if appropriate] how did you learn to put boundaries around your work / how did you learn to work less / put work down more often? What sparked/inspired this change for you? How did you change your mindset and habits?

Wrap-up

- Taking everything together so far, would you say you are in favor of continuing to trial the 4-day work week? Why or why not?
- Is there anything else you want us to know or something we should have asked you, but didn't?

Interview Guide, Wave 3 (after 4DWW, during Flexible Fifth Day)

Reaction to Flexible Fifth Day (FFD)

- Thinking back to November when the shift from 4DWW to FFD was announced, what was your reaction?
 - What did you perceive to be the reason for the change?
 - How did you feel about the change?
 - What were you worried about, etc.
 - Did this change how you felt about TableTech or your job?
- Tell us about how your team is approaching the Flexible Fifth Day
- Were there any conflicts/challenges in implementing/transitioning?
- Do you think this was the right decision for TableTech?

Time Use

- What does Friday (or another flex day) look like for you these days?
 - Tell me about what last Friday looked like for you (walk through)
 - Plans for this Friday?

- [probe to get a good understanding of how flexible/not flexible they feel this time is for them]
- [probe for what they are doing with the time off if they are taking it]
- How (if at all) has the FFD changed what your week looks like?
 - Are you still trying to work a 4-day week or a reduced week?
 - Why or why not?
 - How, if at all, has how you use your time at work changed?
 - Are you working longer hours on Monday-Thursday?
- How would you compare FFD to 4DWW?
 - Probe for how it feels different in addition to practical difference
- To a “regular” 5-day week?
 - Probe for how it feels different in addition to practical difference
- How do you decide whether to work on Friday/the 5th day? [probe for examples] [for engineers, probe for how they make this decision in their mob, stories, examples, conflict/disagreement]
- How do you know when you have worked enough?
 - Is working enough or measuring your productivity more about tasks or hours?
- Has the work culture at TableTech changed since the start of the FFD?
 - Do you feel more or less pressure or more pressure to be “on” or available?
 - Do you feel you have more or less flexibility/control?
- Is there anything you learned or started doing during the 4DWW that you have carried with you?
 - For engineers:
 - Are you still using daily and/or weekly goals to structure your week?

Productivity and Well-being

- Compared to the 4DWW, would you say your productivity has changed? Up or down? Why?
- Compared to the 4DWW, would you say your well-being has changed? How? Why? Where are you seeing this show up in your life?
- How are you feeling about work/life balance these days?
- How would you define productivity/what does productivity mean to you?
- How do you define well-being/what does well-being mean to you?
- To what extent do you see productivity and well-being as going together/synergistic vs. in conflict with each other?

Wrap-up

- Are there any other changes that we haven’t talked about that you have seen over the last 6 months at TableTech?
- Is there anything you would like to change about how FFD or flexible work policies in general at TableTech?
- Is there anything else you want us to know or something we should have asked you, but didn’t?

Appendix B: Summary of Data Collected at TableTech

INTERVIEWS

WAVE 1 INTERVIEWS (based on employees who started on or before 7/1)

Department	# of employees	# of interviews	% of Department
Customer Success	5	5	100%
Engineering	20	12	60%
Sales	8	7	88%
Leadership	5	5	100%
Other	3	2	67%
TOTAL	41	31	76%

WAVE 2 INTERVIEWS (based on employees who started on or before 10/1)

Department	# of employees	# of interviews	% of Department
Customer Success	9	9	100%
Engineering	35	18	51%
Sales	11	11	100%
Leadership	5	5	100%
Other	4	4	100%
TOTAL	64	47	73%

WAVE 3 INTERVIEWS (based on employees who started on 2/1 or earlier)

Department	# of employees	# of interviews	% of Department
Customer Success	10	9	90%
Engineering	37	23	57%
Sales	14	12	86%
Leadership	5	5	100%
Other	4	2	50%
TOTAL	70	51	73%

Note that total in Wave 3 is less than total study participants because some employees exited the firm.

I also conducted brief interviews immediately after the end of the 4DWW (n=11).

Number of Interviews Per Participant

3 Interviews	27
2 Interviews	14
1 Interview	20
0 Interviews	17

OBSERVATIONS

Wave	Hours	Meetings/Sessions
Pre-implementation	8	9
4DWW	58	67
Flexible Fifth Day	74	88
TOTAL	140	164

SURVEYS

Pulse Survey

- Administered weekly before and during 4DWW (with some exceptions to accommodate other surveys or company activities), and bi-weekly after the end of the 4DWW until the beginning of February
- 25 weeks of data
- Average response rate: 60%
- Average n=30

Survey	Launch Date	Wave	Responses (n)	Response Rate
Weekly Pulse Survey	6/17/22	Pre-implementation	31	91%
Weekly Pulse Survey	6/24/22	Pre-implementation	21	62%
Weekly Pulse Survey	7/1/22	Pre-implementation	30	73%
Weekly Pulse Survey	7/8/22	Pre-implementation	28	70%
Weekly Pulse Survey	7/15/22	Pre-implementation	32	73%
Weekly Pulse Survey	7/29/22	Pre-implementation	34	69%
Weekly Pulse Survey	8/4/22	4DWW	35	70%
Weekly Pulse Survey	8/11/22	4DWW	39	75%
Weekly Pulse Survey	8/18/22	4DWW	39	75%
Weekly Pulse Survey	8/25/22	4DWW	38	72%
Weekly Pulse Survey	9/1/22	4DWW	32	60%
Weekly Pulse Survey	9/8/22	4DWW	38	61%
Weekly Pulse Survey	9/15/22	4DWW	35	56%
Weekly Pulse Survey	9/22/22	4DWW	31	49%
Weekly Pulse Survey	9/29/22	4DWW	40	63%
Weekly Pulse Survey	10/13/22	4DWW	33	53%
Weekly Pulse Survey	10/27/22	4DWW	39	62%
Weekly Pulse Survey	11/3/22	4DWW	35	55%
Weekly Pulse Survey	11/10/22	4DWW	31	48%
Weekly Pulse Survey	11/17/22	4DWW	30	47%

Weekly Pulse Survey	12/1/22	Flexible Fifth Day	30	45%
Weekly Pulse Survey	12/15/22	Flexible Fifth Day	35	52%
Weekly Pulse Survey	1/5/23	Flexible Fifth Day	32	47%
Weekly Pulse Survey	1/19/23	Flexible Fifth Day	26	37%
Weekly Pulse Survey	2/2/23	Flexible Fifth Day	30	42%

Employee Experience Survey

- Administered once per wave
- Average response rate: 96%
- Average n=56

Survey	Launch Date	Wave	Responses (n)	Response Rate
Employee Experience Survey	7/18/22	Pre-implementation	43	98%
Employee Experience Survey	10/17/22	4DWW	63	100%
Employee Experience Survey	3/20/23	Flexible Fifth Day	62	89%

DEI Survey

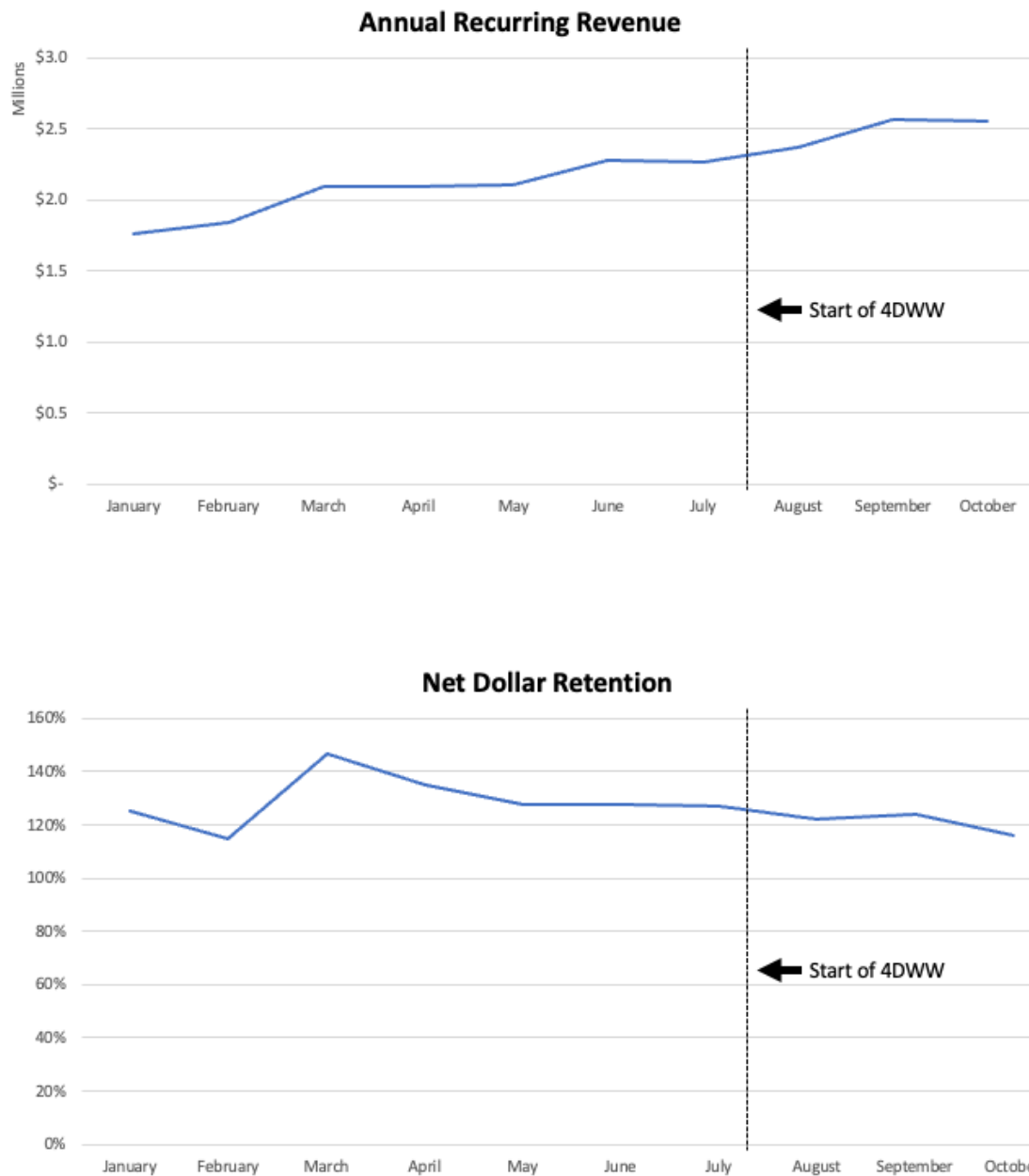
- Administered once in October (during 4DWW)
- N=50, response rate=79%

ARCHIVAL / ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

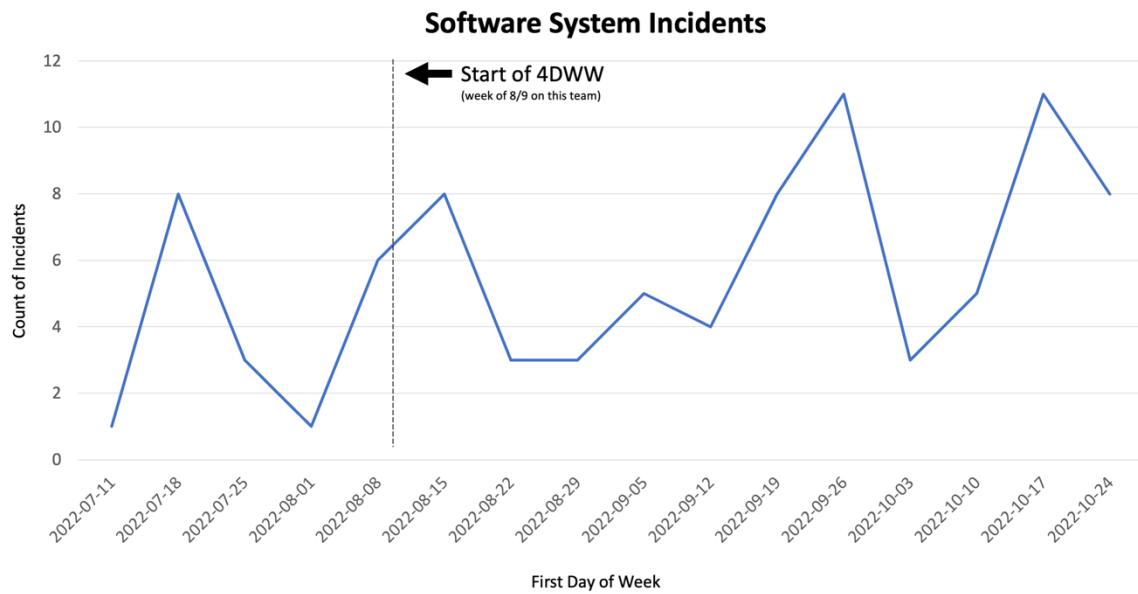
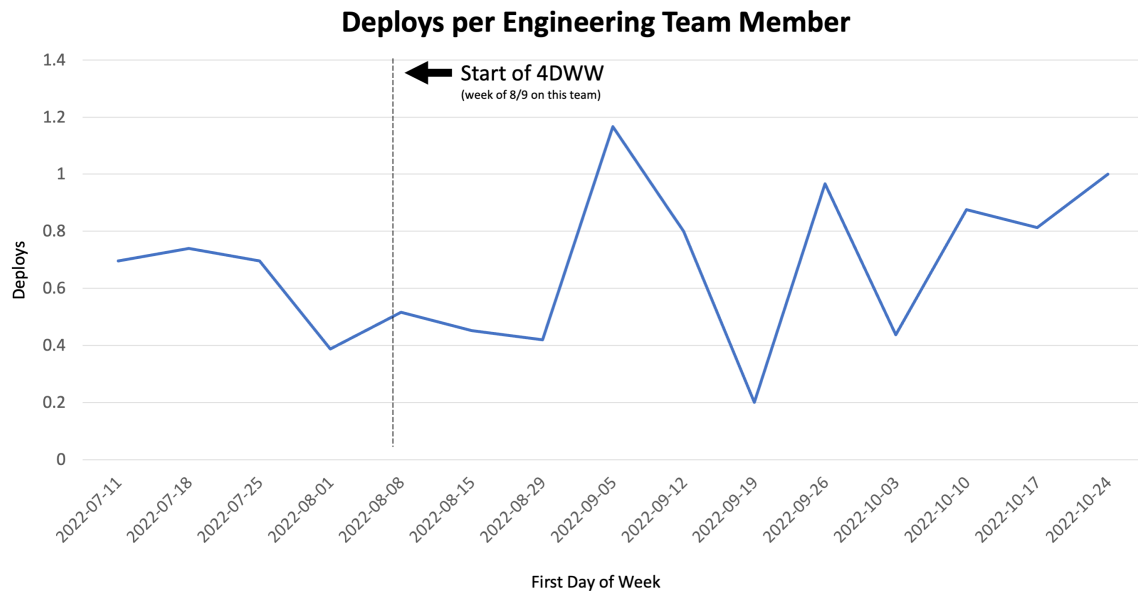
The core materials gathered include:

- Slack posts
- Company documents, such as HR policy documents and slide decks from presentations and meetings
- Administrative data
 - Company- and team-level activity and KPI data
 - Time off data logged in TableTech's HR system
 - Hours worked data for sales team members who track hours
 - Calendar data from a subset of employees

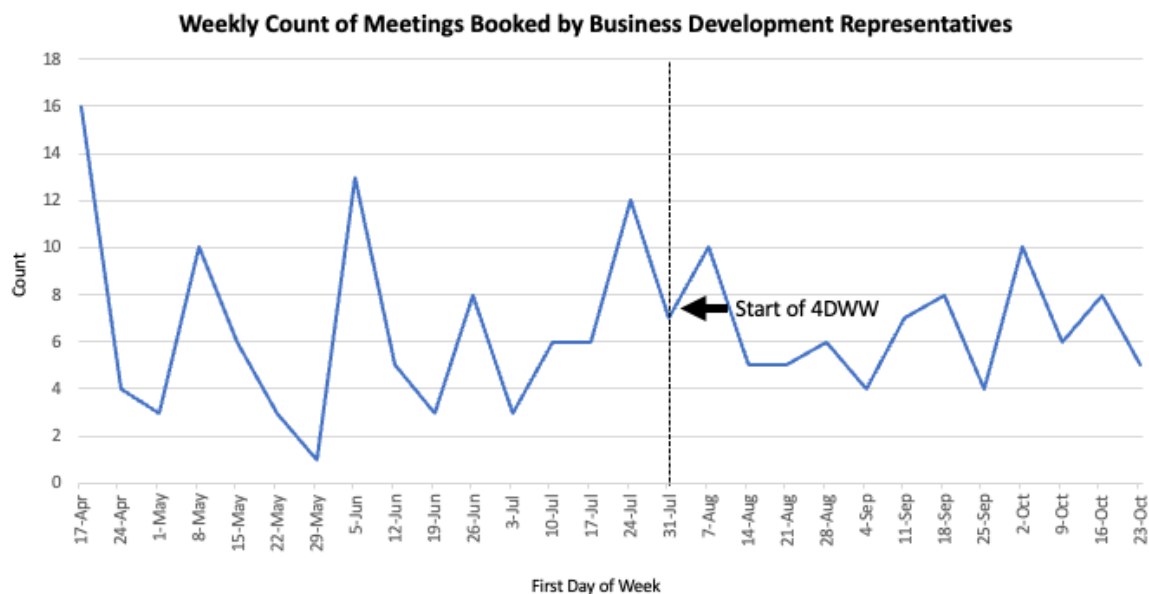
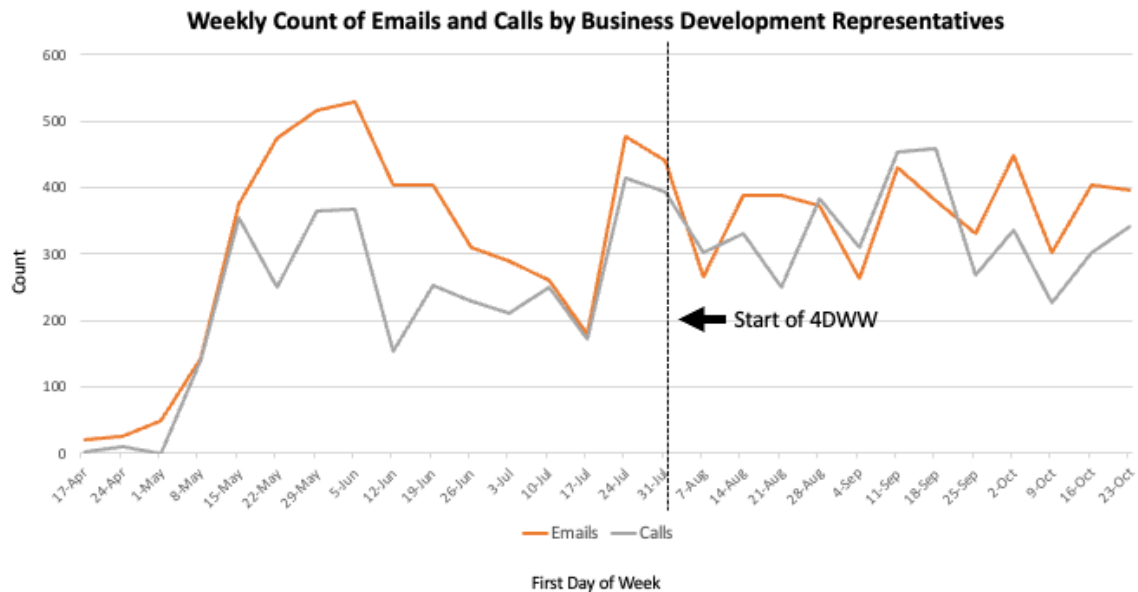
Appendix C: Presentation of Administrative Data from TableTech



TableTech defined these metrics as follows: ARR = Total Amount of Yearly Subscriptions + Total Amount Gained from Expansion Revenue - Total Amount Lost Due to Cancellations. $NDR = \frac{[(\text{Starting MRR} + \text{Expansion MRR} - \text{Contraction MRR} - \text{Churn MRR}) / \text{Starting MRR}] \times 100}{1}$, where MRR is Monthly Recurring Revenue.



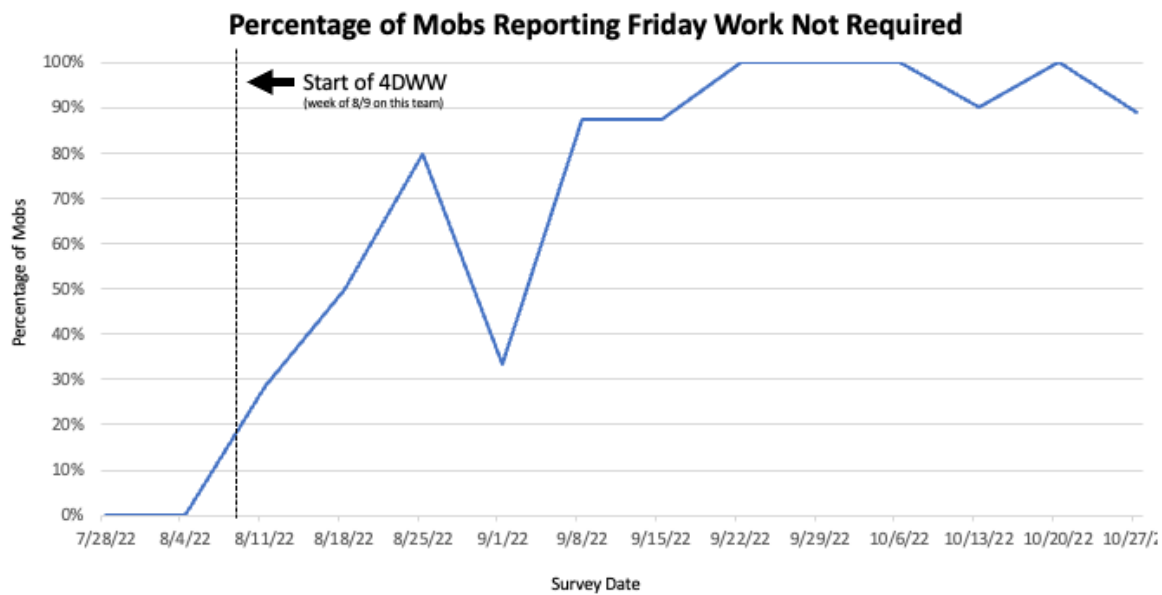
Note: software system incidents are defined as events that trigger an automated alert about a disruption or outage in TableTech's software.



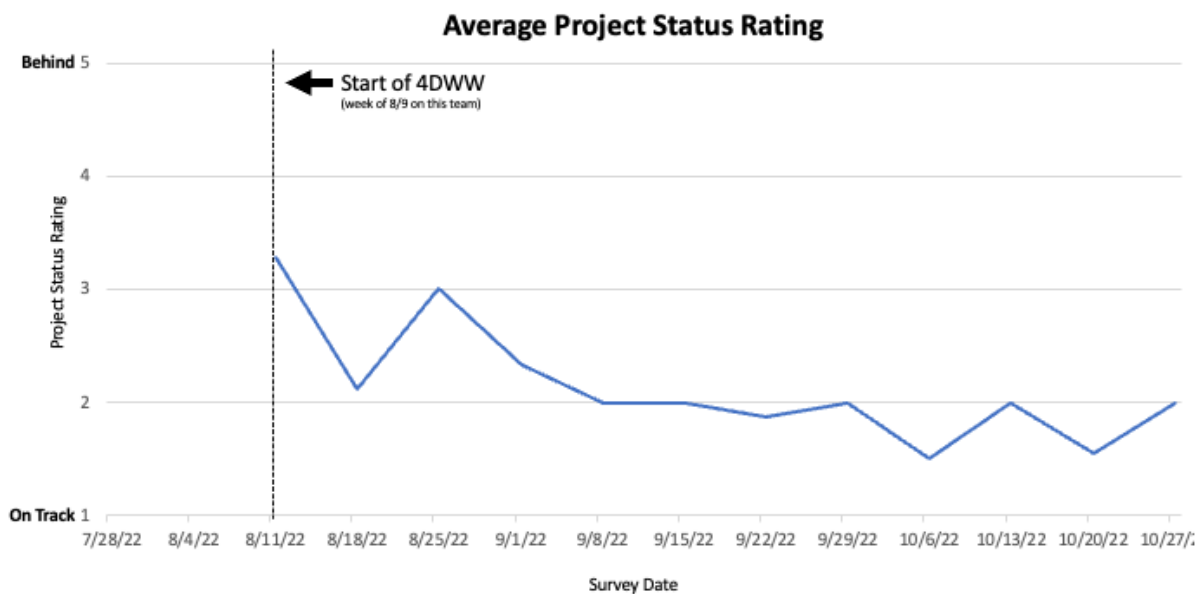
Note: these charts show the total emails and calls by all Business Development Representatives (BDRs) summed weekly, covering the period starting when 3 new BDRs were hired and ending the week the decision was made to end the 4DWW. A 5th BDR was hired in early September but is excluded because she was in training during this period. Account Executives (AEs) are excluded because managers reported that they did not track AEs' activity data and judged them only on the basis of the revenue they booked.



Engineering Team Weekly Goal Survey Results



Note: a mob is a work group consisting of up to 4 engineers working on the same project. The rise in percentage of mobs reporting Friday work indicates increased ability to meet weekly goals.



Note: these data were not collected before 8/11/22.

Appendix D: Supplement to Figure 3.1

Lists of Keywords Searched in *Architectural Record*

Keywords associated with low-status clients: public interest, pro bono, social design, community based, social impact, low income, affordable housing

Keywords associated with high-status clients: commercial, elite, restoration, luxury, celebrity, exclusive/private, villa/mansion, renovation, starchitect

Keywords associated with environmental issues: global warming/climate change, sustainable/sustainability, green building, zero carbon/carbon-neutral, 2030 challenge, LEED, carbon emission, greenhouse gas/fossil fuel

Excerpts from Example Articles in *Architectural Record*

1. Examples of Articles Associating Cutting-Edge Design and Star Architects with Wealthy, Elite Clients

Adler, J. (May 1, 2015). The High Life. *Architectural Record*.

Hence the emergence of the extra-skinny, supertall, ultra-luxury residential tower, which Carol Willis, the founder and director of New York’s Skyscraper Museum, calls “a whole new skyscraper form,” evocative of the iconic New York skyscrapers of the last century. While office buildings have become broader, to accommodate the big floor plates demanded by commercial tenants, residential design has adopted the slender tower form.

This is an architectural development that has been driven, of course, by money. Buildings this tall and narrow do present some engineering challenges to deal with swaying in wind forces, and certain improvements in technology of construction since the 1990s help enable nearly doubling the maximum height of residential building. (In the late 1980s, 750 feet was considered tall.) And the legal basis for these acromegalic, as-of-right towers has been in place for decades: developers can transfer the air rights of lower adjacent properties and pile the FAR onto their attenuated towers. **But it is a vast influx of wealth, much of it from abroad, pouring into New York that is creating a demand for trophy properties** stuffed with amenities, for prices that are edging past the twin landmarks of \$100 million and \$10,000 a square foot. ...

When the Astors and the Vanderbilts built their mansions, they also sought name architects—such as Richard Morris Hunt or Stanford White—but they probably didn’t have resale value in mind. A dwelling isn’t any more comfortable to live in because the outside of the building was designed by someone famous, but the idea that design has intrinsic value is entrenched in New York and extends to Miami, **where new residential buildings have been designed by Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas of OMA, and Bjarke Ingels of BIG, among others.** The phenomenon is creating new opportunities for

architecture and reshaping skylines; the view looking south from Central Park, or toward land from offshore Miami Beach, will be almost unrecognizable in a few years to anyone whose memories date back just to the turn of the century. ...

The number of buyers who could spring for the top apartments at 432 Park, as Viñoly himself said, is about “95 people in the world.” But if the global elite does pack up and move on to wherever they go next, the buildings, for better or worse, will have changed the skyline and the built environment for the rest of us, far into the future.

King, J. (June 1, 2008). Lost opportunities in developing urban America. *Architectural Record*.

As for our hallowed architectural stars, perhaps a few can make market-rate housing their cause.

Yes, it’s nice that Richard Meier is designing pristine towerettes for the likes of Nicole Kidman, and that such artistes as Jean Nouvel and Frank Gehry unveil icons for the ultra-wealthy. But they’re still just playing to the elite, leaving the rest of us to gape or sneer.

Brown, M. Gordon. (September 26, 1996). Review, *Reconstructing Architecture for the 21st Century: An Inquiry into the Architect’s World*, by Anthony Jackson, in How Money and Codes Shape Skyscrapers. *Architectural Record*.

The first sentence of this readable, polemical, and ultimately persuasive book expresses a conviction that many in the architectural profession hold: “There is something very wrong with architecture as it is practiced today.”

The “something very wrong” that Anthony Jackson, a professor of architecture at the Technical University of Nova Scotia, writes about is that architecture has created a public largely indifferent to what architects produce. He points out that **even the word “architecture” has become part of the problem: it conveys images of an elite group of artists no longer suited to play a major role in a democratic market society.**

Jackson frames his critique of architectural practice by examining the culture of architects, showing how the myths of architecture have pulled the profession away from the culture of society at large. “It is reasonable that buildings should reflect the values of at least the majority of the people who inhabit them,” states Jackson. “If they do not, there is a conflict between the public outlook and its constructed environment.”

2. Examples of Articles from *Architectural Record* Discussing Environmental Issues

Gonchar, Joann. (January 2021). Gold Medal Recognizes Ed Mazria’s Climate Activism. *Architectural Record*.

IN A MOVE that may be a sign of shifting priorities, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) has named Santa Fe, New Mexico–based architect Edward Mazria as the recipient

of its 2021 Gold Medal. **Past winners of the annual prize—considered the organization’s highest honor—have typically made their mark on the profession through their body of built work. Mazria, however, is instead known for his climate activism and credited with shining a light on the connection between buildings and global warming.** “We are major emitters,” he says, referring to the architecture and construction industries.

Mazria has championed his cause through Architecture 2030, the nonprofit organization that he started as a pro bono arm of his design practice in 2002. Because of the group’s work, just about every architect knows that the built environment is responsible for nearly 40 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions—more than any other sector. **But Mazria has not only raised awareness about architecture’s carbon problem, he’s shown that buildings are central to the cure.** “Without Ed’s tireless efforts, the relevance of your profession to climate solutions would be considerably less appreciated or integrated into global climate action,” wrote Michael Northrop, the sustainable-development program director for the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, in a letter of support to the Gold Medal jury.

Just a few of Architecture 2030’s initiatives include: the 2030 Challenge, which sets efficiency targets that grow increasingly stringent over time in order to reach carbon neutrality for new buildings by 2030, and for the entire built environment by midcentury; the Carbon Smart Materials Palette, a specification tool aimed at achieving reductions in the carbon embodied in construction materials; and the Zero Code, a standard that supports the design of carbon-neutral buildings. With the AIA, Architecture 2030 successfully lobbied for the inclusion of the Zero Code in the newest version of the International Energy Conservation Code.

Mazria has also played a role in shaping environmental policy globally. His efforts were key in achieving a 2015 “China Accord,” a pledge by 59 Chinese and international architecture firms to design low-carbon buildings and cities and for including the 2030 Challenge targets in the Paris Climate Agreement.

Locher, Mira. (May 2020). Think Global, Act Local: Tokyo’s Carbon Policy. *Architectural Record*.

A decade ago, **recognizing that commercial and industrial buildings—including its iconic high-rise towers—produced almost half of the city’s total carbon emissions, Tokyo started the world’s first urban carbon cap-and-trade initiative. The mandatory program aims to reduce CO2 emissions by 30 percent and energy consumption by 38 percent, compared to 2000 levels, in 1,400 of the city’s largest carbon emitters.** Although the facilities covered by the program represent just 2 percent of the total number of Tokyo’s commercial buildings, they account for nearly 19 percent of emissions, making the policy “effective and powerful,” says Satoshi Chida, Tokyo Cap-and-Trade Program (TCaTP) director, and a critical element in the city’s plan for achieving zero emissions by 2050.

Tokyo clients and architects are responding to the city's increased emphasis on energy efficiency through state-of-the-art facilities and innovative building-management schemes. Mori Buildings, one of Japan's largest developers, is promoting high-performance design and the use of 100 percent renewable energy throughout Toranomon Hills, a mixed-use complex rising in central Tokyo.

With features such as planted outdoor ledges, high-performance glazing, photovoltaics, and advanced lighting and mechanical systems, firm founder Christoph Ingehoven hopes his designs "will influence the way Tokyo develops over the next 20 years, with more planted facades, more public green space, and high levels of sustainable-building certifications." The complex's final building, the Toranomon Station Tower, OMA's first high-rise in Tokyo, recently broke ground and also is targeting significant reductions in energy consumption and CO2 emissions.

Gonchar, Joann. (October 2019). Green-Building Advocates Raise Alarm on Embodied Carbon. *Architectural Record*.

By now, architects are familiar with the often cited statistic: the building sector is responsible for nearly 40 percent of the world's carbon emissions. They understand the role of energy efficiency in reducing fossil-fuel use and tackling climate change. But many are just waking up to the importance of the emissions associated with manufacturing materials and the construction process, or "embodied carbon."

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, it makes up 11 percent of global greenhouse-gas emissions. And, if construction continues at its current pace, in 30 years embodied and operating carbon emissions will be roughly equal.

Also in late September, the Seattle-based Carbon Leadership Forum announced the pending launch of the Embodied Carbon Construction Calculator, or EC3. Several embodied-carbon evaluation tools are already available, but those mostly target the earliest design phases, and their main purpose is to help project teams choose [sic] among types of materials, such as concrete, timber, or steel. In contrast, EC3's developers, who include Skanska, C-Change Labs, Microsoft, and others, say that their calculator, which will be free and open-source, is focused on the specification and procurement phases, helping designers and contractors assess similar materials-comparing, for example, one local supplier's concrete mix with another. "Until now, the industry has not had a way to assess the supply chain through the lens of its carbon impact," says Stacy Smedley, Skanska's director of sustainability.

3. Examples of Articles from *Architectural Record* Discussing Low-Status Clients

Amelar, Sarah. (September 2020). Architecture Firms Begin to Grapple with Discrimination. *Architectural Record*.

Within practices themselves, firm culture has been undergoing scrutiny: What steps can be taken to ensure all minorities feel they belong and are not merely tokens? A number of offices are planning to enhance training and mentorship of BIPOC staff and create clear,

open pathways to advancement and achievement of leadership roles. There's also been renewed commitment to supporting diversity more broadly (which, in many practices, already includes LGBTQ, women's, NOMA, and Latino alliances).

While large firms might have deeper pockets, more modest-sized ones have also stepped forward, as did FXC in cosponsoring a Black Lives Matter street mural in Lower Manhattan, contributing to minority organizations, and matching employees' own donations. No matter what a firm's means may be, says Pei Cobb Freed partner Michael Bischoff, "it's important to come together to harness the power of the collective."

Clients and the character of work pursued have been under reconsideration as well—with increasing emphasis on projects with social purpose, including pro bono work. KPF, for example, joined an effort to assist, through design and logistical interventions, in the recovery of a marginalized part of Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, a zone hard hit by Covid. "It has such urgency, you can feel the energy in the office—people really want to be involved," says KPF president James von Klemperer. "Now the goal is to make such initiatives part of our everyday work." Meanwhile, says Effenus Henderson, a Seattle-based consultant who is developing global standards for DEI in architecture, as well as other industries, "clients—particularly governments or universities—are increasingly demanding a level of diversity, equity, and inclusion from their architects. It's being built into the bidding process."

McGuigan, Cathleen. (March 2012). **Architecture for Everyone.** *Architectural Record*.

A few days later, Thomas Fisher, dean of the College of Design at the University of Minnesota, responded in a blog post on Metropolis. "Nontraditional job opportunities for architects have never been better," Fisher wrote, "and while it may take some time for these markets to mature, they seem likely to grow much faster in years to come."

One of those markets is public-interest design. While architecture has largely been patronized, in Timberg's description, by the top 1 percent, Fisher sees a shift in architectural services for the other 99 percent. Humanitarian design, often funded by grants, is on the rise, providing work and a sense of purpose for a growing legion of (mostly young) practitioners.

Activist architecture is not new—and the most recent groundswell began well before the onset of the recession. **An emerging generation of architects has been reflecting, for some years now, professional values that the Salon article did not acknowledge—a move away from the glorification of the star architect toward a more collaborative design process among architects and across disciplines; a global awareness and social consciousness; and a concern with local conditions as part of a more holistic approach to sustainability.**

Indeed, one significant aspect of the new architecture detailed in the pages ahead is sustainability. These are projects almost always built with local materials, methods, and labor—not Western typologies exported to other countries, but a hybrid of design ideas

customized for conditions on the ground. The Boston-based MASS Design Group built the Girubuntu Primary School of bricks and bamboo with local labor in Rwanda. The brilliant Francis Kéré, who returns regularly from his practice in Berlin to build in his home village in Burkina Faso, brings Modernist ideas adapted to vernacular construction techniques, even using—ingeniously—local clay pots.

Pressman, Andy. (May 2000). Architects can influence policy and contribute to the public good. *Architectural Record*.

Many architects share aspirations to improve communities and the environment and to address basic social problems through design. This drive toward civic activism is not only laudable but essential if practitioners are to enhance the public's perception of architecture and make the field more relevant to broad segments of society.

Pro bono work can provide enormous benefit to society. "Clients" who might not otherwise afford architectural services—and who really need them for code compliance or other facility improvements—include religious institutions, child-care centers, and homeless shelters. This type of work can take many forms but should be executed with the same reasonable standard of care as any other architectural project.

While the motivation to pursue publicly minded work is fundamentally noble, there are secondary pragmatic benefits. Greater exposure and contacts are natural consequences and may produce leads for future work involving the community and important social agendas.

Architects design projects of all types, but they can also strive to become model citizen-professionals. By wisely embracing social responsibility and political process, they can positively influence the public domain in ways that extend their talent and good will beyond buildings. This, of course, has the side effect of enhancing public recognition of the full scope of the profession. In light of societal problems and challenges, it seems especially timely for more of us to consider emulating these examples and become agents of progress and indispensable resources in our communities.

Appendix E: Interview Protocol for Chapter 3

[Note: Specific questions added in the second round of data collection are labelled with R2. Questions added in the third round of data collection are labelled with R3.]

1. Warm-Up/History

- a. What is your position/role?
- b. Take me back. How did you come to be doing this work?
 - i. Were there key influences on you that set you on your professional path, however you want to describe it? [Probe for: job and context changes; ask to explain why they made these moves (R3)]
 - ii. Was there a key moment (or set of moments) that influenced you, or that you see as milestones on your path? [Probe for: how did non-traditional experiences shape their work?]
 - iii. Are you a licensed architect? Why did you / did you not pursue licensure? How does being licensed/unlicensed shape your work?
- c. What is your mission in your work? / What is the mission of your organization?
- d. What does it mean to you to serve the social good through your work? [Probe for: which clients/people/problems they are serving]
- e. How would you describe your typical client? The kinds of problems you address through your work? (R3)

2. Relationship to ‘traditional’ practice (R2)

- a. Do you think of your work as ‘traditional’ or ‘nontraditional?’ Why or why not? How similar is your work to that of traditional architects?
- b. Traditional practice (esp. if they talk about experience in a traditional firm)
 - i. What are the most important values in the profession of architecture? How are those values reflected or not in your firm?
 - ii. What is the culture around or attitude toward doing more socially oriented work at your firm?
 - iii. What has been the hardest part of doing social impact work at your firm?
- c. Do you personally experience a tradeoff between success in the firm or the profession and success doing socially impactful work? If so, why are you willing to make this tradeoff?
 - i. What do you think or feel about the status of your type of work within the architecture/design professions? Is the status of social impact work changing?
- d. Why have you stayed at [firm name] to do this work? Have you ever considered leaving?

3. Socially oriented practices

- a. How would you describe your clients or your projects?
- b. How would you describe your relationships with your clients? With the communities in which you work?
- c. What kinds of practices do you use to work with your clients / communities? [Probe for: collaborative / participatory / innovative practices; ask for concrete examples]

- d. Are there partners (e.g., nonprofits, coalitions, community orgs, social-design firms) that you regularly work with?
- e. Have there been times when you faced challenges in implementing these practices? When you met resistance or pushback from the community? Tell me about a time when it didn't work as you hoped and how you addressed this challenge.
- f. Has your practice evolved over time? If so, how?
 - i. What were the influences that caused this evolution?
 - ii. What pushes / motivates you to adopt more collaborative practices or to try to empower your clients?
 - iii. Are there specific experiences that influenced you to change how you work with / relate to your clients?
- g. Is your work more designer-led or more community-led? Who has the most say over what the process and outcomes look like? [Probe for: power relationship with clients] (R3)
- h. What is the power dynamic like when you have worked with traditional clients vs. community clients? (R3)
- i. Do you think your expertise as a designer/architect is helpful in your socially oriented practice? Has it ever gotten in your way? (R3)
- j. What is the most challenging part of doing prosocial work in the architecture/design profession?
- k. What has been the most impactful project you have worked on? the least impactful?

4. Personal identity

- a. Have you had personal experiences where your gender, your race, or other identity dynamics came into your work?
 - i. Is there an example that is most salient to you? Describe.
 - ii. How did you handle it?
 - iii. If it was a challenging dynamic, did you choose to take it on? How? Why or why not?

Have these elements of your personal identity shaped your career path? How? Do they shape how you practice or how you relate to your clients?

Appendix F: Extended Versions of Tables Containing Illustrative Evidence

Table 3.2: Conflicts Between Prosocial and Professional Identity: Illustrative Evidence

Centrality of Prosocial and Professional Identity
Importance of making a contribution to society “I think I have always, since really childhood, had a deep interest in issues of social justice and the environment and always wanted a connection and wasn’t sure how.” (P59) “I take it back, really, to my youth. So, I grew up really poor, really poor, but in a really diverse community. And I think that that’s something I really tap into when I have conversations, specifically, around the value of affordable housing . . . growing up in a racially and economically diverse community informed my values of understanding why inclusion is important and why equity is important.” (P80)
Centrality of design to identity “[Good design is] what it’s all about—I mean, to me. And I think it’s also why architects as a profession are so grossly underpaid, because they love it . . . a good number of people out there . . . would do this for free.” (P22) “I always loved crafting and building things, so I went to summer camp when I was younger and one of the camp visitors was an architect, and he was just talking about what he did and [since then] I always, I want[ed] to be an architect, and that was around, like, middle school . . . it just stuck in my mind that that’s [what] I wanted to be.” (P31)
Working with High-Status Clients Supports Design Expertise
Design expertise as core professional ideal “We’re very focused on obviously the As, Bs and Cs of architecture, just generally learning history, generally learning place, space, just the formal constructs of architecture, but not any of this kind of social impact.” (P86) “The way that I experienced people talking was not as much about making architecture and design work accessible . . . but it was more so about the artistry and the craftsmanship of putting together drawings and trying to capture the ethereal parts of architecture, how do you talk about light not just in a black and white or shadow, but in a more like almost dreamscape . . . it felt like you were always almost dressing up your language or your designs to speak to other architects.” (P92)
Pursuit of design is linked to serving elite clients “[In] the field of architecture . . . unless you take a proactive position on situating your practice within a different context, you’re gonna work for people that have, in theory, some capital to deploy, and oftentimes a lot. And beyond just capital, it oftentimes means control, whether in the form of land or more substantial capital resources, to get a big thing built.” (P63) “Architecture does require patronage and does require clients and architecture is quite closely aligned with structure of power in society and in terms of economic [and] institutional [factors]. . . . Like we do buildings that becomes [sic] important . . . for . . . issues of authority, power, civil society, and often social justice. . . . It came upon me much later . . . the close relationship of architecture and power.” (P65)
Working with High-Status Clients Conflicts with Prosocial Identity
“There was always something missing . . . in what I had expected architecture to be about. . . . The vast majority of projects were for a very specific and wealthy segment of society. [That] didn’t sit too well with me.” (P12)

“When I was working for [my first employer], most of their work was high-end residential work. I often found myself—what the hell am I doing working on this—the projects just were so people’s third homes. It was totally not aligned with my values. . . . I would say I was always pulled towards this more socially engaged work . . . just working for super rich clients . . . was not interesting to me at all.” (P62)

Working with Low-Status Clients Conflicts with Professional Identity

“I do sometimes worry about my design knowledge and IQ being lost, since I’m not possibly going to be in that space as often. Knowing about certain materials, building methodologies. That lingers in the back of my mind, like, will I be as sharp of a designer as I once was, because I’m not going to be in a design space as much . . . there’s nothing like creating, it’s just a beautiful thing, and beautiful experience and process. On the community development side, sometimes you get lost in spreadsheets, and just the paperwork of things. It’s not so much design that goes on. When we did have architects that come through to design our projects, I get to look at their stuff and kind of review it and all that. It was bittersweet when I had to give it back to them like, oh yeah, you get to go design this now, and I don’t. Yeah, I do miss it sometimes.” (P82)

“I will likely not get a cover on *Architectural Record*. That’s okay. My colleague will get a cover on *Architectural Record*, and I will support him in getting that cover.” (P74)

Table 3.4: Prosocial–Professional Identity Integration Strategies: Illustrative Evidence*

Defending Strategy
Defend high-status clients as prosocial “Our work . . . in so many ways is helpful, because it’s really critical stuff. We’re doing great health-care facilities that allow researchers and others to cure cancer and find that thing. So that’s an amazing thing.” (P29) “You’re providing better facilities. Usually it’s an update to facilities. A lot of the hospitals are 100 years old, and you’re taking those down and giving them something new. So, I think that’s a benefit. Then there’s benefits from accessibility and better standards we have today. There’s a lot more design today that deals with elderly patients, elder care. I think generally it does—it’s better for the community.” (P48) Defend design expertise as prosocial “I personally, you know, really like doing architecture of any . . . kind, and I think we help any client in any project that we do. So, you know, every building needs a roof.” (P24) “I like to think that there’s an element of delight, that people just feel good about being in certain kinds of rooms. . . . in some places, you just like being. You know, one of my favorite places was a crowded, lousy old library. . . . And it just—it struck me for some reason, this is just a really comfortable space. I don’t know. It doesn’t have any connection with the outside. It wasn’t pleasant in a conventional way. It just, you know, it just—I felt good being there and I was effective in that room for some reason. . . . So I know it matters. . . . So anyway, my focus is on design, design of the spaces and design of the way people work within them and connect among them.” (P17)
Affirming Strategy
Working with economically under-resourced clients is prosocial “[Our firm] sets aside 1% of our billable hours for pro bono work. . . . We have a certain expertise in design and planning, and we want to use those as responsibly as possible to make an impact. . . . It’s directly for local nonprofits who wouldn’t have been able to afford our services otherwise.” (P89)

“It’s very clear in my mind and from my leadership here that pro bono and the community work that we do for social purpose is not business development and we’re not doing it to get ahead. We’re doing it because it’s the thing we should be doing and because buildings and architecture and the construction industry is expensive, and we don’t want that expense to be a barrier to the nonprofits in our community for our services.” (P92)

Reframing low-status clients as design clients

“This is very much a design problem . . . it’s a great opportunity to do something that is sort of this creation of this pavilion-like element. And whether they have a concert for Indonesia or whether it’s a conversation about single mothers . . . there’s this pavilion which is just a beautiful design piece. I think it’s going to be an extraordinary installation. . . . And people go, ‘Wow. Did you see that thing over there? That’s really great.’ . . . it is serving a very strong social purpose, but I think for us [the stronger pull] . . . is that it actually is a design piece.” (P29)

“[Our] social-purpose [initiative] is definitely more design-gearred. . . . Obviously, when it’s connected to architecture, it’s the best of both worlds.” (P91)

Expanding Strategy

Addressing societal inequalities

“I think the largest impact we’re trying to make here is . . . around this idea of equity and providing similar opportunities for housing, for transportation, for access to work to everybody in the community regardless of what their demographic background is. . . . On the larger scale we’re working to just increase housing change.” (P11)

“The journey for me started when I moved back to [a city] where the two worlds are very much in your face every day. As you go into your morning commute to work, you pass slums; you pass high rises. . . . I was struggling with, I would go to work [on] big hotels and luxury brands, and then there would be this around me. I really didn’t quite understand how these two could really co-exist . . . and how could I help bridge the two.” (P33)

Doubting the sufficiency of traditional design expertise

“Some days I [think we’re moving the needle on structural inequality], and some days I don’t . . . at the end of the day, though, a lot of it falls in the policy [domain]. . . . As designers, as architects, you are service providers. I think that we are limited in our capacity to actually effect large-scale global change. . . . In my wish list, to moving that needle more, I want the people deciding where the money goes, and the people writing the policy to have had the experiences of working with neighborhoods. Understanding all these things, and being able to come to the table with that in their back pocket. I would like us to not be architects, and do everything else.” (P57)

“Well, outside [of my main role] I’m on many, many boards. . . . we largely help oversee and implement [cultural master plans] in public art . . . and how that really impacts a space in place and in this sense of belonging and for all residents, diverse type of residents. . . . Design can do one thing, but . . . you really don’t deal with the economic support, the political infrastructure, all these things that design has to work with to make communities equitable.” (P86)

Incorporating other types of knowledge and skills

“Our teams are really multidisciplinary, so we bring a lot of different perspectives to a problem. . . . We have an expertise that creates solutions that really fit the needs and the contexts. [We have] this flexible and multimedia approach. . . . That mindset has led the culture to always be questioning, what are the best ways we should be doing something? What new disciplines or backgrounds should we be integrating to do better work?” (P56)

“I would put myself in the ecosystem of design, culture, technology, and communication, and put myself in the center of that. I guess the other big one . . . it used to be called sustainability, but that word is sort of now not a word that people use. How do you work at the intersection of all these things?” (P25)

Reforming Strategy

Aiming to share power with clients

“[My] goal [is] around empowerment and social justice . . . looking critically at what that means. . . . Public interest design projects that don’t move the dial, they’re feel-good projects, but they’re not moving the dial because the community isn’t actually empowered through them. . . . [I aim to] be really . . . self-critical . . . [and] critical of the profession and how we think about empowerment and equity.” (P44)

“I think it happens a lot, not just in design but in other social change fields, where you see this really outdated, colonial approach . . . the white man savior thing of, ‘oh, we’re gonna help the brown people’ . . . The charity approach versus social change . . . it’s really problematic ‘cause it’s not based on . . . deeper understanding of the roots of the problem, and working towards them comprehensively. . . . This savior mentality . . . I think it often actually does the opposite of what it’s trying to accomplish. . . . Architecture can be so heroic in and of itself that I think they don’t ask those questions sometimes.” (P62)

Recognizing clients’ knowledge

“Your job is to get everyone to the table, and it’s to quiet your own voice . . . and to really learn to listen to . . . that local knowledge, that local expertise, that local voice. That’s where I think you need to drop the ego.” (P44)

“Obviously we would need [community members’] input, because they are experts in their own local area.” (P8)

Prosocial–Professional Identity Integration

“My work really has been about integrating all those pieces of myself . . . not just have my work and then have my interests. How do you bring those things together? . . . I feel like I’ve gotten a fluidity where my professional life is an extension of my personal life. . . . the work I do professionally goes hand in hand with my personal beliefs as to the kind of world I want to live in and I want to create.” (P14)

“I think now I’m really lucky because I get to work on something that just doesn’t create any conflict with my personal, I don’t know, I guess with my identity and how I wanted to live.” (P42)

* To avoid repetition, we do not provide quotes that illustrate concepts that are the same across some strategies (e.g., view of low-status clients as prosocial, doubting the value of traditional expertise); instead, we provide quotes that illustrate the distinctive aspects of each strategy.

Table 3.7: How Identity Integration Strategies Shape Approach to Power in Client Relationships: Illustrative Evidence

Defending: Embracing Design Expertise Enables Mutuality with High-Status Clients

“A typical project follows a certain course . . . for a client with a specific need and it goes through a series of iterations . . . and collaborations to find the solution to that client’s problem . . . once there is a team together and once there is a collaboration going on I do like to kind of insert myself into the conversation and start to understand what the big idea is and how to support getting it done.” (P41)

“Our culture is based on understanding a client and then responding to that client understanding in specific ways. So, you won’t see a consistent design language, for example, because our design language purely comes from the responses, the conversations that we have with our clients.” (P76)

Affirming: Embracing Design Expertise Enables Hierarchy over Low-Status Clients

Low-status clients are deprioritized relative to high-status clients

“The hardest part is . . . I think we’re supposed to have real office time for [pro bono], but it always ends up kind of taking a back seat to the real, bigger projects. . . . I want to really commit time to it and treat it like a normal project, but it ends up kind of last in line, I’d say, in terms of priorities and allocating time to it.” (P10)

“I am pretty sure that my people I work for would not be thrilled if I told them I was doing yet another thing that would take away my time to do any of the [social responsibility] or pro bono stuff.” (P58)

Low-status clients are dependent on professionals’ expertise and lack resources

“The paid client of course expects [a] certain level of quality, because he’s paying us. The pro bono clients, we are helping them, so I won’t say that any crappy work we do that they’ll appreciate that; it’s not like that, but they have lesser expectations . . . because we are helping them.” (P21)

“You’re not dealing with someone that’s going to throw their hands up in the air and go to another architect. You can actually push for what you believe in because there’s no, there’s no money on the table.” (P20)

Expanding: Maintaining Design Expertise Enables Hierarchy, and Adding Other Knowledge and Skills Enables Mutuality with Low-Status Clients

Embracing design expertise is associated with perceptions of power over clients

“The economic dynamic that comes out of us having the dollars and the skills, no matter how much we try to be inclusive, there is that fear. You can see it sometimes with people saying yes even though they might not agree. . . . I don’t think that it’s entirely possible to negate the power dynamic that just exists in imbalanced economics. . . .’Cause in this instance, rather than me being on the receiving end of it, I’m on the giving end of it, right?” (P16)

Doubting sufficiency of design expertise is associated with perceptions of mutuality and collaboration

“I always knew I wanted to do something more than just architecture . . . [this] shapes my [approach to my] profession to this day, blending architecture and focusing more on urban design and urban planning as it relates to architecture.” . . . “I do a lot of work in neighborhood redevelopment, affordable and mixed income housing. That’s one of our spiritual mainstays in terms of what we do here in our practice. I love working with nonprofit organizations. And I really love working with the community and engaging the community. Often the best ideas come from the community.” (P84)

Reforming: Recognizing Clients’ Knowledge Enables Mutuality with Low-Status Clients

“That was some of the work that we’d been doing that was really important, where we were working with communities to help them have that voice . . . that we as designers are making decisions about where we put the power, that power of that design and whether we put it in the hands of people who matter. . . . We can actually activate the [power] in communities that don’t normally have that power.” (P64)

“I see that as my role, as somebody who can curate the design process in this way that allows for many hands to touch the project . . . and through many hands touching it, there is a level of understanding and engagement that everybody gets to . . . contribute to it and invest in it in a different way. Ultimately that allows for people to bring their own knowledge to the table, and for solutions to emerge that are better . . . and [it] builds resilience within communities, because people are all exercising their own agency . . . those social ties that exist ultimately lead to better depth in communities, in being able to problem-solve on their own under circumstances.” (P14)

Table 3.8: Factors Shaping the Use of Identity Integration Strategies: Illustrative Evidence

Invalidation by Clients
Invalidation of prosocial identity by high-status clients
“[The client relationship] was very hierarchical [in] the very hardcore service industry way, where the client is always right and even though we as professionals may feel what they’re doing is wrong, we’re going to kind of continue to try and serve them as much as possible without necessarily advocating for what would be the right thing to do for the sake of the community. And so that was a little troubling to me. And even, we had a project in . . . this historically African American neighborhood . . . quite disadvantaged . . . that in theory would be a project where you could get involved in these issues. But we were doing market rate housing and weren’t really doing much of a community engagement . . . there’s only so much you can do in that position. And so that felt a little stifling.” (P69) “There was always a point in every project that I was involved in, where we would leave the community meeting, and things would just kind of be taken off the drawing board, mostly due to financial decisions. And so that was one blow towards what I felt . . . our responsibility was as designers who are telling the community, we’re putting A, and B, and C, and we’re . . . figuring out what’s the best angle to hide the fact that, at the end of the day, this was going to be an 11-story building that’s blocking views to the park, or whatever.” (P93)
Invalidation of professional identity by high-status clients
“I see . . . almost like a lack of respect for the profession, and I’ve seen it just sort of getting worse and worse . . . [earlier in my career] our clients would come in and they would ask us for advice. ‘What should we do? What kind of ideas do you have?’ [Now] we have clients coming in here that tell us, ‘well that needs to be this, and we want this.’ It’s just like, wait a minute here. . . . [on a hotel project, the client] is like telling us what this thing, exactly what it’s going to look like and what’s going to be. . . . And you try to push back and say, ‘well, we think,’ and then you don’t want to argue with them because you’re afraid of losing that job. And I’ve seen that get progressively worse.” (P20) “Well, in all areas of our profession there are two levels of practice. One is that you provide thought leadership to your clients, you sort of help them go in a direction that aligns with their vision but you’re providing knowledge and strategy or assisting them with strategy that perhaps they weren’t, didn’t know where they were going. You helped them get there. . . . Then there is simply chopping the wood. You know, where we [the client] already know what we want . . . the lowest cost guy gets it. [We] basically just treat that as a vendor relationship.” (P22)
Compensating for invalidation of professional identity by working with low-status clients
“[I am interested in] the artistic elements of [pro bono work] or just how it ties into my interest in architecture . . . it involves design, it involves construction, maybe using different materials, having to work within a limited budget, working with community members, using interesting materials, or sustainable issues, recycled materials.” (P6) “It’s the kind of project type, if you’re not familiar with architecture, it’s sort of like—it’s not designing a full building. It’s sort of the opportunity to design something that could be quite different than what we usually do. So, it’s not permanent and you have a little more freedom, I don’t know, in being inventive with materials and the way you would use the place. So, it was kind of an opportunity to do something really creative and unique. That was probably more my motivation than the kind of community, kind of social responsibility, part of it.” (P10)
Invalidation of prosocial identity by low-status clients
“We were shocked at the amount of pushback. . . . one of the women on the client side who’s leading this who’s African American . . . She framed it very well. She says you have to understand when you’ve been living so long of being told and promised things, and not being delivered. . . . The distrust runs so deep, you can say anything you want and they’re not going to believe you. You’ve got to earn the trust and it’s going to take some time. . . . We made many modifications. The project’s a better project for it .

. . . we've garnered more and more support . . . yes, we get resistance. . . . If you want to do a project well in the community, it just takes effort." (P83)

"Communities can become volatile . . . you will hear the negative voices about not wanting that there, or if the development organization doesn't have a relationship with that community, there is that trust-building factor: 'Well, we don't know you, and you.' . . . And you are sort of having to build that trust factor, and reassurance that this is something that's going to be great for the community; you can help people transition out [of the volatility]." (P31)

Experiences of Fit/Misfit: Professionals with Low-Status Demographic Identities

Experiencing discrimination in the profession (lack of fit with demographic archetype)

"I feel like I have been discriminated by being a woman, a woman in a field where the expectation is that the male does it better. . . . [I had an] interview for a job . . . at 2:00 PM. I arrived, I sat outside the office, and it was 2:15, 2:30, I'm like, this guy, I'm right here. He keeps talking on the phone. And when I finally knocked on the door and I said, 'Sorry, I don't want to interrupt you, I see you are engaged in conversation, but I think we had a two o'clock appointment.' And he said to me, 'Oh, two o'clock appointment. What's your name?' I said, 'I'm P5.' 'Oh, I was expecting a guy because the portfolio was too good.'" (P5)

"I think it's always challenging to be an Asian-American woman in a lot of this work . . . from a credibility standpoint. . . . I have to, from the beginning, prove the fact that I know a lot. Actually demand a certain amount of respect. . . . A lot of the work is in a hyper-masculine space. . . . It's always been like I need to earn my seat at the table. I need to prove my worth. . . . I think that comes from not only being a woman. From not being white." (P54)

Distance from elite clients (demographic misfit)

"George Floyd, I mean, that summer changed my whole entire perspective because I was like, 'Well, if I'm not doing anything to change this, what am I really doing?' I mean, I think I was just generally very successful thus far in my career, but what's a success really mean? I've had fellowships, I've had all that, but what does that really mean if I'm not doing the work that is impacting communities that I cared about? . . . It was like, well, I could keep going back to private practice. I can do the Googles. Sure. I mean, and if that's what I want to do with my time, but I don't want to do that. I feel I'd be able to make a much larger contribution in these spaces." (P72)

"It was a level of care. I care so much about the people I talk to every day, and when something happens, I just, we get upset about it together and talk about it. I think in professional practice, the majority of clients were folks who, this will sound real judgy, just had millions of dollars to spare. . . . I didn't have patience for picking out what marble they wanted, or having those kinds of conversations. . . . My attitude and approach is different." (P81)

Shared experiences of marginalization with low-status clients (demographic fit)

"I identify with the LGBT community, so that is helpful in some ways, but it's nowhere near like being an African American in some of these communities. It's hard to compare minority or underrepresented population cards, and I don't think it's ever helpful to really do that. . . . I think, when there's a group of people from—whether they're representatives of communities or the communities themselves that are traditionally from underrepresented, underinvested populations—when they understand . . . or can assume you've had similar experiences of being looked over or being passed over because of who you are. There's a different air to the room, and there's a different kind of conversation [that] can happen that, when it's a room with—if there's one or more older White men in the room that are trying to lead the conversation, and they're straight, and they're from otherwise traditional backgrounds, like, that's a different conversation. . . . It's an opportunity to have a conversation with someone about not necessarily shared experiences, but shared dynamics of, like, I can identify with being discriminated." (P7)

“I never would have been able to access and tap into these communities and these values . . . if I didn’t have this identity. So being a woman, and being Black in addition to that, has allowed me to access people, history, stories, values, sensitivities, to be brought into the fold in communities that [the firm] had no experience in, and being able to then design something that they’re part of, they’re partner in, but better yet that they feel like is theirs. Their own. It’s not the designer helicoptering in and leaving something.” (P86)

Experiences of Fit/Misfit: Professionals with High-Status Demographic Identities

Awareness of demographic misfit with low-status clients prompts expanding expertise

“Even though our work is very rooted in communities, oftentimes, us designers were not from there.

With public-interest design, we never are explicit about racial or cultural competency. Awareness of privilege. Awareness of White privilege. What that looks like in the work. . . . I’ve never experienced homelessness. Right? Right from there, there’s a little bit of a disconnect. Obviously, a sense of privilege and education that I have over the community. Then realizing, ‘Well, I have been working in this community for six years.’ There is a camaraderie. There is [sic] existing relationships. Also, there has been the ability to also understand that there are actual commonalities between us. Then it’s like, ‘How do I leverage that and be explicit about it also. Have it inform the work.’ It’s hard, because I never had any tools. You’re never trained in school. I’ve never taken a public-interest design class while I was studying architecture. All of it has been self-taught. I’ve extrapolated community organizing or popular education principles to my own design practice. Some of that, I think, is a big struggle.” (P54)

“I talked about working in [an area] which is predominantly African-American. I may be a person of color, but I’m not Black, and I know nothing about what it means to be Black. Although I try really hard, I will never know. That was one of the beautiful examples of the realizations that you do when you focus on trying to understand other communities. So, working with the community . . . was an insane amount of research. For every community meeting, I had to do so much historical research, just personal reading that I had to come prepared just to be able to earn a little bit of respect from the community, just by them knowing that I had an interest and that I was trying to get to know where they were coming from. So that, coupled with their shared experiences, was extremely helpful. So yeah, there’s been barriers, but I like to focus on the positives that we can take.” (P88)
