



Master in Learning and Communication in Multilingual and Multicultural  
Contexts

**A CASE STUDY:  
PROFILE OF AN IDEAL TRAINEE IN THE  
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

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## **Abstract (English)**

Terminology Coordination Unit of the European Parliament in Luxembourg appears to be a perfect workplace to boost professional skills in terminology, linguistics and translation, develop personal qualities and at the same time enhance EU knowledge within the European institution. Trainees at TermCoord are privileged to work in two professional fields, namely terminology management and communication. However, it seems that in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, the work environment of the Schuman trainees is more challenging than expected due to teleworking and remote communication.

Adopting a sociolinguistic approach, this research study strives to illuminate how the Schuman trainees construct a strong and flexible professional identity in the context of teleworking. The main stance of this work is to trace what factors shape the professional identity of TermCoord trainees, how switching to online communication influenced this process and what role the Global DISC assessment tool takes in shaping the professional identity of the trainees. Using a sample of five people, I collected data from three sources: individual interviews, reflexive diaries, and a focus group interview. My most important contribution is that I have presented the benefits and challenges of the virtual workplace, expectations and reality of the work environment, how it is possible to grow in the institution from trainee to communication coordinator and how trainees comprise several roles in the workplace. The results have shown that both COVID-19-related and not-related challenges impact the professional identity development of the trainees at TermCoord. The study's results add nuance to our understanding of who the "ideal" TermCoord trainee is and what qualities a TermCoord trainee must have to "make traineeship a success" in the fast-changing environment.

## **Abstract (French)**

L'unité de coordination terminologique du Parlement européen à Luxembourg apparaît comme un lieu de travail idéal pour renforcer les compétences professionnelles en terminologie, en linguistique et en traduction, développer les qualités personnelles et en même temps améliorer les connaissances de l'UE au sein de l'institution européenne. Les stagiaires du TermCoord ont le privilège de travailler dans deux domaines professionnels, à savoir la gestion terminologique et la communication. Cependant, il semble qu'en ces temps de pandémie de COVID-19, l'environnement de travail des stagiaires de Schuman soit plus difficile que prévu en raison du télétravail et de la communication à distance.

Adoptant une approche sociolinguistique, cette étude de recherche s'efforce d'éclairer la façon dont les stagiaires de Schuman construisent une identité professionnelle, forte et flexible dans le contexte du télétravail. Le but de cette recherche est de déterminer quels facteurs construisent l'identité professionnelle des stagiaires du TermCoord, comment le passage à la communication en ligne a influencé ce processus et quel rôle l'outil d'évaluation Global DISC joue dans la formation de l'identité professionnelle des stagiaires. En utilisant un échantillon de cinq personnes, j'ai recueilli des données à partir de trois sources : des entretiens individuels, des journaux de bord réflexifs et un entretien avec un groupe de discussion. Ma contribution la plus importante est de présenter les avantages et les défis du lieu de travail virtuel, les attentes et la réalité de l'environnement de travail. Un autre aspect est l'évolution du stagiaire dans l'institution, de sa fonction de stagiaire jusqu'au coordinateur de communication et la façon dont les stagiaires comprennent plusieurs rôles sur le lieu de travail. Les résultats ont montré que les défis liés ou non à COVID-19 ont un impact sur le développement de l'identité professionnelle des stagiaires du TermCoord. Les résultats de l'étude nuancent notre compréhension de qui est le stagiaire « idéal » du TermCoord et quelles sont les qualités qu'un stagiaire du TermCoord doit avoir pour « réussir son stage » dans un environnement qui évolue rapidement.

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1. Research contribution**

In today's highly competitive and globalised world, professionals in almost all areas are continuously developing new skills under the pressure of fast-changing circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic, which commenced in 2020, was a decisive factor that suddenly transformed employees' perspectives and attitudes toward their workplace in different professional fields. This might be especially remarkable in the field of communication, as almost all communication shifted from presence to online mode at that point in time, and almost no one was prepared for the remote-working mode at the beginning of 2020. At the same time, an urgent need to upgrade communication skills arose due to the change in the communication environment for many organisations and individuals.

In the light of challenges provoked by the imposed implementation of the virtual workplace for many institutions and employees, it is of particular interest to trace the professional identity development of young Schuman trainees at the European Parliament and how they were able to cope with these emerging challenges. Young people's identity development in the workplace is a crucial aspect of several previous studies. For instance, Adams et al. (2006) investigated the initial factors influencing the professional identity of first-year health and social care students. Another illuminating example is the study of Hamilton (2013), which explores the development of professional identity from the perspective of accountant students.

My work contributes to this conversation in that it investigates how Schuman trainees perceive their workplace during the period of their traineeship and how the conditions of working remotely and in a virtual environment specifically contributed to the development of their professional identity. The study aims at investigating how an image of the "ideal" trainee gets constructed by the trainees during their traineeship. To examine that question, participants' personal narratives and reflexive diaries written by the participants are being explored and used as a method. This will reveal how trainees envisage their work and its requirements at TermCoord (Terminology Coordination Unit at the European Parliament) and how this image evolves during the time of their traineeship in this institution.



Research on the professional identity development of young professionals at the European institution is essential, as there is a lack of knowledge on professional identity development and how it is affected by rapid and unexpected changes. It needs to be noted, that the notions of identity, in general, and that of professional identity in particular are intrinsically connected. Indeed, nowadays, our profession reveals a lot about our personalities, and sharing information about one's occupation represents a particularly telling way of presenting oneself in society.

This study investigates professional identity development by examining the factors mentioned by 5 trainees that make up that identity. The study further proposes to draw a profile of what these perceived qualities add up to forming the image of an “ideal” Schuman trainee at the Terminology Coordination Unit of the European Parliament in the context of six months traineeship. Moreover, the study focuses on how the image of an ideal ‘trainee’ is shaped and constructed under the particular circumstances of COVID-19 and the conditions of “teleworking” as the prevalent mode of work and communication during that time. The study seeks to look deeper into how such an image forms and takes shape as self-perception among five trainees and how they understand what is required of them as trainees and what they see as needed to be fulfilled to become successful professionals during their traineeship in the unusual circumstances.

In this piece of work, I am going to focus on the construction of the image of an “ideal” trainee based on the collection of personal experiences and expectations of the trainees who were temporary members of the Terminology Coordination Unit during six months. The data for this thesis was collected online via in-depth semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview and reflexive diaries in the period starting from December 2020 (middle part of the traineeship) until March 2021 (end of the traineeship). Given the time restrictions of the traineeship, it was only possible to conduct a preliminary investigation of the possible professional development of the trainees expressed through their interview narratives. It was not possible to collect the narratives of the participants before the start of their traineeship, as at that moment of time the plan for the current research study was still at the development stage.

## **1.2. Research questions and context of the research**

Considering the raised above issues, this study will investigate the following research questions:

- 1) How is the professional identity of Schuman trainees at the Terminology Coordination Unit constructed over the course of one traineeship?
- 2) How has switching to online communication in the workplace due to the pandemic affected this process?
- 3) How does the Global DISC evaluation tool contribute to shaping the professional identity of the trainees during their traineeship?

To address these questions, I carried out a case study at the TermCoord with the aim to discover how the trainees see themselves as professionals in the context of their traineeship, how they construct the image of an “ideal” trainee and how they perceive their workplace during their traineeship.

TermCoord was officially founded in October 2008, following the decision of the European Parliament. Currently, TermCoord belongs to the Directorate A of the Directorate-General for Translation of the European Parliament. TermCoord is mainly responsible for coordinating the terminology work within the Directorate-General for Translation. Its primary role is to assist translators from different translation units in their daily tasks, facilitate terminology research and the management within the translation units. It also contributes to the EU terminology database IATE. The TermCoord team is responsible for ensuring the linguistic consistency of the EP databases.

The team comprises permanent staff, rotating terminologists, trainees and study visitors. Every five months, TermCoord welcomes four new trainees: two communication and two terminology trainees.

Before the pandemic hit in 2020, trainees worked a hundred per cent being present in the office at the premises of the Parliament. During these normal times, the work mainly involved face-to-face communication. This also included weekly meetings with the TermCoord team, in which trainees actively participated taking over different roles, such as secretary or chair of the meeting.

However, with the rise of the pandemic, most communication shifted online. Therefore, it is interesting to trace the changes in communication approaches of trainees, how they dealt with

the challenges of virtual communication and to see how they perceived their workplace now under these changing conditions.

De facto, a communication trainee in the unit is expected to be engaged in various communication activities: communication with academia, that includes IATE projects done by different universities in cooperation with TermCoord (for details see <https://termcoord.eu/universities-projects/>), external terminology experts, professionals working in linguistic areas and a larger public interested in terminology, translation, languages, and multilingualism. They do this through their public website <http://termcoord.eu/> and their social media accounts.

Trainees are expected to work very independently in the unit. Every week there are internal meetings taking place on Monday. During these meetings, critical topics of the week are discussed, and tasks are distributed inside of the team. The permanent staff is in permanent contact with trainees. There is a hierarchy in the unit: if the trainees need to contact another unit, terminologists or externals, this has to go through the permanent staff as a first point of contact.

According to the requirements published on the website of the European Parliament, related to the traineeships (for details see <https://ep-stages.gestmax.eu/search#results>) regarding the position of the communication trainee, a candidate is expected to have knowledge in different areas of interest. It includes web editing and blogging experience, experience of working with WordPress and other CMS, some linguistic background, excellent writing skills, web design skills, social media skills. A candidate should be creative and initiative, possess strong team-working and communication skills, which will enable a trainee to work as part of a small team. Furthermore, knowledge of HTML, CSS, PHP, MySQL, Photoshop or similar is considered an advantage. A communication trainee must also have an excellent command of English, as activities and work communication will be mainly conducted in English. It is evident that the list of requirements is extensive. According to the data, obtained from the Head of TermCoord Rodolfo Maslias, there are about one hundred candidates every year applying for a traineeship experience at TermCoord.

TermCoord aims at making terminology accessible to citizens. Trainees at the unit take an active part in contributing to this goal by fulfilling terminology and communication tasks. Two

terminology trainees are responsible for internal trainees' projects and the project «Terminology without borders». In contrast, other trainees, specialising more in communication, are actively implementing and improving the communication strategy of TermCoord by maintaining an active online presence on social media channels and writing interesting articles related to the EU and global affairs. Trainees are actively involved in external and internal communication with different stakeholders.

Apart from the communication tasks, trainees are also actively involved in terminology work, and their primary platform to work with is <https://yourterm.eu>. It is an interactive online platform constructed to promote the project «Terminology Without Borders». Trainees manage parts of the website by taking care of termbases and glossaries and putting information on terminology contacts to create terminology networking.

After that brief description of TermCoord and the profile of a TermCoord trainee, I turn to explaining the thesis structure. My work is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 contains the literature review and theoretical framework in the current study context. It explains the key concepts such as teleworking, the virtual workplace and key ideas revolving around the notion of identity and professional identity. Moreover, it discusses the challenges of the virtual workplace along with its benefits and limitations.

Chapter 3 sheds light on the research methodology applied in the study.

Chapter 4 provides analysis of the findings.

Chapter 5 contains discussion.

Chapter 6 proposes conclusions.

### **1.3. Motivation of the study**

The subject of my thesis is of special importance to me, as I also obtained the possibility to become a communication trainee at Terminology Coordination Unit of the European Parliament in 2021. However, most of the data I gathered for this study – mainly from

interviews with other trainees – were collected before I started my own traineeship at the European Parliament. Through the eyes of five trainees who came before me in that role, I tried to imagine my future workplace and the challenges awaiting me at the start of my own journey as a TermCoord trainee. The collected interviews inspired and motivated me to start my European Parliament traineeship experience as soon as possible.

The idea to write my master thesis at TermCoord came to me in March 2020, when I was planning to have a study visit at TermCoord. Unfortunately, due to the spread of the pandemic, my study leave lasted only two days. Despite this, in November 2020, I applied for a position of a communication trainee and received positive feedback regarding my application.

My interest in this area arose from personal reflections that were spurred by a course I took on intercultural communication in the workplace, and particularly by taking the Global DISC assessment. Global DISC (<https://icq.global/intercultural-disc/>) is a tool allowing a better understanding of how personality type and cultural background impact our behaviour and communication style. It is an online assessment inventory designed to explain how personality type and cultural difference impact three layers of identity: what, how and why we act and think the way we do. It was set up to help me better understand my strong and weak sides concerning working in an international team. At first, I was surprised by the results I obtained because I thought of myself as a high-competitive person, whereas my test results showed that I am not overly competitive. No research has yet been done on these kinds of assessment tools (online inventories) and how they connect to the construction of professional identity. My hypothesis at the beginning of this research was that taking the online assessment would have a significant impact on this process, as I assumed the insights participants gained from taking the assessment about their personality and communication style, would shape how they think about themselves, their workplace, and their place and fit with this communicative environment and its requirements.

During the process of my research, however, I changed my centre of interest. Initially, I had planned to measure the intercultural competence of the participants using the Global DISC tool. However, I soon realised that such an approach would require a statistical analysis and tools, I was not sufficiently equipped with. I therefore shifted my centre of interest to research on professional identity and how it is constructed under the particular circumstances of teleworking, as I became interested in how switching to online communication in the

workplace affected the ways in which co-workers not only related to their work and workplace, but also to their role in the work process and their own perception of what it means to be working in that environment under conditions of the pandemic.

Although my research focus shifted, it remained a collaborative project, and I still used the Global DISC tool with the trainees. This might have affected their perception and the research in some ways. However, as I was allowed by the developer of the tool to use the software for free with the trainees, I saw it as my duty as a researcher, to honour my commitment. I felt bound by this agreement and presented the results of my research to the developer of the tool, even if the results obtained throughout my study showed that the tool was not the most influential factor regarding professional identity construction.

The process of identity construction is described over time as a whole, without distinction between the participants' states of mind in different periods, as the time between sets of interviews was too short to trace any changes. However, I was able to trace what the participants took away and learned from their experiences at TermCoord.

In this study, it was essential to tell the story of the trainees who experienced working at the European institution for the first time and who shared their experiences with me during challenging times. In the end, challenging times always make us grow, which I wanted to capture in the research – how much the participants grew and how their professional identity evolved.

It is a long piece of work in terms of the time I spent on it, and it was written during different periods of my life. I started writing it the day lockdown still was very present in Luxembourg; I was writing it already during my traineeship at the European Parliament; finally, I was writing the last pages when the war in Ukraine deployed, and I was called to work as a Ukrainian translator at the European Parliament. I don't know if I can call this thesis my personal diary, but in some ways, it became it as it was written during the ups and downs of my life. I hope the story behind this case study will be interesting for the reader.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

The literature review seeks to explore the key topics related to my research questions. Reminding the reader, these are: 1) how the notions of identity and professional identity are interconnected; 2) what factors influence the professional identity construction; 3) how working under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and its particularities has changed the workplace – from a physical experience to a mostly virtual experience of communication with others.

Firstly, this chapter looks at the definitions of identity and professional identity. It investigates what is understood under the phenomenon of professional identity construction, considering factors that shape this concept in already existing studies. Secondly, this chapter sets the scene regarding the virtual workplace and describes the challenges during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Thirdly, this chapter reviews changes in the workplace communication due to the current crisis, current problems and probable solutions proposed. Finally, this chapter suggests how this study can contribute to already existing research on professional identity construction. There is little literature related to development of professional identities in unusual circumstances such as pandemics, thus the purpose of this study is to enrich theory on professional identity construction by investigating the factors that might be the “building blocks” that contribute to construct professional identity of the young professionals in the unusual times. Moreover, the purpose of the current study is to investigate whether the online inventory Global DISC can also be one of these possible “building blocks” during the period of a traineeship.

### **2.1. Identity versus professional identity**

#### **Definitions of identity and professional identity**

Prior to establishing the connection between identity and professional identity, it is necessary to reveal the meaning of the term “identity” and distinguish it from “professional identity”.

Erikson, one of Founding Fathers of identity theory, in the last century described identity as “a multidimensional construct tapping into cognitive, moral, cultural, and social aspects and encompassing different levels of analysis” (cited in Luyckx *et. al.*, 2011, p. 78). He also believed identity to never be “final” and stable, as it continues its development through the

lifespan (cited in Luyckx *et. al.*, 2011), and this differs from an essentialist perspective where identity is seen as something fixed. To be precise, a social constructivist perspective on identity states that “the self has many layers, some more central (inner) layers and others more peripheral (outer) ones, but all of them are subject to change over time and none of them forms an essential and fixed core” (Horner & Weber, 2018, p. 107). During the last years, the concept of identity has been receiving more and more attention. Today, the concept of identity still stays one of the core questions in the social sciences (Duc, 2008). The concept of identity can be contextualised in different domains and categories: we can talk about moral identity, identity, related to family, gender and sexuality, ethnic and cultural identity, national identity. In this case study, I will take a deeper look at professional identity.

Before starting the discussion on professional identity of Schuman trainees during their traineeship, it is necessary to provide a definition of “professional identity”. Even though the concept of professional identity is widely discussed among the scholars, there is still lack of consistent terminology in relation to this concept. First, there exist several alternative terms used by the researchers, designating the same concept: occupational identity (Berrios-Allison, 2005, cited in Skorikov & Vondracek (2011), career identity (Anderson, 1995, cited in Skorikov & Vondracek (2011), vocational identity (Diemer & Blustein, 2007, cited in Skorikov & Vondracek (2011), work identity (Walsh & Gordon, 2008, cited in Skorikov & Vondracek (2011). There have been numerous attempts to define the concept of professional identity. Duc (2008) mentions that the concept of professional identity, as well as the concept of identity, is a multidisciplinary concept that can be found at the intersection of different fields: social identities, collective identities, and personal identities. Some researchers interpret the notion of professional identity as self-comparison of workers among professional groups: being one of the forms of social identity, professional identity embraces group interactions in one workplace and is related to how workers compare and differentiate themselves from other professional groups (Adams *et. al.*, 2006). Schein (1978) was the first researcher who characterised the concept of professional identity as “the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role” (cited in Ibarra, 1999, p. 764-765).

Research established that professional identity is based on the attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs, and skills that people share in one professional group; an individual accepts the work role, and professional identity is nothing, but self-concept associated with the accepted work



role (Hall, 1987; Watts, 1987; McGowen & Hart, 1990; Ibarra, 1999, cited in Adams et. al., 2006). Skorikov & Vondracek (2011) support this point of view by stating that professional identity (occupational identity in their terminology) is a term that refers to the self-awareness of oneself as a worker. Holland (2011, cited in Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011) defines occupational identity as a stable and clear representation about one's career goals, interests, and abilities. According to Meijers (1998, cited in Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011), occupational identity can be seen as one's perception of occupational goals, interests, abilities, and values or as a structure of meanings related to motivation and skills within a professional role. Professional identity might be characterised as the entity of the professional and personal self (Kasperuniene & Zydziunaite, 2019). Kielhofner (2007) proposes to review the notion of professional (occupational in his terminology) identity as the individual's perception regarding occupational interests, goals, abilities and values (cited in Skorikov & Vondracek (2011). According to Gecas (1982), professional identity (work identity in his terminology) might be perceived as "the collection of meanings attached to the self by the individual and others in a work domain" (cited in Miscenko & Day, 2015). Meijers (1998) also states that occupational (professional) identity consists of meanings in which the person puts their competencies and motivation regarding the respectable career roles (cited in Skorikov & Vondracek (2011).

Looking at the definitions above, proposed by different scholars, one can notice that professional identity is mainly seen as *a perception* of an individual about one's professional interests, goals and values.

Schein (1978) states that the concept of professional identity develops over time, and this process includes looking into professional practices, the development of the talents and the values of the occupation (cited in Adams *et. al.*, 2006).

What is the relationship between identity and professional identity? To answer this question, it has been established that research on professional identity is embedded into research on personal identity (Slay & Smith, 2011). Indeed, in nowadays world, our profession tells a lot about our personalities, and occupation is one of them smartest ways of presenting oneself in a society. According to Skorikov & Vondracek (2011), being a major component of overall identity, professional identity formation appears to be under the influence of personality. Dubar (2000) highlighted the importance of professional identity, considering the multiple nature of identities:

*Parmi les multiples dimensions de l'identité des individus, la dimension professionnelle a acquis une importance particulière. Parce qu'il est devenu une denrée rare, l'emploi conditionne la construction des identités sociales ; parce qu'il connaît des changements impressionnants, le travail oblige à des transformations identitaires délicates ; parce qu'elle accompagne de plus en plus toutes les modifications du travail et de l'emploi, la formation intervient dans les dynamiques identitaires bien au-delà de la période scolaire (p. 16).*

This point of view is supported by Horner & Weber (2018, p. 107), as they highlight “the multiplicity of identity layers by using plural forms as in, for example, ‘repertoire of identities’”.

Despite the growing interest in identity studies, little do researchers know about the way identities are formed among professionals inside an organisation (Ibarra, 1999, cited in Pratt, 2006). Turner (1999) mentioned that one individual can simultaneously comprise several different identities, and one identity might be expressed more than the others, depending on the situation (cited in Adams *et. al.*, 2006). It is often the case that the professional identity plays the most significant role in the individual's life (Adams *et. al.*, 2006), as the notions of identity and professional identity are intrinsically connected. Duc (2008) also supports this point of view:

*Le travail et la formation professionnelle, initiale ou continue, représentent des domaines pertinents d'identification des individus (p. 243).*

In other words, traineeships, jobs and trainings that we do, influence and continuously shape our identity. Our professional activities today will have an impact what kind of person we will become tomorrow.

## **Professional identity construction**

Establishment of a flexible and strong professional identity appears to be one of the crucial steps on the way to professional success and social adaptation. It is necessary to mention the complexity of factors shaping professional identity of individuals, as the factors range from internal factors such as personal agency to external factors capable to facilitate professional identity development (Siobhan, 2014). To investigate the identity construction process, three

main directions have been established: career and role transitions, socialisation, and identity work (Pratt, 2006).

First, research on career and role transitions supposes that identities are subject to change in organisational settings during the process of career development of an individual (Pratt, 2006). Elsbach (1999) states that organisations play a huge role in constructing an individual's identity (cited in Miscenko & Day, 2015). Indeed, work environment in an organisation and identity are intrinsically connected. Wille & De Fruyt (2014, cited in Miscenko & Day, 2015) claims that not only individuals tend to choose a profession according to their personal skills, but an organisation might also exert an influence on person's identity.

Bentley *et al.*, (2019) assume that the process of identity construction might be affected by multiple identities. It is obvious that career is characterised by the continuous abandonment of old identities and construction of new ones (Bentley *et al.*, 2019). As it was established at FAME Consortium in 2007 (cited in Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011), professional identity formation is a lifelong process consisting of constructing, shaping and reshaping the self as a worker. Previous empirical studies have shown that professional identity development is not possible to trace over short periods of time (Dellas & Jernigan, 1987; Meeus & Dekovic, 1995; Meeus *et al.*, 1999; Van Hoof, 1999, cited in Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011).

The process of professional identity formation might be quite stressful, as Skorikov & Vondracek (2011) highlight. However, acquiring a strong professional identity is seen as an important factor on the way to professional success. It might seem that there is a direct connection between flexible professional identity and social adaptation. Brown & Rauner, 2007 (cited in Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011) highlighted the nature of modern occupational identities:

- Occupational identity is subject to change over time
- Occupational identity is shaped under the influence of interpersonal relationships
- People make a big contribution to the construction of their personal occupational identity
- Social-economic structures and processes constrain individual occupational identities
- There is considerable variation in the salience of occupational identity within the person's overall understanding of identity.

Skorikov & Vondracek (2011) state that “the process of constructing one’s occupational identity is influenced by relevant significant relationships and broader social factors, such as societal norms and expectations and economic and technological change”. In other words, the construction of the professional identity is dependent on various external factors. The coronavirus disease, being a major crisis, negatively influenced almost all aspects of our lives and provoked new challenges for workers. Indeed, Stetson et al., (2020) mention that these challenges shape professional identity formation of medical students who develop their professional identities through different trainings. Increased isolation and distant learning are factors that might shape professional identity of future workers in a negative way. In our findings we explore more deeply how the coronavirus disease shaped professional identity of Schuman trainees.

Professional identity can be also shaped through emotions of an individual. According to Jin *et al.*, (2014, cited in Kasperuniene & Zydziunaite, 2019) state that there are two types of emotions that impact professional identity construction: attribution independent (e.g., fear, anxiety, appreciation) and attribution dependent (e.g., disgust, contempt, anger).

The second direction investigating the identity construction process is research on socialisation (Pratt, 2006). Professional identity construction starts long before undertaking a new professional role through professional socialisation. Professional socialisation is a process during which an individual absorbs the knowledge, skills of professional identity belonging to a member of a certain profession.

Professional socialisation is “the complex process by which a person acquires the knowledge, skills, and sense of occupational identity that are characteristic of a member of that profession. It involves the internalization of the values and norms of the group into the person’s own behaviour and self-conception” (Jacox, 1973; Cohen, 1981, cited in Adams *et.al.*, 2006, p. 57). It means to incorporate the values and norms of the concrete professional group into the own behaviour of the individual. Professional socialisation occurs “through critical experiences where procedures and rules experienced by students or novice professionals trigger the construction of a professional identity” (Adams *et.al.*, 2006, p. 57).

Several researchers support the idea that professional identity never represents the real image of an individual. Ibarra (1999) introduced the concept of “provisional selves”, that serve as

“trials for possible but not yet fully elaborated professional identities” (p. 764). This view is supported by Dubar (2000) who states that identity is provisional:

*De ce fait, l'identité pour soi reste toujours provisoire : on n'est jamais ce que l'on fait ni même ce que l'on est dans le présent. On fait toujours semblant (p. 222).*

In other words, individuals never objectively perceive their real role. Taking the concept of professional identity into account, one might say that we always pretend being what we want to become in the professional context.

From the point of view of social constructivist theory, there is clear distinction between imposed or ascribed identities (how other people see us) and assumed and achieved identities (how we see ourselves) (Horner & Weber, 2018). Professional identity can be an imagined identity of a worker who perceives himself or herself possessing certain kind of professional skills. However, this imagined professional identity might differ from the imposed professional identity – how, for instance, colleagues and co-workers see us.

The third set of studies focusing on identity construction is generally called “identity work” and is focused on identity construction in social contexts (Pratt, 2006). Parents, teachers and friends, as research suggests, can affect professional identity to a great extent (Mortimer *et al.*, 2002, cited in Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Adams *et al.* (2006) supports this hypothesis by saying that role models are an important factor influencing the construction of professional identity. Role models can be other professionals, mentors or even family members.

## **2.2. The phenomenon of teleworking**

In the last three decades the topic of the remote workplace has already been thoroughly investigated by many researchers. The studies have developed in several directions. One kind of research concerns intergenerational tensions during teleworking in times of crisis. This research has shown that during crisis situations communications in multigenerational workplaces may be quite challenging due to different views on technology usage among different generations, different response to change and, as a consequence, a breakdown in communication that may bring unwillingness to knowledge transfer in an organisation (Urlick, 2020). Another kind of research discusses the impact of teleworking on work productivity and job performance in both the context of COVID-19 pandemic (Diab-Bahman R. & Al-Enzi A.,

2020, Kniffin et. al., 2020, Shrivastava & Singh, 2021) and in normal times (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010) and reviewed benefits and challenges of teleworking. Third kind of research is mainly focused on coping strategies of organisations in relation to teleworking and the role of organisational support (Bentley et. al., 2016, Hacker et. al., 2020). However, little research has been devoted to the study of perception of the remote workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic and how the remote workplace and online communication would possibly affect the professional identity of workers.

Teleworking is defined as “working with the aid of technical equipment whereby the agent works full-time or part-time at one or several workplaces outside the head office or the central main office (Lindström & Rapp, p. 54), and “if the agent spends 100% of his/her working time at home we call this *work at home* (ibid). In the current research study, the terms “teleworking” and “working from home” are used interchangeably. At the individual level, shutdown-affected employees are split into three groups: “work from home” (WFH) employees, “life-sustaining” workers and laid-off employees (Kniffin et. al., 2020).

The phenomenon of teleworking is not new, as it existed long before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and employees already faced many challenges while teleworking in non-pandemic times. According to Lindström & Rapp (1996), the concept of teleworking gained its popularity in 1976 in both academic and non-academic fields. During ten years before COVID-19 outbreak teleworking was already slowly gaining its popularity (European Commission, 2020). According to Eurofound (2020), about 40% of working people in the EU began to telework due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is important to note that teleworking before the pandemic and teleworking during the pandemic are two different contexts, as in the second case people were forced to work remotely without any alternatives due to restrictions, imposed by the local or national authorities. Many workers were forced to switch to the teleworking mode for the first time in their life. The European Parliament is not an exception. In 2020, the European Parliament launched Virtual Desktop Infrastructure Services, “group of applications that allow you to access your work desktop from any device connected to the internet, anywhere in the world”. Schuman trainees in the European Parliament also had to get used to the new virtual desktop without having any experience with it.

According to the OECD model (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020, cited in European Parliament Study, 2021), teleworking can both positively

and negatively affect productivity and firm performance. Previous research on this topic shows that flexibility, increased family time, save on travel expenses are the possible benefits of teleworking (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020, Stadtlander *et al.*, 2017). Teleworking can indeed reduce commuting and distractions related to it and ensure more focused work for employees (European Parliament Study, 2021). Another positive aspect of teleworking is the ability to control work related interruptions (Stadtlander *et al.*, 2017). Positive impact of teleworking on our society is related to people's social behaviour. Being the result of COVID-19 pandemics, virtual working mode tends to positively impact helping and pro-social behaviour, according to Kniffin *et. al.*, 2020. People more tend to request help from others, as other people do tend to be more willing to help. This could be especially noticeable during crises. There are several reasons that might explain that: in the virtual settings people are less concerned about personal privacy (Cleavenger & Munyon, 2015, Kniffin *et. al.*, 2020), stigmatisation is reduced (Ben-Porath, 2002, cited in Kniffin *et. al.*, 2020), and receiving help gives hope that things will get better in the future (McDermott *et al.*, 2017, Kniffin *et. al.*, 2020).

On the other hand, due to teleworking, employees' satisfaction and efficiency may decrease. This may be explained by increased social isolation, absence of personal, face-to-face contact (European Parliament Study, 2021). Another important point is that in the light of the current pandemic, the necessity to move to online or virtual workplaces might cause intergenerational tensions that lead to communication breakdowns (Urick, 2020).

The emergence of COVID-19 created unexpected challenges regarding working conditions for many employers and employees at their workplaces. First, employees might not feel the same level of trust. The pandemics has changed the way people communicate and work which led to severe consequences. For instance, in a virtual work environment, employees might present deviant behaviour such as cyberloafing, time banditry, shirking work, disengagement, sharing of confidential codes and access (Shrivastava & Singh, 2021). Disengagement is expressed in both intellectual and emotional alienation from work, leading to poor performance. Absence of physical interaction might result in feeling «disconnected» from employees' organisation and going away from company's goals and culture (Shrivastava & Singh, 2021). Indeed, lack of real communication with colleagues and leadership under virtual circumstances might bring to demotivation of workers to commit.

There are several limitations of virtual working settings that include the following:

- Professional isolation: people working from home feel isolated from the organisation as they do not know what is happening inside of the organisation, and they might have little or even no real contact with their colleagues. As a result, workers feel left out.
- Manager–employee relationship: switching to teleworking might result in disability to give sufficient feedback on work from managers, which could possibly negatively impact the nature of manager-employee relationships (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007, cited in Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020).
- Employee–employee relationship: in the virtual settings it is sometimes harder to establish proper workload for everyone, as well as coordinate common work. Lack of real communication might negatively influence the relationships between employees (Fonner & Roloff, 2010, cited in Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020).
- Ramarajan & Reid (2013) state that it is challenging for employees to find balance between work and non-work (cited in Kniffin *et al.*, 2021). WFH made this even more complicated, as it is hard to find a boundary between working and non-working while sitting the whole day over the laptop. Some people find it extremely difficult, to separate work life and private life. Kelliher & Anderson (2010) in their research established that many remote workers tend to work beyond working hours when they work from home. Stadtlander *et al.*, (2017) in their case study discovered that people working from home consciously separated their home and workplace either by establishing a separate room for working or organising a work schedule separating work from home. People who work in the office clearly see the boundaries between the home and work. These physical and mental “fences” are clear due to the daily routine (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Zerubavel, 1991, cited in Ammons & Markham, 2004). Indeed, work-life balance is one of the key features often missing in the remote workplace. Keeping the balance between private life and work is sometimes not easy while working in the office, and home office makes even a bigger obstacle on the way to establishing the golden middle between personal life and work.
- Previous research also showed that virtual teams might lack communication richness in comparison to teams, working face-to-face (Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004, cited in Kniffin *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, Mortensen & Hinds (2001) state that traditional issues such as conflicts and coordination might escalate quickly in the virtual working mode (cited in Kniffin *et al.*, 2020).



On the one hand, teleworking is an opportunity to work autonomously. On the other hand, autonomy is not always perceived positively by employers during the crisis (Lee, 2021). Eurofound (2020) introduces the concept of so-called autonomy paradox. Autonomy paradox means that a high level of autonomy of employees brings positive and negative consequences at the same time. Among the positive consequences, one can mention higher job satisfaction, and the negative consequences include longer and irregular working hours, higher level of stress, and a disruptive work-life balance (Messenger et. al., 2017). Inadequate autonomy in the virtual settings might be one of the reasons of deviant behaviour of employees, according to Shrivastava & Singh (2021). As a result, it is important to have a supervisor who could provide help to employees who work autonomously. According to Bentley *et. al.*, (2016), the support of the supervisor is of key importance to enhance the level of satisfaction of teleworkers.

### **2.3. Workplace communication during COVID-19**

Due to technological developments, we have the privilege of using different communication channels in our professional and private lives. According to Media Richness Theory, different communication channels are arranged from weaker to stronger medium channels (Cakula & Pratt, 2021). Looking at the hierarchy of media channels, composed by Schmitz & Fulk (1991), one can notice that face-to-face communication stands at the top of the list. Phone calls and video calls are seen as effective channels of communication; however, the most efficient way still stay face-to-face meetings. Face-to-face communication is seen as the richest medium of communication, allowing to receive the immediate feedback and use different signals including body language, intonation, facial expression, plus this kind of communication conveys emotions (Suh, 1999). However, in the light of the current pandemics, face-to-face communication is becoming rather a luxury than a routine, especially in the professional context. In the European Parliament Study (2021) it is highlighted that the quality of communication both between employees and between employees and managers significantly suffers under the conditions of teleworking. This might be explained due to the absence of face-to-face workplace communication. Research shows that face-to-face interactions tend to gain 34 times more positive responses than e-mailing (Roghanizad, M. and Bohns, V., 2017; Bohns, 2017, cited in European Parliament Study, 2021).

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, emails remained one of the most popular communication channels. However, in certain professional fields, for instance, in the

clinician's circle, emailing became administrative burden (Nadkarni *et. al.*, 2021). We can assume that emails might be an overwhelming communication channel in such professional fields as medicine.

One can assume that digital technologies were well prepared for such crisis as pandemics, and despite lockdowns and restrictions, web-conferencing systems (WCS) enabled people to communicate remotely and breathed a new life into already existing concept of "virtual togetherness". Before the crisis, the concept of "virtual togetherness" was, first and foremost, associated with a sense of identity and community in cyberspace, but nowadays this expression is receiving another interpretation and has been successfully applied in relation to virtual communication of people all over the world. According to Hacker *et. al.*, (2020), WCS transformed into a social technology and allowed people all over the world to keep together, also in the professional context. Virtual coffee breaks allowed employees to prevent social isolation and keep up to date concerning the internal communication between the colleagues. Hafermalz & Riemer (2016a) state that before the crisis workers did not have the opportunity to participate in such activities and, as a result, they felt left out (cited in Hacker *et. al.*, 2020). Indeed, in pre-crisis times there existed the polarity of "us versus them" in partly distributed teams (Sarker & Sahay, 2003, cited in Hacker *et. al.*, 2020).

Remote communication also made some changes in the hierarchy of organisations. During the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak, mandatory teleworking resulted in the creation of self-organisation of horizontal mechanisms of coordination by workers, who used ICT (Information and Communication Technology) tools from the comfort of their homes (Fana, M. et al., 2020b, cited in European Parliament Study, 2021).

## **2.4. Research gap**

Professional identity is a key component of engagement, retention, and adaptation to the workplace (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, cited in Eliot & Turns, 2011). Investigating the factors shaping development of professional identity of the young professionals at the European institution might help to identify how they adapt to their workplace and how much they are engaged in the virtual work environment. The research landscape of the current study is intended to fill in a gap in the professional scene of the European institutions: little research has been conducted to trace the identity development of the trainees at the European institution such as European Parliament. Our work contributes to the discussion on teleworking in unusual

circumstances by revealing how challenges, related and not related to COVID-19 pandemic, are tackled both by the Schuman trainees and by the permanent staff in the context of working in the European institution.

### **3. Research methodology**

This chapter discusses the methodological basis of the present study. More specifically, it outlines the research design, justifies the choice of methods and tools used to collect the data, presents the data on participants. Moreover, this chapter explains how the data was analysed, reveals the role of the researcher, discusses ethical considerations, and explains how the research questions were answered.

#### **3.1. Choice of methods: qualitative approach**

Since my aim is to explore the construction of the professional identity of the trainees at the European institution and their perception of the virtual workplace, to make the research feasible, it has been decided to employ a primarily qualitative approach.

Qualitative research is characterised by its inductive nature of building knowledge with the aim to generate meaning (Leavy, 2014, cited in Leavy, 2017). The qualitative researcher may be perceived “as a bricoleur, as a maker of quilts, or, as in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 4). In my study, I will also play the role of a “bricoleur” who tries to build the image of the “ideal” trainee through the perception of the workplace and factors shaping the professional identity construction of the trainees.

Flick (2002) highlights the interconnection of rapid social changes and the need of implementation of inductive strategies into the research methods:

*Rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives ... traditional deductive methodologies ...are failing... thus research is increasingly forced to make use of inductive strategies instead of starting from theories and testing them... knowledge and practice are studied as local knowledge and practice (cited in Denzin, 2013, p.18).*

Qualitative research is a “place of multiple interpretive practices” (Denzin, 2000, p.6). The researcher can utilise various approaches and methods. All these research practices “can provide important insights and knowledge” (Nelson et. al., 1992, p. 2, cited in Denzin, 2000).

It has been decided to create the multimethod research design including semi-structured interviews, reflexive diaries and focus group interviews.

According to Barbour (2007), qualitative research is applied to describe and interpret social phenomena from the insider's point of view by analysing experiences of individuals or groups. Leavy (2017) highlights the values on which qualitative research is based: "the importance of people's subjective experiences and meaning-making process and acquiring a depth of understanding (i.e., detailed information from a small sample)" (p. 9). In the context of the current study, everyday experiences, related to professional practices, were analysed through the data, obtained from semi-structured interviews, reflexive diaries and a focus group interview. Experiences of trainees during their 5-months traineeship at the European institution were analysed considering that the trainees worked remotely during the whole period of their traineeship.

Qualitative research emphasises the socially constructed nature of reality, highlighting the intimate relationship between the researcher and the subject of research. As a researcher, in my study I try to find out how social experience of the participants is constructed and given sense in the professional context. According to Kvale (2007), qualitative approach helps the researcher to reveal how people construct the world about them. In the context of the current study, I observe how the participants construct their professional world in special circumstances due to the current pandemic. The primary goal of the research is to explore the workplace perception of the participants and the development of their professional identity.

Ritchie *et. al.* (2013, p. 4.) highlight that aims and objectives of qualitative research "are directed at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about the sense they make of their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories". In my study, I try to extract sense trainees make of their experience of working at the European institution during the pandemic times.

### **3.2. Research design**

This study can be roughly divided into the following stages:

- Phase 1: establishing contact with the participants

- Phase 2: conducting pre-assessment interviews
- Phase 3: introducing and applying the Global DISC assessment
- Phase 4: introducing reflexive diaries
- Phase 5: post-assessment interviews
- Phase 6: focus group interview
- Phase 7: thematic analysis of the data

### 3.3. Data collection

The data were collected in three ways:

#### 1) Semi-structured interviews

The in-depth interview, whose structure ranges from unstructured to highly structured (Leavy, 2017), is a unique and powerful method to capture the experiences of the participants and to receive detailed responses. Interviews “use conversation as a learning pool” (Leavy, 2017, p. 139), allowing the researcher to extract the data in a natural way, as people participate in conversations on the daily basis. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the main source of data, as they allow more flexibility, in comparison with structured interviews. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews contain the list of questions that allows the researcher to create a preliminary plan of the interview.

One important criteria of selecting participants for this study required that the chosen sample of participants could provide sufficient insight into the workplace and how participants experienced it during their traineeship. It had been planned to have five participants. A total of ten interviews were conducted in January-February 2021. No one refused to be interviewed or to answer any question that was asked of them. Due to the current pandemic situation and COVID-19 restrictions, it had been decided to conduct the interviews in the online format via the Webex application. The interview guide was prepared in English due to the reason that English played a role of *lingua franca*, and as the participants came from different countries and spoke different languages: German, Italian, Croatian, Polish, and English. The focus group interview was also conducted in English.

To obtain data for analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five participants during a period of two months. At first, a preliminary meeting with the participants and the supervisor was organised to explain the objectives of the research and give an overview of the planned project schedule. During this meeting, it was agreed to conduct video-interviews and the dates for each interview with the participants were duly scheduled. Leavy (2017) points out that “although not identical to face-to-face conversations, video-conferencing and Skype interviews have many of the benefits of in-person interviews” (p.142). During the first contact with the participants, I created the first layer of trust between me and my future interviewees, as I was presented as an ex-study visitor to TermCoord and a future TermCoord trainee, so I was not a complete outsider.

To quote from Leavy, (2017, p. 140), “it’s advisable for novice researchers to create more detailed interview guides”. I created a very detailed interview guide containing general questions, questions on image of an “ideal” trainee, challenges, related to the workplace and questions regarding other ideas. Despite the fact I had an interview guide, I left some space for improvisation, as, according to Wengraf (2001), semi-structured interviews are to be improvised in a careful and theorized way. Concerning the level of structure of the interviews, initially it was planned to pose the same questions to all the participants. However, during the interviews, the order of questions was changed from time to time, and some questions were omitted, as it was impossible to predict the responses of the respondents. This made each interview an interactive and unique path. The subsequent questions were improvised, new questions were asked, and new topics were added to the preliminary interview guide.

According to Kvale (2009), a semi-structured life-world interview is intended to understand themes emerging in the lived daily world from the perspective of the participants.

The interviewing was based on seven stages, formulated by Kvale (2009):

1. Thematizing
2. Designing
3. Interviewing
4. Transcribing
5. Analysing
6. Verifying

## 7. Reporting

The interview technique included suggestions listed by Seidman (2013): to ask questions when the response is not clear, ask to hear more about the subject, avoid leading questions, ask open-ended questions, avoid interrupting participants when they are talking.

During the interviews, I used probes to the interviewer's answers that, according to Flick (2014, p. 208), "lead them to more depth, details and illustration". Indeed, spontaneous questions such as "Could you please tell me more about that" raised more interest and feedback from the interviewees.

### 2) Focus group interviews

Focus groups interviews were selected as one of the methods to collect data due to several reasons. Firstly, according to Liangputtong (2011), focus group methodology allows participants to create their own list of questions and frameworks, as well as to see their own needs and problems. In the context of the current research, the participants build their professional career at the European institution, and the framework of the research might interest themselves to analyse their own attitude to their current workplace and challenges related to it due to COVID-19 pandemic. According to Denzin (1986); Frey & Fontana, (1993), focus group interviewing encourages free expression of ideas, motivating the participants to speak up (cited in Denzin, 2000, p. 838). Ritchie *et. al.* (2013, p. 212.) state that "participants present their own views and experience, but they also hear from other people", and this is the main thing that differentiates focus group interview from the individual interview. During the current study, the participants had the opportunity to reflect on what is said by others in the group and formulate their opinion, drawing on the opinion of others in the group.

Secondly, the advantage of the focus group approach is that they are believed to minimise the distance between the researcher and the participants (Denzin, 2000). Building on from the idea of Denzin (2000) that group interactions tend to reduce the impact of the researcher on the research subjects by dragging the balance of power toward the group, it has been decided to practice the focus group interview.

Moreover, according to Denzin (2000), the peculiarity of the focus group research is that social scientists have an opportunity to observe collective human interaction, which is the most



important sociological process. Group discussions “can also help in the understanding of diversity by engaging people with different perspectives in debate, and can thus have additional explanatory power” (Ritchie *et. al.*, 2013, p. 340).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus group interview was conducted in the virtual settings. One of the major advantages of virtual focus groups is the low costs. According to Bloor (2001, p. 81), “the costs ...are also reduced significantly by the absence of the need to travel”. Flick (2014, p. 257) mentions that “technical problems in the online connection of one or more participants may also disturb the discussion and influence the quality of data”. Indeed, there were several connection problems during the interview, however, this method was chosen due to the impossibility to conduct offline focus group interview.

Ritchie *et. al.* (2013) note that group discussions can become more engaging if the researcher uses enabling techniques. Moreover, she holds the view that the techniques help refine the expression and formulation of views. Among a wide repertoire of enabling techniques, mapping emergent information was used to stimulate thinking and self-expression of the participants during the focus group interview.

Nine anonymised extracts from the participants’ diaries and interviews were shown to the participants during the focus group interview in the form of the PowerPoint presentation via Webex. To organise a group discussion, Flick (2014, p. 245) proposed the following: “a concrete problem is introduced and the group’s task is to discover, through a discussion of alternatives, the best strategy of solving it”. During the focus group interview, the participants were asked to fill in the blank (e.g., “Even though I think my colleague is not extremely good at handling \_\_\_\_\_ at work, I try to \_\_\_\_\_ her”) and answer the questions afterwards such as what would be their reaction in the described situation or what could be the best solution. As this was a video conference, the participants were asked to raise a hand to answer the question. I encouraged the participants to fill in the gaps together to engage the participants more into group work. Following Flick (2014, p. 243), “the interviewer should encourage reserved members to become involved in the interview”, I actively engaged more passive participants by pointing questions at them or asking their opinion regarding the suggested situation.

### 3) Reflexive diaries

Babbie (2013) proposes to implement a debriefing phase into the research design, that could possibly elicit feedback from participants regarding their experiences (cited in Leavy, 2017, p. 41). According to Leavy (2017), the debriefing phase is particularly important in case the research has investigated a sensitive subject. In our case, the participants applied the Global DISC tool which was intended to help the individuals to understand their personality type and how it together with their cultural background could influence their behaviour and communication style. From my personal experience, sometimes reading the assessment report might reveal surprising things that you could never imagine about yourself, and the reflexive diaries provided a tool and space to collect impressions on the assessment taken. The diaries included reflections of the participants on the information provided in the Global DISC report.

The participants were sent the instructions on how to fill in the reflexive diaries well in advance. First, the participants were invited to share whether the information in the first part of the assessment report corresponded to their perception of their behavioural and communication style and their cultural background. They were also proposed to reflect on whether their strengths and potential weaknesses described in the report correspond to their own self-perception.

Second, the participants were recommended to describe whether they took into consideration recommendations on how to make sense of other people's behaviour and get along in the second part of the report ("How to maximize efficiency between styles", starting from p. 19) and how and to what extent these recommendations influenced their behaviour and communication style during the next weeks of the traineeship. The participants were invited to describe their reflections on these recommendations expressing their attitude to them: whether they were helpful or not in the workplace, and if they were helpful, in what way. They could select and describe the situations where they applied the recommendations from the report and how it influenced their collaboration in a team. They could also say how they tried to identify the behavioural styles of colleagues ("Identifying the styles in 4 simple steps", p. 21), adapt their behaviour according to their styles and whether it brought any results (Whether it enhanced the productivity in a team, for instance).

The main goal of using reflexive diaries in this study was to help trainees analyse their impressions on Global DISC and prepare them for the focus group interview. They were asked to produce different entries on different dates, engaging with the experiences, ideas, and

connections that the Global DISC assessment has inspired in them. Participants were asked to complete the reflexive diary two entries per week, if possible. Each entry should contain at least 100 words.

One of the limitations of these diaries is that the trainees did not always have time to write down their reflections. However, the use of the reflexive diary provided a chance for the participants to reflect on their personality and their communication style and reflect on the results obtained by using the Global DISC tool. The participants shared all their entries with me, however, some of them made less entries than the others due to their busy workflow at TermCoord.

### **3.4. Participants**

The main objective of the study was to receive in-depth data revealing factors shaping professional identity of trainees in the context of the workplace at the European institution. At the beginning, it was decided to conduct interviews with 5 participants whose traineeship started at October 2020 and lasted until March 2021. However, given the fact that the team was led by another team-leader who was an ex-trainee in the past and could share experiences as well in the context of professional identity at this workplace, it was decided to broaden the scope of the interviewers to 5 people, including the team leader and considering her experience.

The defining criteria for selecting the participants were the following:

- Experience of being a trainee at TermCoord
- Different cultural and language backgrounds of the participants.

All five participants moved to Luxembourg for their traineeship, and all of them had to work in a remote mode during the whole period of the traineeship. One participant had her traineeship at the start of the pandemic, and the interpretation of her experiences was decided to be treated differently.

For the current study, convenience sampling was conducted. Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2011) state that it “involves identifying participants based on their accessibility to you” (cited in Leavy, 2017, p.149). Ritchie *et. al.* (2013) criticise this approach by saying that “the value of this

approach is limited though it can have some uses – for example it can be used to obtain early information about the field of study relatively quickly and cheaply” (p. 116).

Participant	Gender	Role in the team
P1	F	Team-member
P2	F	Team-member
P3	F	Team-member
P4	F	Team-member
P5	F	Team-leader

Table 1. Characteristics of participants

### 3.5. Transcription

Transcriptions are translations from an oral language to a written language ... *traduire trahit* – translators are traitors” (Kvale, 2009, p. 93). In other words, the process of transcription is as time-consuming and rigorous as translation. Verbatim interview transcriptions must be avoided, as there is a risk to obtain an inadequate artificial construct neither fitting in the written nor in the oral context (Kvale, 2009).

All the interviews were recorded via smartphone. To ensure the safety on the recordings, they were saved on several devices and in the protected I-Cloud. For the transcription of the interviews, the online software Trint was used which allowed me to save time on the transcription process. The interviews were transcribed in English. The interviews were transformed into a more formal written style, frequent repetitions were eliminated from the transcript to make the transcript more readable. During the transcription process, I listened again to the recording, as due to sometimes poor connection quality, I had some hardly audible passages.

Regarding the transcription conventions, a simple style of transcription was used that is suitable for content or discourse analysis. According to Flick (2014, p. 389), “precise transcription of data absorbs time and energy”, so it has been decided not to transcribe precisely irrelevant data such as the greetings of the interviewer or general questions intended to build a rapport. The

data such as “names, local and temporal references” (Flick, 2014, p. 389) has been anonymised in the transcripts.

### **3.6. Data analysis**

#### **Interviews analysis**

The data for the interviews and focus group interview were collected in English. During the transcription phase, key points for the thematic analysis included the perception of trainees of their workplace, workplace communication, challenges and difficulties during working, ways of coping with challenges. This allowed me to identify points that construct the professional identity of the participants during the traineeship.

For the given study, thematic analysis was chosen due to several reasons. As explained by Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis is “a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set ... TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences” (p. 57). I applied thematic analysis in my work to identify patterns that come across the interviews I conducted. In my study, thematic analysis is used to reveal topics that could reveal the factors, shaping professional identity of my participants. One of the reasons to select thematic analysis in my study is accessibility (Braun and Clarke, 2012). The results of the analysis might be clear to the wider audience, and even people who are far from qualitative research, might understand and interpret the data analysis.

According to Braun and Clarke (2012), a six-phase approach to thematic analysis was applied. The initial stage involves “familiarizing yourself with the data”. During the first phase, I started reading all the interview transcripts carefully. At the same time, I was listening to the interviews and annotating places, potentially interesting for my research. One of the advantages of applying thematic analysis is openness to experience of participants.

The next stage is “generating initial codes”. During the second phase, I started generating initial codes. It has been decided to conduct inductive thematic analysis, as I started generating codes from my data. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), codes serve as the building blocks of analysis. In my research, codes were representations of participants’ perception of an ideal trainee, challenges, and communication at the workplace.

The third phase is “searching for themes”. The fourth step is “reviewing potential themes”. The fifth phase is “defining and naming themes”. The final step is “producing the report”.

The interviews were done in two stages: pre-assessment interviews and post-assessment interviews. Both pre- and post-assessment interviews contained the same questions that allowed to trace any changes in the perceptions of the trainees under the influence of the Global DISC tool.

## **Focus group interview analysis**

Between whole group analysis and participant-based group analysis, it has been decided to apply the first type of analysis. According to Ritchie *et. al.* (2013, p. 340), it is “more commonly practised”. As Ritchie *et. al.* (2013, p. 340) state, whole group analysis “treats the data produced by a group as a whole without delineating individual contributions”.

During the analysis, the level of participation by different group members, areas of disagreement or conflict, the formulation and evolution of views over the course of discussion was captured. Unfortunately, it was not possible to trace non-verbal communication, as the group discussion was in the remote audio mode. This created a challenge for the moderator of the group, as it was not possible to see the participants, and they seemed more distant. Sometimes long pauses appeared during the discussion, and I, as a moderator, had to involve the participants by asking someone concrete to reply to my question.

The purpose of the focus group interview was to observe how the participants would propose solutions to different situations at workplace and to create the discussion among the participants. One of the big obstacles during the online focus group interview was the interruption of the internet connection, so several times the participants asked to repeat the question, and this did not add the dynamics to the group discussion.

The discussion in the focus group interview revolved around topics, similar to the topics in the individual interviews. However, during the group discussion, these topics were bounded to concrete situations that arose in the past at the workplace. It was intended to observe how the participants would react in the group and propose their ideas.

### 3.7. The role of the researcher and ethical considerations

Leavy (2017) holds the view that “the paradigm or worldview you are working within influences your perspective on your role in the research process” (p. 38). Striving to achieve an “empathic neutrality” (Ritchie et. al., 2013, p.22), I aimed to be as neutral as possible during the whole process of collection and interpretation of data. However, “all research will be influenced by the researcher and there is not completely ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ knowledge (Ritchie et. al., 2013, p.22). One of the main benefits and at the same time drawbacks of the current study is the fact that I also applied for the traineeship and afterwards could experience being a trainee and getting into the insider’s position. Therefore, neutrality and pure objectivity could not be fully reached, as my own experience of “being in the trainee’s shoes” and my worldview eventually impacted the interpretation process.

Being granted access to the internal workflow of the European institution is a big responsibility. All research projects are seen as a form of a political intervention (Heller *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, they require applying ethical principles. Following Heller *et al.* (2018), I applied four key ethical principles during the whole process of my research. Considering the first principle, I informed the participants about the fact that their conduct is under scrutiny during the interview. Following the second principle, the participants signed the consent form before participating in the recorded interviews, and they were informed of the fact that interview will be recorded and transcribed right before the online interview. Participants have the right to be protected from the vulnerability that may arise during the interview process, and one of the effective methods to minimise risks, related to how the researcher shares the interview results, is the informed consent (Kelman, 1977, cited in Seidman, 2013).

As Heller *et al.* (2018) state, the first minutes of the interview are of significant importance. Each interview started with an introduction aimed at establishing rapport, revealing purpose, motivation, and timeline of the study. Each participant was briefly informed about the research topic and the objectives of the research. I established the first contact by jumping from the unrecorded to the recorded section by saying “Hey, how are you?”, “Ok, if you are ready, I will start recording” and then started the official part of the interview telling the purpose, etc.

However, video communication could help to establish better contact with the participants, I did not ask them to turn on the video during the interview session. I turned my own video on.

Some of the participants did not switch on the video due to their personal reasons, but this did not seem to influence the quality of the data I received.

According to Corbin & Morse (2003), there are two types of risks of participating in the research: risks during the interviews and risks after the interviews (cited in Seidman, 2013). To minimise such occasions, I minimised the possibility of the participants to become recognisable by applying the third principle of protection of identity. I promised confidentiality in my research consent and used pseudonyms, as, according to Galetta (2012), prior to putting the findings on the paper, one needs to assign pseudonyms to research participants. The pseudonyms conveyed several dimensions such as gender and culture background of the participants. Following Galetta (2012), it was decided to concentrate on study findings by using the pseudonyms.

The third principle is to share my notes or recordings with people if they ask. One of my participants asked for sharing the transcript of her interview because she wanted to check at first which data is put on the paper and will be published afterwards.

It is especially important to build relationships with participants that have trust, as presence or absence of trust affects data collection and results. Following Leavy (2017), I built trust by showing an active interest in participant's experiences during the interview. Active listening was engaged as much as it is possible via the video interview.

The participants were accessible through the institution where they work. I asked my supervisor who granted an access to the participants and their workplace, as my supervisor had the responsibility for the operation on the site.



## 4. Findings

This chapter reveals and analyses the data collected during the case study. In the analysis, interpretations of findings will be explained step by step.

To start with, to answer the research questions, it was decided to conduct semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview serve as a basis for the thematic analysis. To follow the first phase of the thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke's (2006), it was decided to transcribe the semi-structured interviews and go through the transcripts attentively. A total of 7 themes were extracted from two sets of semi-structured interviews, according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. These themes represent factors that, in our opinion, construct professional identity of the participants during the period of their traineeship.

As it has been established in the literature review that professional identity is comprised of values and beliefs of a worker, it has been decided to extract these values by establishing what trainees believe to be an "ideal" trainee, get to know their attitude of the trainees to the workplace and how they perceive and cope with workplace challenges. Indeed, in challenging situations it is easy to trace and see a person's values, as people might be more outspoken regarding the challenges they faced with. During challenges, it is simple to understand what person's motives are, what really drives and motivates an individual.

Theme	Description
Image of an "ideal" trainee	Imaginary qualities necessary for the successful work in the Unit
Benefits of the workplace	Positive sides of the workplace
Workplace challenges	Difficulties that trainees faced with during the traineeship
Coping strategies	Ways of coping with challenges in the context of the digital workplace, solutions proposed by trainees and their supervisor

Expectations and reality of the workplace	How the workplace was perceived before start of the traineeship and after 3 months of traineeship
Growing in the Institution: From trainee to communication coordinator	Knowledge transfer that grasps change of the professional role and taking on new responsibilities
Balancing between several roles	How trainees comprise several professional identities

Table 2. Emergent themes

#### 4.1. Image of an “ideal” trainee

As in the literature review it has been already established that the fundament of the professional identity consists of the attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs, and skills that people share in one professional group, it has been decided to define themes that embrace all above mentioned.

Siebert and Siebert (2005, p. 204)) state that “behavior is motivated by how one sees oneself in a variety of personal and professional roles”. Trainees describe how they perceive the image of an “ideal” trainee and, therefore, create their own behaviour and attitudes. The goal of this thesis was to understand what the participants perceive as “an ideal” trainee, and what skills this imaginary professional should possess, what attitudes, skills, and knowledge this person should have. As a result, the first theme contains participants’ perceptions of how they see and imagine being an “ideal” trainee. The interview question sounded *“What characteristics should an “ideal” trainee possess, to your mind?”* This question was asked in January 2021 after three months of the traineeship, when the participants already obtained some experience and could share their experience with me. According to a constructivist epistemological perspective, “people play a role in constructing both a sense who they think they are and the “reality” within which they live” (Berzonsky, 2011, p. 55). This interview question was especially relevant in relation to the concept of professional identity, as the trainees managed to create their own unique imaginary professional identity through their personal narratives, and along with that they construct a sense of their “reality” by characterising their current workplace at the European institution. “A person’s reality reflects personal interpretations of objects and events, not the events in themselves”, according to Berzonsky (2011, p.55). Dubar (2000) says that identities are not real, they are always provisional. Therefore, what trainees describe in the

interviews is their own interpretation of being a trainee at the European institution and expectations in relation to their workplace.

There are several factors that, according to the personal perceptions of the trainees, can construct strong professional identity of an “ideal” trainee.

*Proactivity* was mentioned quite often during two sets of the interviews. According to Oxford Learner’s dictionaries, proactivity is “controlling a situation by making things happen rather than waiting for things to happen and then reacting to them”. In the context of our study, the participants connect the notion of proactivity with showing the enthusiasm during their traineeship and expressing their creative ideas. P2 interpreted the notion of “proactive attitude” as follows:

*You need to have your own ideas, be creative, and also not to be shy or <...> afraid to propose new things to the team (P2).*

Proactive attitude is also seen in the eyes of the trainees as a quality that might eventually lead to career growth and bring new job opportunities. The more the trainee is involved in the work of the Unit, the higher is the chance to obtain a job after finalising the traineeship. Showing initiative and creating one’s own project is making a trainee an attractive candidate for a potential employer:

*It's also good to be creative and come up with your own project, because the more you do while you're here, the better the chance that you can maybe get a job after this (P2).*

Other participants also highlighted the importance of being active as much as possible to make “the traineeship a success”. P3 mentions the necessity to actively participate in the life of the Unit on the daily basis:

*You need to be an active member, let's say you need always to <...> express your thoughts because TermCoord is based on this kind of family relationship (P3).*

*In my opinion, to make this traineeship successful, you need to participate in the let's say in the everyday life of the Unit. I don't know how to explain it just to you need to acquire the internal <...> management (P3).*

*And of course, you need to participate in the everyday events, the meetings and the everything of the Unit (P3).*

The term *internal management* in this case refers to how each component of TermCoord functions, including weekly meetings where permanent staff and trainees exchange and discuss what needs to be done throughout the week. During these meetings, everyone informs the team what has been done in their field of responsibility and presents new ideas and suggestions. For instance, communication trainees can present new topics for articles such as IATE Food term of the week or IATE term of the week. Terminology trainees report on the progress in terminology projects, which new contacts with terminologists have been established etc.

Being proactive is especially important in the virtual environment while there are less opportunities to show proactive attitude compared to face-to-face communication. During the time the study was conducted, participants had to do teleworking, and this might be one of the challenges related to this theme, as not every person might be able to show a proactive position on Zoom or Webex. However, the Unit successfully adapted to the teleworking mode, as every Monday the team of the Unit had an internal meeting where every member of a team including the trainees expressed new ideas or suggestions, which is especially welcome from the trainees. These ideas will afterwards be documented in the “minutes” of the meeting by the secretary of the meeting, so no idea is lost or forgotten. Trainees are always welcomed to show their proactive attitude through proposing and implementing new ideas. However, there are also some “borders” or limitations related to the guidelines of work of the Unit:

*I would say that trainees here have their hands open so they can, like, get creative, they can come up with their own ideas so they can express themselves of course, following still some basic guidelines that regard the whole Unit and the way that we communicate outside of the Unit (P5).*

Regarding web-presence of the Unit, trainees must abide by the rules explained in its Communication strategy (for details see: <https://termcoord.eu/termcoord-communication->

[strategy/](#)). For instance, trainees must take photos and images from the repositories available by the EP and not from any other sources.

“The development of a strong professional identity may also be fostered by other factors, such as levels of cognitive flexibility, which refers to an individual’s ability to structure knowledge in response to changing situational demands, making it pertinent when considering how a student develops from a novice into an expert, through knowledge construction” (Martin & Anderson 1998, as cited in Adams *et.al.*, 2006, p. 57). Indeed, adaptability/flexibility is frequently mentioned by the participants as a quality of an “ideal” trainee. It may seem that the participants perceive flexibility as a factor leading to the development of a strong professional identity:

*So, the first thing that comes to my mind is adaptability and flexibility to new working conditions, to a new working group, a new environment, so, for example, a multicultural team (P1).*

To interpret the phenomenon of flexibility, we could say that a trainee should be willing to accept all the tasks given and to be able to adapt to the workplace challenges. Moreover, a trainee should be ready to understand what others want to be done and in what way it should be performed. In addition to it, P5 gave their own interpretation of flexibility and connected flexibility to usage of different communication channels such as messengers and emails instead of standard face-to-face communication:

*Also again, this flexibility has greatly improved because since we are here it's not really easy to just go ask your colleague something, but you need to send either an email or call him or her WhatsApp (P5).*

Indeed, emailing and messaging is more time-consuming and needs more patience. In this context, I can assume that COVID-19 pandemics and communication challenges such as communication mainly through email and WhatsApp have helped building flexibility, reactivated autonomy of trainees and their sensitivity for the needs of others. Flexibility is also associated with the ability to accept new opportunities and to learn new things and grow as a professional during the traineeship:

*As a trainee, especially in TermCoord where the Head of Unit really wants to give you many opportunities to try out different things, if you are not flexible and you don't welcome those opportunities, you're not going to learn a lot, and you probably won't develop as a professional during this time, as you could (P5).*

*Intercultural competence* is seen as an obligatory skill by the participants. This skill is connected to flexibility, as the trainees are supposed to be flexible not in a homogenous group in terms of cultures, but in a multicultural team. P1 assumed that in the new workplace, especially in the multicultural team, it is crucial to be able to easily adapt to the environment. The participant emphasises the necessity to understand others, as different people from different cultures are used to work in a different way and tempo. There is a connection to intercultural competence as well, as it is important to be open minded towards other cultures:

*So, first of all, I think that <...> cultural openness, you should have an open mind towards other cultures and being ready to understand. So also, yes, to be smart in terms of interpreting how the others think and <...> express themselves. So maybe in a multicultural environment, such as our workplace, we don't share the same <...> ways of doing things. And that's why an ideal trainee should <...> be able to understand also different ways of being, of thinking, of asking things (P1).*

As trainees often work with students from universities all over the world, they also should be patient to approach of other cultures, as sometimes there might arise some misunderstandings:

*So, OK, so we've got this one project with students from <...> university from <...>. They were actually pretty arrogant. Like, annoyingly arrogant, but they wanted all of the data, which we can't give them, of course, because we're the European Parliament and they've basically gone silent, which is a bit frustrating because we were supposed to meet them last week or this week and nothing's happening (P4).*

In this case, the students from a foreign university were inappropriately direct and wanted to get the confidential data from the trainees which they could not give according to the confidential policy of the European Parliament. At the end, the cooperation did not go well, as the students ignored further attempts to establish contact as they did not see their expectation

towards the collaboration fulfilled. What can help in such challenging situations is patience and politeness:

*Then also politeness [helps] very much, because especially when you have to deal with many people from external organisations or other trainees, so you have to be really polite in the way you ask things, maybe writing emails (P1).*

Trainees represent the European Parliament, and politeness is a fundamental skill that overcomes all misunderstandings and challenges of the virtual communication.

Last, but not least key skill of an “ideal” TermCoord trainee is the team player ability:

*Then definitely he or she should be a good team player because the whole traineeship is about teamwork and networking. So definitely, even if you're working in a small team, if you are OK working with a team, it makes your work easier, but also for the team that welcomes you as a trainee (P5).*

All these qualities, mentioned by the participants, are the part of the process of professional socialisation, as “individuals developing an understanding of what it actually means to be a professional (Cohen 1981, cited in Adams et.al., 2006, p. 57). To sum up, it has been revealed that there are several essential qualities that an “ideal” trainee should possess. To these qualities belong proactivity, flexibility/adaptability, knowledge of internal management, intercultural competence, patience, politeness, reliability and ability to work in a team. In the chapter that follows, I present how TermCoord trainees apply all these qualities by successfully balancing between several professional roles in the Unit.

## **4.2. Balancing between two roles: communication and terminology**

According to Hatmaker (2012, p. 125), professional identity “may be comprised of multiple roles and at work a person may find her- or himself playing different roles in the course of enacting their professional identity”. It seems to be that at work the person fulfils responsibilities that are not included in their “official” professional role. Gee (2001, p. 99) states that “all people have multiple identities connected not to their “internal states” but to their performances in society”.

During the traineeship at TermCoord, trainees balance between several roles. Despite a clear distinction on the website of the Parliament regarding range of tasks for communication and terminology trainees, some of the tasks overlap and allow a Schuman trainee to take on another role and fulfil tasks that they normally do not do for their professional profile.

Moreover, the profile of both communication and trainee is so wide that they can apply all linguistic, communication and technical skills they acquired before the traineeship. P4 mentioned:

*And this is actually the first time in my life that I can actually apply my knowledge of Indo-European of Celtic studies, the linguistic field, terminology and my communication skills (P4).*

These skills used by the trainee during the accomplishment of various tasks: writing articles on a language topic, creating new terms or communication with externals.

In the next two sections, we will see the difference between the role of terminology and communication trainee, investigate the differences in tasks distribution and observe how the roles are overlapping.

## **Role of a communication trainee**

The unofficial name of the communication trainees is "commies", mainly used in the Unit's informal WhatsApp chats and meetings. Trainees are responsible for promoting the Terminology Coordination Unit and have various tasks. They are in charge of the Unit's external website [termcoord.eu](http://termcoord.eu) and its social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube). Trainees develop the editorial plan for every social media and adapt the content to attract more followers. They publish content related to terminology, linguistics, linguistic curiosities, and information about events organised by TermCoord or conferences. They also post news about the TermCoord blog and promote the articles we write.

They are managing the website of Terminology Coordination Unit [termcoord.eu](http://termcoord.eu) and fulfil it with resources and articles. Every week, trainees publish articles written by them or by external coordinators. There are several types of articles that the communication trainees are publishing: IATE Term of the week, IATE goes AUDIO, I-ATE Food term of the week, Video Fix, AI.Tech.



## IATE Term of the Week

Every Friday we publish 'IATE Term of the Week', a term related to European current affairs in line with the EP's agenda. The aim is to promote public IATE and to invite terminologists/translators/linguists to contribute their language equivalent and thus improve IATE.



### IATE Term of the Week: Photovoltaic

termcoordinateditor · 27/05/2022

0



### IATE Term of the Week: World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development

termcoordinateditor · 20/05/2022

0



### IATE Term of the Week: European Education Area

termcoordinateditor · 13/05/2022

0



### IATE Term of the Week: Creative Europe

termcoordinateditor · 06/05/2022

0

Figure 1 – Example of content created by trainees

## Interview with Marie-Claude L'Homme

12/04/2021

943

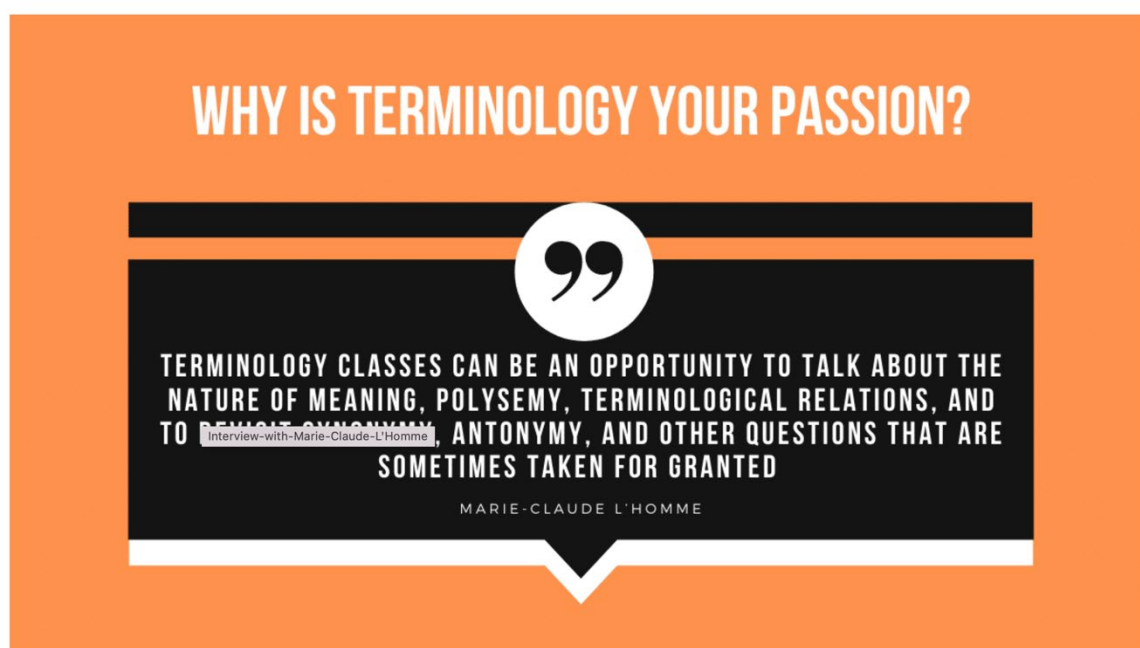


Figure 2 – Example of the interview with the prominent terminologist

Communication trainees are involved in both internal and external communication, and Figure 2 represents the result of the external communication – an interview with a prominent

terminologist conducted remotely by me in April 2021 (for details see: <https://termcoord.eu/2021/04/interview-with-marie-claude-lhomme/>)

The communication trainees are responsible for the visual side of the Unit, as they develop logos and banners for the units and its communication channels. As one of their main tasks is to expand TermCoord's website audience reach, the communication trainees also manage the official social media channels of TermCoord: Facebook (followed by +25 000 people), Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

The communication strategy presented on the TermCoord website reveals TermCoord's vision, objectives and rules regarding the content published by the trainees. Both communication and terminology trainees are obliged to follow the rules during their traineeship. All content that trainees are publishing is under the responsibility of the Head of the Unit or delegated to the permanent staff members. Every five months, the communication strategy is updated by the new team of trainees, as every time new trainees bring new ideas and follow the recent developments in the field of digital communication.

### **Our vision**

TermCoord's goal is to continue being a worldwide reference point for terminology management, while constantly improving the way in which we support in-house translators. Our aim is to be a haven for language professionals and those interested in terminology, translation, linguistics and interpreting. We are strongly committed to making terminology accessible to a wider audience, both through daily communication and projects done in cooperation with individuals and organizations.

### **Rules**

- The content of TermCoord's web-presence is under the responsibility of the Head of the Unit or delegated to permanent staff members.
- Publishing is following EP's GDPR.
- All photos and images are taken from the repositories available by the EP.
- Posts in the websites and social media accounts cannot contain publicity for commercial activities.
- Posts in the websites and social media accounts cannot contain any political views or comments about national, religious, gender and other sensitive related topics (based on EP's respective policy).

Figure 3 – Communication strategy of TermCoord

## **Role of a terminology trainee**

Terminology trainees are unofficially called "termies". Tasks of terminology trainees include IATE work. IATE is an EU's interinstitutional terminology database used for the collection, dissemination, and management of EU-specific terminology. Terminology trainees do updates and research on this database.

One of the main tasks of terminology trainees is coordination of terminology projects. As part of their traineeship programme, translation trainees from the translation units take part in the terminology projects coordinated by terminology trainees and supervised by the terminology mentors from TermCoord. Translation trainees prepare terms in their native language to put these terms later in IATE or correct or update already existing terms in IATE. Translation trainees select one domain and work on the terms from this domain. TermCoord's terminology trainees guide translation trainees through their specific project.

In addition, terminology trainees actively participate in all brainstorming discussions regarding finding an appropriate term for IATE Term of the Week.

Terminology trainees are also responsible for the website management of [yourterm.eu](http://yourterm.eu) where one can find the project *Terminology without borders* - project of the Terminology Coordination Unit (TermCoord) that reflects and supports the goal of the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Translation (DG TRAD) to communicate with citizens in clear language. There are ten domains for the moment on the website: MED, ENVI, CULT, FEM, JURY, MARE, EDU, FOOD, TECH, FIN. Each domain contains several projects in which individuals and universities can participate by contributing to creation and updating of the glossaries on a specific topic. Terminology trainees are the main coordinators of these projects, as they manage the whole process of creating the projects. Their role is to communicate with universities and individuals who would like to contribute to the projects and make terminology more accessible to everyone.

Communication trainees also help to coordinate the terminology domains presented on the website. Both communication and terminology trainees take two-three domains under their responsibility. The tasks of all the trainees include looking for potential terminology contacts including both universities and individuals.

Terminology trainees can also write an article for [termcoord.eu](http://termcoord.eu) if they have time for it. Also, one of the main tasks of both communication and terminology trainees is to conduct at least one interview with a prominent terminologist, translator or linguist. In addition to that, sometimes both communication and terminology trainees record podcasts for the internal website of DG TRAD.

This balancing of the roles between terminology and communication can be also viewed from the point of view on multiple identities, explained by Dubar (2000). They develop an identity as a communication trainee and then switch to the role of terminologist, as they also work on creation of terms, termbases and managing terminology projects.

When I myself was a trainee at TermCoord, I had different types of tasks that were related to both terminology and communication. I was responsible for terminology management of the website [yourterm.eu](http://yourterm.eu) together with other three trainees-colleagues, and everyone was responsible for three terminology projects to manage. Despite the fact, that my main field of responsibility was communication, I helped out my colleagues with terminology tasks. These terminology and communication roles are complementary. They relate to each other in terms that terminology trainees do the terminology work, and communication trainees promote their work on social media and make terminology more accessible to citizens.

Trainees themselves do not see combining several professional roles as burden. On the contrary, they see it as a chance to boost their Curriculum Vitae and to get more diverse experiences from several different fields. P3 sees the balancing between two roles as:

*the opportunity to enlarge and enrich my curriculum (P3).*

*And because every organisation, every company also has a specific communication department, so this is something that is actually enriching my curriculum, yeah. I'm happy being involved also in the communication team (P3).*

### **4.3. Benefits of the workplace**

Both P1 and P2 highlighted that they learned how the work at a large, high ranking, prestigious institution is organised.

*So, I've learned to work in, you know, at the highest level for at the top institution (P1).*

*I think I learned a lot about teamwork, about organizing work in a huge organization (P2).*

Another benefit is networking, although it is mentioned as a potential benefit of the workplace due to COVID-19 pandemics. Creating the network of contacts is one of the biggest end points of the traineeship, as trainees mainly only start their career path, and during the traineeship trainees are able to communicate with a wide range of professionals in the field of terminology, translation and linguistics that might contribute to the further development of their careers. According to E. Cappellini et. al., (2019), traineeships indeed might serve as a starting basis for a stable career in the future. However, the virtual workplace is not the ideal place to create the network of contacts, as the participants did not really have the chance to meet people face-to-face during their traineeship:

*Well, the benefits, if this wouldn't be COVID period, I think would definitely be networking, which we don't really have the chance to do because we don't meet people (P4).*

TermCoord is also perceived as a place to apply all skills that the participants acquired before in their professional lives:

*And I'm just happy that I can actually apply everything I've learned because I've learned a lot and my former employers weren't really interested in all of my skills. So I'm just happy that I can, for the first time in my life, actually try everything (P4).*

Applying all possible skills during the traineeship is also interrelated with being a proactive and flexible trainee, as it was discussed in the previous section.

Taking a traineeship is also perceived as a big achievement in the professional context:

*For me, it was a milestone for sure, like in the career. Even moving to a different country for the first time for such a period is kind of revolutionary, because it changes your perspective and opens your eyes to possibilities (P2).*

#### **4.4. Workplace challenges: COVID-19 influence or not?**

Despite the positive issues outlined above, negative issues also need to be considered. Apart from workplace benefits, there is also the opposite side of the coin – that articulates as

workplace challenges. According to Adams *et.al.*, (2006, p. 57), critical experiences, experienced by novice professionals, might, however, trigger professional identity construction. Workplace challenges belong to critical experiences, and therefore it is important to trace them in this study. To trace professional development of trainees, it has been decided to find out more about the challenges and how they coped with them during their traineeship. Challenges are an essential part of people's experiences, and they form an important part of how the professional identity of Schuman trainees gets constructed. Arriving to a new workplace is always an enormous challenge itself. In our case study, however, there are two crucial circumstances that make the introduction to and insertion into a new workplace particularly challenging: 1) has to do with moving to a new country and 2) refers to the implications related to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, it has been decided to classify workplace challenges as 1) related to COVID and 2) not related to COVID-19.

## **COVID-19 related challenges**

In this section, it will be important to trace how “virtual” workplace in times of COVID transformed professional identities of the trainees, and we will see whether teleworking influenced performance of trainees and what impact COVID-19 isolation made on the during their traineeship.

One of prerequisites of receiving the traineeship was to sign a consent that the trainee must stay at the place of the actual traineeship, namely in Luxembourg. It was impossible to work in the remote mode from their own country, and this was one of the major challenges of the traineeship. During the winter 2020, it was almost impossible to establish new real contacts due to the spread of the coronavirus, and the participants did not have many chances to meet other trainees from other departments. Furthermore, for some of the participants, it was their first experience of moving to a foreign country, which is already a challenge itself. The impossibility of establishing new contacts with colleagues and other trainees added significantly to making adaptation harder than it would usually be:

*Well, to be honest, I was actually quite miserable about it because I moved to a foreign country to work here, and of course, you don't know anyone, none of us have got big*

*flats. Well, you know, in a room and we've all got Internet issues, so online meetings are sometimes a bit hard (P4).*

Luxembourg, located in the centre of Europe, offers many attractive places to spend off-work time. However, once the participants arrived in Luxembourg, the lockdown measures were taken into action due to spreading of COVID-19. Accordingly, the participants did not have the chance to fully enjoy the country, have a good life-work balance. Consequently, fear was identified as one of the issues at the start of the traineeship:

*Oh well, first of all, <...> the main problem I found at the beginning was my <...> fear was how can I manage my things? (P3).*

However, despite being a challenge, this experience in the current circumstances was life-changing and perceived very positively at the same time, as the excitement of getting a new career opportunity seems to overturn the sense of confinement:

*Well, for me, it was a milestone for sure, like in the career. Even moving to a different country for the first time for such a period is kind of revolutionary, because it changes your perspective and opens your eyes to possibilities. You know, it just now it feels like everything is possible (P2).*

Wasting time unproductively is another major challenge identified by all the participants. The P3 stated that due to remote working mode, it was more complicated to stay focused the whole working day, as there are no distractions, no communication with colleagues or going to the canteen, and it was hard to stop working, and the participant felt tired and couldn't concentrate well. This shows that working in the office with the colleagues influences positively on productivity of the trainee, as there is always a possibility to talk to a colleague and change the environment. At home, it is impossible.

We can also trace in the narratives regarding challenges that some of the Schuman trainees experienced how switching to online communication in the workplace due to the pandemic affected constructing their professional identity. Indeed, communication only via internet is quite time-consuming and tiring, as one needs to check twice whether everything is correct before sending an email:

*We mostly communicate on WhatsApp or via emails, so, in writing. So, you <...> basically need to double check if everything is understood on both sides, and it takes a bit more time than it would take in person (P2).*

*There was an issue about the project [name] and I am in charge. So, I just simply write her a message, but I write for message quite quickly because I was in a meeting. So, I would, I could not be more, I was busy, let's say. And she interpreted my message. She told me "OK, but don't be angry with me". And I just told "No, [name], maybe there was misunderstanding. I am not angry. I just sent you a message very quickly because I was busy with other stuff" (P3).*

*I thought maybe when you write a message, you know, it's difficult <...> to understand, maybe, you write your message, thinking of your voice, your <...> intonation, which is kindly friendly, etc. but, maybe, some of the people on the other part of the message could understand it unfriendly because he imagines you talking, maybe you are angry and maybe he can interpret the message in a different way (P3).*

Moreover, quite often virtual communication through emails leads to misunderstandings:

*And the communication with the graphic designer was a bit frustrating. But that was, of course, because we can't physically, we can't see each other. So, trying to communicate through emails was really hard. So, I would then like comments about things that I would want to change as like sticky notes in the Adobe program (P4).*

Zoom fatigue (Oz & Crooks, 2020) is another major influential factor that emerged due to teleworking mode. Schuman trainees do not have the possibility to draw the border between home and work, as they work staring at their screens all the time, sometimes without any opportunity to walk or change the background, which influences their productivity and reduces concentration.

*Sometimes you, I don't know, have multiple meetings, one after the other, and then you are not concentrated anymore (P5).*

*The biggest one is obviously the teleworking and <...> this kind of monotony (P2).*



Challenge of teleworking due to COVID-19 transformed ways of communication to large extent and highlighted the importance of developing new communication skills in the era of Zoom and Webex. Depending on the tasks, different communication methods are used in the team. If it is needed to summarize some points, emailing is preferable than video conversation. On the contrary, when it is needed to take decisions together, Webex or Skype conversation is in favour. One of the participants stated that in some ways COVID-19 improved communication:

*An email exchange is less efficient and less quick with respect to a phone call or Skype call so <...> that we improved this kind of communication of videocall (P3).*

Indeed, all the participants replied positively to the question “*Do you think we need different communicational skills in times of COVID?*”. One important point is the difference in presenting things online and offline. P5 mentioned:

*Yes, I would say so, especially if you're in here work, you are expected to give some presentations because giving a presentation online is quite different than giving a presentation in person, especially if someone it's a person that doesn't have a lot of experience with tools and applications that you have to use in order to do a presentation online. In this case, this requires a bit of adaptation, I would say, and learning some new skills and new tools to be able to do that because you cannot do it without it.*

Trainees need to have not only different communication skills in times of pandemic, but they also need to develop excellent organisational skills while working from home. Organisational skills always play a huge role in the accomplishment of daily tasks of any employee or a trainee. However, due to the COVID-19 restrictions and teleworking, Schuman trainees had a higher level of autonomy, and in this case, trainees needed to be even more organised and attentive to structure than in “normal” times when physical workplace routines provide some of these frames. In this context, trying to stay super organised can also be perceived as a challenge. Trainees work on the full-time basis in a very active tempo, and at the time of the traineeship trainees had to present all the work in the online mode. Working from home might have a lot of distracting factors, and the trainees needed to be very organised and more focused than in

pre-COVID times. P1 mentioned being precise and organised as one of the crucial qualities of an “ideal” trainee.

*So, I think preciseness, of course, you have to be precise in what you do. You have to provide an accurate job for everything you do, and then you should be well organised so that you remember everything, all the deadlines and everything that you have to do on your task (P1).*

Another trainee mentions COVID as a constraining and limiting factor which at the same time led the trainee to the higher lever of the autonomy and organisation:

*I guess that's on one side this was a difficulty that I think that there were not, if there was not a pandemic, it would be much easier to get into the mechanism. But on the other side, the fact that I tried to find my way on my own helped me a lot in, I don't know, in organising my work (P3).*

The fact that the trainees did teleworking and did not sit next to their supervisor who could show them their workflow in more detail in the normal office, influenced the professional identity development of the trainees in terms that they became more independent in accomplishing their tasks. It is interesting to note that despite being a trainee, trainees feel that they have a high level of responsibility while managing the assigned projects. Traineeships are often associated with assisting someone in their tasks, however, at TermCoord this is not the case, as the trainees do the “real work” themselves and independently:

*The most interesting thing at TermCoord is that you have 100 percent the responsibilities of the projects you are actually managing. So, you have kind of managerial skills to do that (P3).*

*Reliability, because definitely you are a trainee, but at least in TermCoord we as trainees had to really like we did actual work. So sometimes when people talk about internships or traineeships, what comes to their mind is that you are assisting someone and you do coffee, you prepare their lunches, or I don't know. But here the trainees are really creating content, managing social media, managing the website, managing project (P5).*

Trainees seem to appreciate being given that level of responsibility, as they are more autonomous and able to develop their managerial skills to maximum. However, everything has two sides, and I noticed the presence of “autonomy paradox” (Eurofound, 2020) while interviewing the participants of the research. Despite being autonomous, some trainees still would prefer to be more guided in their projects and get more specific feedback during the traineeship:

*I would have preferred more concrete feedback. "OK, you did in this way. This is a good, a good idea, but do it in this way because otherwise..." (P4).*

We are all different, and for some people such level of autonomy and responsibility might seem “too much” whereas the other individuals are more than happy to be completely autonomous during the traineeship. I might assume that this is connected to the level of experience the trainee might already have before entering the European Parliament:

*So, it was it was my working, my first working experience. Yeah, maybe I will repeat myself that I would have preferred to have more specific feedback (P4).*

To sum up, this section has reviewed the key challenges that emerged due to COVID-19 pandemic in the workplace. To the COVID-related factors that shape professional identity of the trainees belong 1) isolation during the quarantine; 2) wasting time due to distractions and absence of work-home borders; 3) misunderstandings during the virtual communication; 4) zoom fatigue, 5) monotony of teleworking 6) self-organisation and autonomy during teleworking and. These COVID-related challenges positively transformed the professional identity of the participants in terms that they boosted their virtual communication skills. Despite the obvious positive impact of challenges, the participants experience them as negative in the first place – online communication was challenging, more time-consuming, requiring more attention – but probably beneficial in the end. The trainees were required to quickly adapt to a new digital environment to be able to efficiently communicate with colleagues or externals. The section that follows moves on to consider challenges, not related to COVID-19.

## **COVID-19 not related challenges**

There are quite many workplace challenges typical for “normal” non-pandemic times, and here we will explore them more in detail. One of the challenges is related to communication with external and internal staff, and this has nothing to do with COVID-19, as Schuman trainees at TermCoord always have to manage an intensive workflow, regardless of whether it is teleworking or not:

*Current challenges are to accommodate everyone's requests because sometimes there are all requests coming from colleagues or from external people, external partners, for example, and so one of the challenges for me is to accommodate all everything they want.*

A challenge related to the management of an intensive workflow is there is not only a large amount of different tasks to handle, but it involves also that a decision-making process needs time. There is a hierarchy in the Unit comprised of more experienced (permanent) staff at the top and trainees at the bottom. Any idea must be run by and approved by the permanent staff during the weekly meeting, as trainees cannot take these decisions. Therefore, it takes extra-time to implement an idea:

*Sometimes the work and the final result can take quite some time to be accomplished (P5).*

Decision-making process is not only a matter of time (getting ideas approved by more senior members), but also a generational issue, where younger people may have ideas with which older colleagues might not agree. Generation gap in ideas was mentioned as a challenge. This is connected to the fact that two different generations have a different response on technologies (Urick, 2020):

*So, sometimes it's difficult to get your message through. So, it's not pretty, yes, sometimes it is frustrating, but I mean, not personally, not in a personal way, just because I think sometimes it's two different generations. Also, about the design of our Web page, really simple thing. And whereas older generations, they may have different ideas on those things (P1).*

However, there is always a solution at TermCoord. Despite the generation gap, older and younger generation have found the right strategy to work productively together. In this extract, for instance, the participant speaks about the trainees' workflow where communication trainees at first create a design, then agree upon the best design idea and finally present the final idea of the design to other members of the Unit:

*Yeah, with the design and everything, so eventually we agreed with the Head of Unit that the designs should be voted between the communication team because we are the ones who are responsible for all the branding and communication outside of the unit. So, eventually we just show the final design that we all agreed upon to the other team members, and that's it (P5).*

Another challenge for the trainees is related to internal management and the parallel handling of tasks and specific projects on the various platforms of the European Parliament, which are numerous. Trainees explore the main website of the European Parliament, Intranet, termcoord.eu website, yourterm.eu, the website of My House of European history, etc. Moreover, at the first week trainees typically participate in different events organised specifically for trainees to make them understand better the objectives of their traineeship:

*The challenges, I think from my point of view, are trying <...> to get more knowledge of all <...> the projects the tasks that TermCoord has to <...> do for the European Parliament (P3).*

In summary, it has been shown from this review that not related to COVID-19 challenges include intensive workflow, hierarchy at the Unit, internal management.

#### **4.5. Coping strategies**

In this chapter we will see how challenges, related and not related to COVID-19, were handled both from trainee's and supervisor's side and what solutions were proposed to trainees in the absence of face-to-face communication.

Challenges, mentioned by the participants included zoom fatigue and absence of real contact with their colleagues due to teleworking. However, they successfully coped with it by

establishing and keeping informal communication channels open every day. Despite the impossibility to interact physically in the office with the team, trainees felt part of the team due to measures taken by the Head of Unit. The Head of Unit used web-conferencing systems and messengers to make the trainees feel part of the team. Depending on the difficulty of the task, trainees were assisted either by the permanent staff or by their trainees-colleagues. The phenomenon of “virtual togetherness” (Hacker *et. al.*, 2020) during the COVID-19 crisis successfully prevented the feeling of isolation of trainees:

*The Head of Unit tried to catch up with everyone, not to make make us feel isolated during this teleworking part. And I think he managed to do that that because we had quite a few meetings and we also talked to WhatsApp almost every day. So it still made us feel like a part of the team, even though we didn't really have time to connect and integrate physically into the team.*

An efficient coping strategy is described in the following extract where getting used to the new workplace is compared to learning how to drive a car:

*You just need to understand and enter the mechanism. And then once you're in now, you cannot stop, let's say. And you there are kind of necessary steps that you need to do. It's like <...> when you learn to how to drive. Let's say, the first (step) at the beginning is very difficult, but then it's kind of automatic (P3).*

Once the participants get used to the teleworking mode, new tools and guidelines, they start developing routines and feeling comfortable at their virtual workplace.

Despite teleworking, trainees successfully managed to solve all work issues due to great collaboration in a team, openness, and readiness to help each other. Regular communication plays an important role in overcoming difficulties.

*Fortunately, I get along really well with my colleagues, and in particular I work closely with [name], the other [nationality] trainee, and so we always help each other and (...), because whenever I have a question I can ask her, we will help each other sure, so, sometimes I'm more patient, sometimes she has more patience, so we also manage to <...> answer to all the questions and all the requests. So, one time I do that, and some other times she will reply (P1).*

Having defined how trainees apply their own coping strategies to overcome challenges, I will now move on to discuss how organisations can help to cope with the emerging challenges. Let us now consider how sense of belonging to one team, to one community, same issues and problems make trainees feel closer to each other and create a positive work atmosphere:

*Well, it's definitely help for the work here in a group of trainees and people are facing the same struggles and we all feel similar things now. So, you can always talk to your colleagues. And we are pretty close with the girls from the Unit. Obviously, you have your family to talk to and I don't know, for me, like exercise is also important, like yoga or some like, I don't know, pilates, maybe just to (...) eyes of screens for some time (P2).*

In the context of an organisation, in this case, of the European institution, an organisation “can also provide us with a sense of social identity – an organizational social identity” (Haslam & Ellemers, 2011, p. 718).

#### **4.6. Expectations and reality of the workplace**

First, it is necessary to mention that all trainees were warned of teleworking mode before starting of the traineeship. But, expectations and the perception of the reality they encountered differed among the respondents.

P1 expressed her expectations of the workplace as:

*To be very strictly organised and to have any formal and specific, really precise operational style.*

The expectations, however, did not match with the reality of the Unit the participant worked:

*My Unit in particular, maybe I don't know if all the units are like that, but in my Unit, we have a lot of freedom.*

This connects with the very first section of the analysis when I mention proactivity as an important quality for a TermCoord trainee. Trainees are not limited in expressing their ideas, despite that not all ideas are accepted in the end.

*I think it was pretty much what I expected, but better. I was really pleasantly surprised by how welcoming and nice the team is mainly.*

*I imagined that there were more hierarchical relationships, let's say, but I when I came to Luxembourg, I realized that, as I've just mentioned, we are part of a common family. So we are on the same level and of course since we are trainees, we have less responsibilities with respect to the other members of the Unit, of course.*

Another participant described expectations of the workplace at the Parliament as “valid”, meaning that in the political organisation there are some guidelines expected:

*Yeah, since it was a traineeship at the European Parliament that I didn't know a lot about the actually what I'm going to work for I was expecting it to be quite valid. (P5).*

The participant said the word “valid”, as she expected the work environment to be more strictly organised in terms of freedom to express ideas.

It is interesting to note that trainees had a lot of freedom at their workplace, and despite the hierarchical relationships in the team, they were able to implement their own ideas into reality. Participants repeat this idea of “family relationships” at TermCoord, and they explain this relationship as follows:

*You need to be an active member, let's say you need always to <...> express your thoughts because TermCoord is based on this kind of family relationship, I mean, we are all on the same level, and the point of TermCoord is to share ideas and not to be afraid to say that <...> you do not agree to some <...> kind of issue let's say (P3).*

They are all on the same level in terms of expressing their ideas and suggestions. However, these ideas still need to get an approval of their supervisor.

Another participant speaks about lack of competitiveness among the trainees:



*I definitely expected it to be more demanding, more fast paced, competitive maybe, and in reality, it's not like that at all. It's more about teamwork and, you know, supporting one another (P2).*

The lack of competitiveness might be explained by the fact that the workplace feels evenly structured despite that senior members have to approve of projects and ideas. The perceptions are also different related to the culture from where trainees are coming, used to more or less hierarchical environments as well.

After having spent three months of their traineeship, the trainees were already able to compare their perception of the workplace at the beginning of the traineeship and now:

*OK, well, with respect to the first day of my traineeship, I feel much more involved because I just understood what the mechanisms of the Termcoord are. So, I feel more confident in expressing my thoughts (P3).*

This would be expected after spending time in an environment, as the trainees are more autonomous, they know how to manage different projects, and they are more confident in expressing their thoughts in relation to terminology and communication work.

#### **4.7. Growing in the Institution: From trainee to communication coordinator**

It was also possible to trace the views of someone who had been trainee but was no longer part of the current team. One of the participants (P5), had been at TermCoord for more than 5 months to first do a traineeship, but now she had moved on to become a communications coordinator, managing a team of trainees. The questions for this participant were formulated differently, according to her experience at the Unit. The participant was asked *Do you think your experience of being a trainee at the TermCoord helps you in your current job position? Why?* To get the understanding whether and how five intensive months of being a trainee influenced the further development of the professional identity of the participant.

The question *What work requirements should a trainee fulfill in order to be a successful professional? You were a trainee for 5 months last year. What do you think is most important here to make this traineeship a success?* implied that P5 might have different view as their traineeship is already terminated, and the participant might have analysed their experience through the period of time. This perspective gives an opportunity to trace what qualities are necessary for possible career development in the European institution, as this participant was proposed a secondment contract for six months.

While answering the above-mentioned question, the P5 mentioned the practice of transferring the knowledge from “old” to “new” trainees as the regular practice at TermCoord:

*Yeah, definitely. Because if I imagine someone from the outside coming and taking up the role of communications coordinator and just like first having to learn how we work and the tools that we use or the publications that we do, or the role of the communication team coordinator, it would probably take more like a month to get used to everything. But for me it was just like a regular, like a normal start, let's say, because I just changed my role to like managing the trainees and onboarding them. I also onboarded them when they came while I was a trainee, because here at TermCoord, it's normal that the trainees who are at the end of their traineeship onboard the new trainees. So it's like this knowledge transfer and know-how to transfer.*

It is not a common path that trainees are retained by the institution to become permanent members of staff, however, trainees get a unique privilege to see from the inside the modus operandi of the European institution. A traineeship in the European Parliament helps to gain practical skills, related to the specific professional field. Moreover, it is the best place to learn about other EU institutions, bodies, agencies and decide whether working for the European institution would fit you.

Here one can notice that during the traineeship, trainees also get an opportunity to try a new professional role during the «know-how» transfer. Although this is not an official promotion, trainees get the opportunity to be placed into a higher place in the hierarchy while teaching the newcomers which might definitely transform their professional identities and their view on their professional «self».

The difficulty of the interview with the P5 consisted in the fact that she finished their traineeship several months ago and could not reply to all the questions related to benefits and challenges of the trainee's workplace precisely. Therefore, it was decided to investigate the same questions to both their trainee's workplace and current workplace and compare the difference.

Knowledge transfer was also mentioned by the P5:

*So, they help me with my French, and I always get everything, all of the proofreading in English. That's my job. So, we have got a great transfer of knowledge, and everyone's got their own specialty. And it's just it's fitting puzzle.*

Inexperienced trainees once come to the European institution and, step by step, discover its rules and guidelines. Pratt (2006) was talking about role transitions in organisational settings. Here we can observe the clear picture of it, as, after five months of the traineeship, trainees become experienced professionals ready to be hired at any workplace. During the first month of the traineeship, new trainees learn by doing and following the instructions of "old" trainees who are still at the Unit. It is a beneficial practice, as, although at the beginning of the traineeship, trainees receive "Vademecum" – trainees' manual where all the information on the trainees' workflow is presented, this manual is partly outdated. The most important information on the workflow is typically obtained during the "takeover" month when the knowledge transfer takes place.

#### **4.8. Focus group interview**

I asked the question *"How do you cope with this with stress, for instance? Could anyone share their ways of coping with stress at work?"* to investigate what possible ways of coping with stress the participants could propose and to compare possible group replies with the replies during the individual interviews. This question is relevant, as, according to the previous research, there is a lot of stress and challenges present during the shift from the "normal" office to "home office". Stress is obviously associated with the fear not to create the best image of yourself as a trainee:

*Well, I think you just get used to it. So, it either kills you or you learn to live with this (laughs). I think it's normal to feel a bit stressed and want to deliver especially as a trainee you come here only for a locked period of time. Of course, you want to leave the best image that you can because you're hoping that this will lead to a job after the traineeship. I think most of the trainees come here with this thought, and it can make the stress level a bit higher (P5).*

Organisational skills seem to be the most effective way to overcome stress, as the other participant highlighted:

*Well, I actually agree with (P5) because with time you get used to it and when you are overloaded with work, you have to find your own way to manage it, which is maybe your organisation. You just take a breath and reorganise your tasks, according to the new task that you are assigned (P3).*

Fear is related to expectations the trainee has to himself or herself:

*I think it's more a matter of personal expectations. So, the expectations you have on yourself. Maybe it's not always about the work that you're that you're given, but you know, it's about you not feeling <...> good enough to <...> do that (P1).*

*I think sometimes we just have to lower the expectations we have from ourselves (P5).*

*I think, maybe at least from my experience, the idea of coming to work for the European Parliament was a bit frightening before I came, because it's like a big European institution and you don't know how far it is going to be for you to get used to all the procedures and processes (P5).*

The phenomenon of the “virtual togetherness”, analysed by Hacker *et. al.*, 2020, is very well displayed in the words of P2, when she tries to find an explanation to the Example 7, presented for the discussion: “I guess that in some way COVID improved communication”.

*The fact that we are all in the same situation, no matter like who we are and what we do kind of makes us feel closer to each other (P2).*

Virtual meetings where some other things apart from work questions are discussed, indeed help to establish a friendly atmosphere at TermCoord and try to ignore the isolation:

*We used to have, like the other, other points on our meetings where we would share some fun videos or something to laugh together. I think it makes this isolation more bearable (P5).*

The focus interview was useful to observe what common points the trainees have regarding the solutions to cope with the stress of teleworking. We observed that all trainees agreed on the fact that the virtual informal conversations help to cope with COVID-19 related challenges. It was also interesting to observe how the participants interpreted an opinion of one trainee, expressed in the individual interview that “that in some way, COVID improved communication”:

*The fact that we are all in the same situation, no matter like who we are and what we do kind of makes us feel closer to each other (P2).*

*And so, I think it improved communication by making them clearer because you have to express in a written form (P2).*

*But other than that, I would say that it's basically more complicated and duplicated and multiplied communication (P1).*

#### **4.9. Global DISC application**

Having discussed how the professional identity of the participants is shaped under the influence of various factors, starting from workplace challenges, and ending with balancing between several roles, the final section of this paper addresses the role of Global DISC evaluation tool in shaping the professional identity of TermCoord trainees. After the Global DISC had been applied, the interviewers had another series of interviews where they expressed their impression on Global DISC report. There were some controversial opinions regarding the online tool, as some of the participants noticed changes in their way of communication whereas the other participants did not see any changes in the way the team communicates.

*I am more aware of what I can achieve on an interpersonal level. So, in a team, in an international intercultural team. So, I know how far I can go in understanding and be myself at the same time (P1).*

*It helped me being more neutral in my communication (P1).*

*On the other hand, I mean, although willing to change, I don't think it's fair that only I should change (P1).*

*I don't feel like we have changed the way we communicate after receiving the results. We could basically (laughs) end each other's sentences. So, we were a good team. So, maybe we just didn't feel like there is a need to change (P2).*

*I would say that being understood and being flexible are still the main values and the core values that an ideal trainee should have (P1).*

It is difficult to judge whether there were any improvements in the team communication after having applied the recommendations, listed in the Global DISC due to several reasons: 1) trainees were already quite close to each other and did not have any communication issues, according to their narratives; 2) it is different to trace the difference in a very short period of time; 3) teleworking mode prevents seeing whether Global DISC benefited the communication of the team. Interaction through emails or WhatsApp messages makes more difficult to interpret the attitude of the person on another side of the screen.

## 5. Discussion

Regarding the content discussed in the previous chapters of the current study, the following part reveals the significance and implications of the findings.

First, contrary to the findings of Martins, Gilson, & Maynard (2004), I did not observe lack of communication richness in virtual teams, compared to face-to-face conversations, in the context of the TermCoord traineeship. The workflow and the online communication are organised very efficiently, as the phenomenon of “virtual togetherness” is omnipresent during the whole period of the traineeship. The trainees actively participate in the informal online meetings and WhatsApp conversations that makes them feel a part of TermCoord during teleworking. Despite teleworking constraints, trainees perceive Schuman traineeship as an opportunity to grow as a professional and to reach this goal they are proactive even in the online meetings, proposing interesting ideas and initiatives. However, there is an opposite side of the coin, as rich online communication is tiring. In line with the ideas of Oz & Crooks (2020), it can be concluded that zoom fatigue is a factor that prevents trainees from being always concentrated and productive. The monotony of continuous meetings negatively influences their productivity, as they do not have a chance to change the background while staying at home all working day. Shrivastava & Singh (2021) have shown that working in a virtual work environment might lead to disengagement, time banditry and shirking work. However, it is not the case at the TermCoord, as the trainees have a high level of responsibility while accomplishing their tasks and they provide an accurate work for every task they do. This might be connected to the fact that the trainees are always selected among hundreds of applications, and only the most qualified and professional candidates are selected to become a TermCoord trainee. So, we can see that despite all monotony of teleworking and endless online meetings, all TermCoord trainees provided high-quality results during their traineeship and overcame the obstacles of virtual communication and pandemic isolation.

Another interesting point for discussion is intergenerational tensions, experienced by some of the participants. The results I obtained regarding intergenerational tensions tie well with the previous study of Urich (2020) wherein it is explained that in times of crises several generations might expect tensions connected to different response to change and different view on new technologies. However, despite differences in the perspectives regarding technologies, the

compromise was always the case at TermCoord due to successful cooperation of trainees and the Head of the Unit.

Another point of discussion is how the trainees perceive the autonomy during teleworking. Autonomy can lead the trainees to better self-organisation, according to my research. However, as Lee (2021) emphasised, the autonomy is not always perceived positively in times of crisis and it can be a limiting factor for some individuals. This point of view is similar to that reported by some of my participants. More unexperienced trainees would prefer to have more precise feedback from the supervisor whereas other trainees. However, we all know that the teleworking mode has limited possibilities for it. Referring to Shrivastava & Singh (2021), “too much” autonomy in the virtual settings might cause deviant behaviour of employees, as, so the objective is to find the “golden middle” in the autonomy of trainees.

The final point of the discussion is that findings of my investigation align with studies of Pratt (2006) that have documented the construction of a professional identity through the process of socialisation. The trainees developed an understanding of what it means to be a TermCoord trainee and moved beyond their expectations that they had regarding their workplace and responsibilities before entering the European Parliament. The development of professional identity of trainees at the European institution is characterised by deepening their knowledge of the internal management of the Unit, improving their management and organisational skills throughout the period of the traineeship, and overcoming possible obstacles such as connection problems or communication misunderstandings. I observed that the trainees continuously develop new skills during their traineeship, and even if their workplace expectations do not match their expectations before starting the traineeship, they appreciate this experience. They developed new skills because of overcoming challenges. They enrich the image of an “ideal” trainee by developing new skills and supporting each other. The traineeship is not only about professional skills, it is also about feeling of support inside of the team and from the supervisor.



## **6. Concluding Remarks**

### **6.1. The main findings**

The main purpose of the current research was to investigate the professional identity construction of the trainees at the European institution. The second aim of this study was to trace the impact of the online communication in the workplace on this process. The third goal was to examine the contribution of the Global DISC evaluation tool to shaping the professional identity of the trainees during their traineeship.

To tackle these questions, I have decided to conduct a case study at the Terminology Coordination Unit of the European Parliament. I conducted semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview to collect personal narratives of four participants during the period of their traineeship at the TermCoord together with one participant who was their team coordinator and who previously was a TermCoord trainee. In addition, the participants were asked to fill in the reflexive diaries where they shared their impressions on the Global DISC evaluation tool after having tested the tool themselves.

This study has identified that the TermCoord trainees created a strong and flexible professional identity of an “ideal” trainee based on the qualities necessary to make “the traineeship a success”. The profile of an “ideal” trainee is formulated out of trainees’ perceptions of the workplace and their personal experiences and expectations. An “ideal” trainee is a digital savvy “multitasking monster”, capable of coping with professional challenges in the pandemic circumstances, accomplishing diverse tasks, managing projects in parallel, and quickly adapting to a new working environment.

The second significant finding was that due to online communication during teleworking trainees developed such qualities as flexibility, adaptability, self-organisation, proactivity, autonomy and applied new online communication tools. Despite the absence of face-to-face interaction with colleagues and external stakeholders, trainees reported that communication improved during the pandemics in terms of the possibility to held online events such as conferences with universities located in different parts of the world in a short period of time. It could not be possible to be physically present on such a big number of conferences, so the pandemic increased the amount of the external communication in TermCoord.

This study contributed to the current understanding what are the challenges of teleworking and online communication and what coping strategies are used by young trainees and their supervisor to tackle these challenges. We trace that the participants developed new communication skills and efficiently combined email communication channel with video meetings with both internal and external stakeholders. A significant role in establishing internal communication channels played the Head of the Unit, who created informal virtual community through communication channels such as WhatsApp groups and meetings where linguistic jokes were discussed in the core team. The current research has confirmed the findings of Hacker et al. (2020), which found that the concept of "virtual togetherness" prevents social isolation and keeps people together, also in a professional context. The phenomenon of "virtual togetherness" is a game-changer, as it proved its efficiency at the TermCoord, where trainees were teleworking and still felt the "family atmosphere" of the Unit due to regular informal online meetings. I noticed that trainees have faced challenges, both related and not related to COVID-19 pandemics and successfully overcame them due to their personal determination and passion to the work they do and along with the successful organisation of the virtual workflow.

The research has also shown that the Global DISC tool made no significant difference in shaping the trainees' professional identity. However, it has been decided to leave it in the study due to personal obligations to the developer of the tool. According to data received, Global DISC did not directly impact the participants' professional identity development. That could be explained by the timely constrained manner of the current study. The participants did not have much time to analyse its influence on the teamwork after its application. However, the participants had the chance to reflect on their results obtained in the form of Global DISC reports in their reflexive diaries. According to the findings, Global DISC was a reflexive tool for the participants, making them analyse their communication style toward their colleagues. Participants explored their behavioural style that might, in the end, influence their development as professionals, as communication constitutes an essential part of the professional development. The Global DISC tool might be effective only if the participant accepts the description of their behaviour style.

This study added to existing research by identifying how professional relationships in the unit are constructed in the context of the traineeship under the teleworking conditions. One important point to note here is the "family atmosphere", as trainees feel supported and encouraged in the unit due to the fact that their ideas are very welcome, although they need to

go through the “hierarchical filter” at first in order to be implemented due to the internal rules of the European Parliament.

Furthermore, this work contributes to existing knowledge of multiple identities (Dubar (2000), Horner & Weber (2018) by providing an overview of several professional roles of Schuman trainees. Despite having applied for a specific professional profile, either in the field of communication or terminology, trainees had to balance between several roles and combine all their skills during the fulfilment of their daily tasks at the TermCoord. It would mean that nowadays the young professionals need to combine skills from several professional fields to successfully fulfill their professional role.

Finally, we can make a conclusion that a Schuman trainee at TermCoord is a versatile personality capable of implementing new ideas that bring life to the unit, talented in different professional fields starting from speaking several languages and finishing with being able to write HTML-codes.

## **6.2. Limitations of the study**

This study presents how professional identity of Schuman trainees is shaped in the context of the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemics. However, some limits of this study are recognised. For instance, our focus on only trainees from Terminology Coordination Unit may prevent from developing a fuller understanding of the professional identity construction of trainees in other units of the European Parliament and trainees from other European institutions.

Another limitation of the study is that the data for the interview was collected in the online mode through the Webex application. Due to connection problems, some data was lost, and information could not be interpreted in one hundred percent. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic situation and the local restrictions, online interviews were the only possible option to collect the required data. Moreover, it is harder to establish a rapport through the online interview. During one interview, one of the participants did not switch the camera on, and I did not think it would be correct to ask the participant to switch the camera due to ethical reasons. The fact that we did not get to know each other in real life hindered the possibility to get more sincere answers to my questions.

One more limitation is the number of the participants. The number of trainees taking the traineeship during five months is limited to four people, so it is impossible to get the extensive data over the short period of time. Future research might benefit from a broader pool of participants to get more data.

Another limitation and at the same time an asset is that I could not be fully neutral in the interpreting the results of the study, as I was also an “insider” during the phase of interpreting and analysing the results, as I myself was a Schuman trainee and saw the workplace from inside. However, this helped me as well to understand the hierarchical relationships, internal rules and be in the role of the “observer”, as I would not have an opportunity to observe the workplace of the participants of the study, so I basically observed the workplace during my own traineeship at TermCoord.

### **6.3. Potential for future research**

The current study suggests areas for further research. It is not quite clear how such online inventories as Global DISC might influence the development of professional identity of employees on the long-term basis, so it would be of a special interest to continue research on this topic. In our effort to contribute to the greater good of this world, we hope that the findings in this research will make positive changes for all stakeholders. We hope that stakeholders will consider challenges of trainees that they had during their traineeship and that findings will become a driving force for amendments towards sustainable workplace for trainees at the European institution in the future. In conclusion, as I was a communication trainee at TermCoord after having conducted the case study, I have personally faced many of the challenges that my participants had during their own traineeship. My vision and my personal experience, to my mind, helped a lot to formulate a true story of my case study and to identify the qualities that an “ideal” Schuman trainee possesses to make a traineeship a success. At the end, currently I am back to the Parliament – as a Ukrainian translator already. I took into account all qualities, used for the description of an “ideal” trainee, and I must say that this is a good guide if someone would like to enter the world of a European institution and discover attitudes and challenges of the Schuman trainee in practice.

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “A Case Study: Profile of an Ideal Trainee in the European Parliament” has been carried out in the Master in Learning and Communication in Multilingual and Multicultural Contexts, at the University of Luxembourg, under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Budach. The work is original and has not been submitted in part or full by me for any degree or diploma at any other University.

I further declare that the material obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged in the thesis.

Luxembourg, 11. 06. 2022

Olena Khomiakova

## Consent form

### Goal of the project

You are invited to take part in interviews during the course of which you will be asked to talk about your professional self-perception and the perception of your workplace during your traineeship at TermCoord. The audio material will be recorded throughout the duration of each interview. The audio material will be transcribed and added to the thesis work in print, and the extracts of the audio will be used for scientific analysis.

This is part of a study conducted by Olena Khomiakova as part of her Master thesis for the MA programme “Learning and Communication in Multilingual and Multicultural Contexts” at the University of Luxembourg. Furthermore, your participation entails answering a questionnaire that is part of a tool called GLOBAL DISC and to keep a diary on how using this tool has impacted your perception of the traineeship. You might be willing to sharing the reflexive diary.

### Confidentiality

The information collected during the interviews is confidential. Your name will be anonymised as well as any information that would allow to potentially recognize you. No information that would allow identifying you will be disseminated without explicit prior consent from you.

### Voluntary participation

Your participation is voluntary. This means you accept to participate in this project freely and without any external constraints. You have moreover the right to withdraw from the study at any time, even before the end of the study, simply by informing the researcher. In this case, all information that was gathered during the interviews with you will be deleted. Your consent to participate in the study implies that you agree that the student and/or the professors in the course (Professor Gabriele Budach) might use the information collected for class discussion, for research and for sharing with administrative bodies at the University of Luxembourg.

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I understand and agree to the conditions outlined on this consent form. I had the opportunity to ask questions to the researcher and I understand that I have the possibility to withdraw at anytime from the study without giving any justification or suffering negative consequences.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 1: Transcription Conventions

(All participants' names and initials are pseudonyms)

I	interviewer (Olena Khomiakova)
AB	initials of the interviewee
(...)	inaudible speech
(words...)	brackets bound uncertain transcription, including the transcriber's "best guess"
<...>	omission of one or several words containing repetitions or irrelevant information
...	pause of 1-2 seconds
<i>(laughs)</i>	non-verbal actions are explained in italics
[name]	square brackets with no flag indicate content that has been redacted (with a label such as <i>name</i> , <i>place</i> , <i>date of birth</i> , as appropriate)

## Appendix 2: Example of Interview Transcript

(Full transcripts of the interviews are provided in electronic form)

### TRANSCRIPT – INTERVIEW 1 IP1

<...>

1 **I:** Great, OK! First of all, I would like to move on to the topic of an ideal trainee. And the first  
2 question is, what characteristics should an ideal trainee possess to your mind or, better, what  
3 should a trainee bring to the job? What do you think makes an ideal trainee?

4 **AB:** So, the first thing that comes to my mind is adaptability and flexibility to new working  
5 conditions, to a new working group, a new environment, so, for example, a multicultural team.  
6 So, first of all, I think that <...> cultural openness, you should have an open mind towards  
7 other cultures and being ready to understand. So also, yes, to be smart in terms of interpreting  
8 how the others think and <...> express themselves. So maybe in a multicultural environment,  
9 such as our workplace, we don't share the same <...> ways of doing things. And that's why an  
10 ideal trainee should <...> be able to understand also different ways of being, of thinking, of  
11 asking things, so, these are the first things.

12 **I:** Yeah. Thank you very much for your interesting ideas and thoughts concerning this point.  
13 And what work requirements should a trainee fulfil in order to be a successful professional?  
14 Because you have been in the job now for three months and what do you think is the most  
15 important here to make this traineeship a success?

16 **AB:** So, I think preciseness, of course, you have to be precise in what you do. You have to  
17 provide an accurate job for everything you do, and then you should be well organised so that  
18 you remember everything, all the deadlines and everything that you have to do on your task.  
19 Then also politeness very much, because especially when you have to deal with many people  
20 from external organisations or other trainees, so you have to be really polite in the way you ask  
21 things, maybe writing emails. One of the most important things. I would say, <...> to be  
22 available, to be always available and always ready and to have some personal initiative, I think  
23 it's also important.

24 **I:** OK, thank you. And I would like now to move on to the topic of challenges related to the  
25 workplace during the internship. So how did you see the workplace before taking the  
26 traineeship at the TermCoord? What were your expectations?